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Nannies and Public Space: Reproductive Labor in Richmond, VA

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Abstract

In the realm of urban planning, the gendered and spatial dynamics of childcare as a field of labor have been historically overlooked. This thesis addresses this gap by examining the geographies shaped by nannies in Richmond, VA, and their implications for urban planning in the context of the evolving neoliberal "new" economy. Existing research focuses on the geographies of children and burgeoning sectors of gig work in the neoliberal city. This study positions itself at the intersection of these areas, focusing on nannies as long standing gig workers within the childcare network, uniquely positioned to be affected by economic transitions. By investigating how nannies navigate both physical and digital public spaces in Richmond, this research unveils the geographies they co-create. The study first reviews existing scholarship across disciplines, providing a foundation for understanding the varied approaches to these intersecting topics. It then outlines the conditions of the case study, focusing on nannies operating in Richmond's urban public spaces, leading to a three-pronged qualitative study, made up of a survey, site visits, and digital content analysis. Findings reveal that Richmond nannies are geographically dispersed in a manner mirroring the region's car dependency and economic segregation. Public space emerges as a central aspect of nanny geography, with nanny experiences linked to available amenities. Notably, nanny Facebook groups play a significant role in the Richmond nanny labor market, shaping both inclusionary and exclusionary dynamics. In conclusion, the study argues for a paradigm shift in regional planning for care work, emphasizing a reevaluation of where and how work occurs within and around the city. This research contributes to our collective understanding of the intricate relationship between nannies, the built environment, and the evolving nature of work in a changing economy, calling for further research to develop more nuanced understandings.

Key Words: Urban planning, reproductive labor, care work, nannies, public space, digital geography, new economy, gig work, regional planning

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Introduction

  In urban planning theory and practice, the role of children and those doing labor that is broadly considered "women's work" in urban space has been historically sidelined. There is even less investigation into how these two groups co-create their geographies - which can be understood as their physical footprint - in the city. This is disappointing, because the labor that goes into rearing children maintains the city's population and gives it purpose. It is especially important to correct this oversight in an age where the growth of cities relies on marketing them as places that are pleasurable to live and raise families, not just places that are convenient for producing capital.

  The current body of research relating to this investigation covers a range of topics. It includes analyses of how the neoliberal "new" economy and the digital age are transforming the urban environment and the labor market, the role of both children and gig workers in the aforementioned urban and work environments, and both historical and contemporary inventories of who is performing childcare. It is clear that nannies, professionals who have been both long-time gig workers and a central part of the childcare network, are sure to be impacted by how a changing economy transforms both public space and the labor market. This study, poised at a time of economic transition, fills the gap that ties those areas of study together.

  By investigating how nannies navigate physical and digital public spaces in Richmond, this paper aims to shed light on these geographies, particularly how they are constructed in the neoliberal "new" economy. The following document outlines how these intersecting topics have been addressed independently and by scholars in varying disciplines, as well as what they found. It then describes the conditions of the case study selected: nannies performing labor in public spaces in Richmond. With

that context, it describes the three-pronged qualitative study conducted in order to contribute to our collective understanding of the factors that influence how, where, and why nannies perform care work in Richmond's urban public spaces. This leads into a discussion of findings regarding the physical and digital geography of Richmond nannies. It finishes by analyzing the implications these findings have for urban planning practice, as well as further study.

This study finds that Richmond nannies are geographically dispersed in a way that reflects and reproduces the car dependency and economic segregation of Richmond more largely. It also finds that public space is essential to the geography of Richmond nannies, and the way they experience public space is essentially linked to the amenities available within it. Furthermore, it finds that nanny Facebook groups have carved out a niche in the Richmond nanny labor market, and that those same groups may foster a culture of exclusion. In light of those findings, this author argues that regional planning for care work requires a shift in the perspectives of where work happens in the city, and that the preservation of public space is vital to the health of the nanny economy.

Review of Existing Literature

The New Economy and the Urban Environment

The new economy - the neoliberalization of an increasingly service-based economic system - is characterized by gig work (Holloway & Pimlott-Wilson, 2016; Knaus et al., 2021; Mcdowell, 2004). This shift from the production-based economy that dominated the first half of the twentieth century has resulted in the blurring of a few different boundaries.

The growing emphasis on service-based industry together with the increase in women in the workforce has blurred the boundaries between masculinized and feminized labor and increased the

demand for low-skilled, low-pay workers (Mcdowell, 2004). This results in the need for multiple

wage-earners in the household, thus limiting the available time for the unpaid labor of maintaining

their homes and families and resulting in outsourcing that labor to care workers (Grieco & Sen, 2020;

Holloway & Pimlott-Wilson, 2016; Mcdowell, 2004). In turn, this shifts the dynamics between who

can and cannot afford the luxury of outsourcing childcare, as the financial necessity of the

dual-income household expands the pool of households that are reliant on childcare workers from just

the most affluent, to those among the middle-class. This shift is necessitated and made possible by the

shrinking of wages (Holloway & Pimlott-Wilson, 2016).

The boundaries are also blurred between spaces in the city. Historically cities have been

organized with centers of production, or more recently, centers of business, at their core (Scott, 2010).

Gig work, however, does away with the need for a centralized place of business, and leads to the

workers' geography being dispersed throughout the city (Jarvis, 2007; Knaus et al., 2021). This process

has been described by some scholars as an informalization of formal labor, due to the way the gig

structure has made formal labor resemble informal labor in its dispersal (Knaus et al., 2021). This begs

the question of how care work, which has historically been conducted largely in the informal economy,

has been impacted by the normalization of gig structure in the formal markets.

If the New Economy is characterized by gig work, then gig work itself is characterized by digital

platforms. Digital platforms serve to organize labor in a centralized way that removes the need for a

dedicated physical space (Knaus et al., 2021). In so doing, the digital platform serves a similar purpose

to the central business district, suggesting that digital space functions as a kind of geographic space, and

needs to be considered in order to understand the economic geography of urban space. This point is

further emphasized by studies that explore the role of digital platforms in organizing urban infrastructure, as well as labor (Plantin et al., 2018). The conception of digital platforms as a kind of urban space is summarized by the term "platform urbanism", which highlights the power digital platforms have to shape urban economies, infrastructure, culture, and politics (Rodgers & Moore, 2018). This environmental transition also shapes how labor relationships work. Whereas before, the anonymity of employee and employer may have been overcome via personal recommendations and the passage of opportunities through personal networks, the digital platform relies on reviews and verifications to accelerate the process of building the trust essential to the employee-employer relationship (Knaus et al., 2021). It also means the pool of candidates will be different. Instead of the pool of potential candidates and opportunities being shaped by personal connections and specific neighborhood geographies, the digital platform shapes the pool by technological accessibility. At the same time, the structure of the platform facilitates access to the labor market for those who may be less socially or geographically connected. This phenomenon contributes to the dispersal of the labor market.

Who is performing childcare?

Our understanding of who is responsible for childcare is informed by social reproduction theory (SRT). SRT grows out of the work of Karl Marx, applying a feminist lens, to distinguish between *productive* labor - the labor that goes into producing capital - and *reproductive* labor - the labor that goes into reproducing the worker. Social reproduction encompasses direct caretaking, the maintenance of the home, and healthcare (Bhattacharya, 2017; Federici, 2004; Mezzadri, 2022). Traditionally, much of this labor has been considered to be "women's work", and is performed

primarily in the home, or what feminist theorists refer to as the "private sphere". While this labor is not exclusively performed by women, and gendered expectations of the division of labor are shifting (particularly in dual-income households in the global north), studies of the gendered division of labor during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown reveal that women still shoulder the majority burden of parenting and household responsibilities (Haney & Barber, 2022; Waddell et al., 2021).

A study of childcare arrangements in 2011 found that a third of children under the age of five were in non-relative care arrangements, including organized care facilities and other childminders (Laughlin, 2013). Among children aged 5-14, most of whom are in school during the day and some of whom are of an age to not require supervision, only 5% were in non-relative care arrangements (Laughlin, 2013). The higher proportion of children who are in relative care arrangements (which may include parents, grandparents, or siblings), is unsurprising, considering the trends in stay-at-home parenting. The proportion of stay-at-home moms hit a contemporary peak following the 2008 recession, with 29% of mothers staying at home in 2012 up from a low of 23% in 1999 (Cohn et al., 2014). In 2016, this proportion fell slightly to 27% (Livingston, 2018). Internationally and in the United States, the resurgence of stay-at-home parenting has been linked to the rising costs of childcare, and studies have found that affluent mothers are more likely to work outside the home than their lower-income counterparts (Cohn et al., 2014; Gallagher, 2018; Grieco & Sen, 2020; Holloway & Pimlott-Wilson, 2016). This leaves middle-class households in the contradictory position of not being able to maintain their lifestyles on a single stream of income but making just enough with two wage-earners to afford childcare. The implication here is an unequal distribution of reproductive labor not just among men and women, but among low-income, middle-income, and high-income women.

Concerns about reproductive functions being outsourced from privileged women to marginalized women at the local and global economic scales are prevalent in the SRT literature. Historically, marginalized women have been an essential part of the American reproductive landscape. Recent immigrants and women of color have been employed in the homes of middle- and upper-class women since industrialization, the arrangement enforced by racist hierarchies of power (Glenn, 1992). Following World War II, many of these women moved into service work that took place in the public sphere rather than the home, but the work itself was still reproduction-oriented (Glenn, 1992).

Contemporary studies in the United States are particularly focused on Latina and/or immigrant care workers. These studies highlight the common occurrence of Latinas, many but not all documented or undocumented immigrants, being employed by white families and reducing the burden of reproductive labor on white mothers (Armenta, 2009; Grieco & Sen, 2020). As a result, employers (privileged women/families) have more time and energy to invest in their communities, while employees (typically women of color) have less, reproducing the appearance of a lack of investment in marginalized communities, and sometimes the burden of reproductive labor being passed along to children in employees' households (Grieco & Sen, 2020). Many of these employment arrangements are informal (Grieco & Sen, 2020), meaning they operate outside of the regulations, requirements, and protections of formal labor and employment laws (Portes & Haller, 2005). The marginalization of these women, combined with the invisibility of their work, their lack of union representation, and the informal nature of many of these employment arrangements leave them in a vulnerable position (Grieco & Sen, 2020).

Where does childcare happen?

As previously mentioned, the "private sphere" where most care work happens primarily refers to the home. This means that care workers are spending the bulk of their workday within their employers' homes, fostering a unique sense of intimacy between employee and employer, and blurring the lines between productive and reproductive space in ways different from other employment arrangements (Federici, 2004; Grieco & Sen, 2020). This makes the care worker less visible to the labor market as a whole, but more visible to their employers than their counterparts performing more masculinized labor outside the home, or service labor in the public sphere. In conversation regarding the social and economic conditions that led to the European witch hunts of the 16th and 17th centuries, Silvia Federici references "the fear of the propertied classes with regard to their subordinates, particularly low-class women who, as servants, beggars, or healers, had many opportunities to enter their employers' houses and cause them harm" (2004, p. 95). This dual dependance and apprehension of marginalized women, who are slotted into the roles of domestic workers on the basis of gendered and racialized notions of aptitude, may persist in the perception of care workers to this day.

This is not to say that childcare is restricted solely to the home. Other venues, such as schools and organized childcare facilities are outside the scope of this study. Public space, however, has always been central to a complete understanding of the geographies of social reproduction. Federici notes the importance of the commons as a locale for the social activity of women and a place where communities could share the responsibilities and resources of reproductive labor, such as laundry and childminding in the late feudal/early capitalist era (2004). This essential function of the commons was damaged by the process of enclosures that restricted access to communal spaces, which in turn facilitated the

relegation of reproduction to the private sphere (Federici, 2004). Despite these restrictions, public

spaces - typically parks and playgrounds - continue to be identified as important places in studies of the

geographies of children (Huynh et al., 2013; Mertens et al., 2019; Rivera et al., 2022; Travlou et al.,

2008), and therefore their caretakers. These spaces are important for the caretakers as well; parks have

been shown to play an important role in fostering community amongst nannies, who might otherwise

be isolated from social-emotional benefits of having coworkers in their work environment (Armenta,

2009). Though there has been less scholarship on them, public libraries, which tend to be full of

resources and programming catered specifically towards young children, have also been identified as

spaces that can serve as sites of reproduction, especially in colder climates where it is not realistic to

spend extended periods of time outdoors (Frederiksen, 2015). This suggests that libraries may be

integral to the geography of care workers as well.

Defining "public" versus "private" space in the context of this conversation is important. There

are a number of different ways to address the dichotomy. Perhaps the most common definition is based

on ownership - public space as space being owned by the state, and private space as space privately

owned (Bondi, 1998; Nissen, 2008). This definition doesn't fully capture the nature of usage, however.

Some feminist geographers may evoke private and public spheres while defining space, casting private

space as space where reproductive activities occur and public space as space where productive activities

occur (Bondi, 1998). This definition is not sufficient for a conversation regarding reproductive labor

being done in the public sphere, though. The most useful definition, in this case, is the one presented

by Sylke Nissen, which describes public space as space that is publicly usable and to which the public

has unrestricted access, regardless of ownership (Nissen, 2008).

A common theme that emerges in the Feminist discourse around public spaces is the question of public restrooms. Lack of access to functional bathrooms can result in limited access to public space due to the inability to perform basic human functions. Abstaining from said functions can pose particular risk to cisgender women by leading to urinary tract problems (Carmenga et al., 2019), and concerns over safety and cleanliness are more likely to cast public restrooms as non-functional for women (Carmenga et al., 2019; Leslie Kern, 2020; Németh & Schmidt, 2007). The issue of bathroom accessibility and functionality is exacerbated when children are brought into the mix. Caretakers may need more space and resources to change diapers, and small children may require more frequent trips to the bathroom. Public restrooms may be deemed even less functional for caretakers than women alone.

The landscape of productive and reproductive labor is changing, however. The growing trend of Work-From-Home, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, has led to people, who would otherwise have firm boundaries between their productive and reproductive spaces, perform all their labor in the same place, often without firm time-boundaries either (Haney & Barber, 2022; Waddell et al., 2021). This raises questions about how spaces that have been the domain of children and their caretakers during the work day have changed with the introduction of a new class of flexible professionals.

Digital Platforms, Childcare, and the New Economy

The digitization of the labor market has specific implications for the care work industry. As the lines between this historically informal industry and other, more formal industries blur, it adopts more strictly the capitalist character of the neoliberal economy. Some scholars have expressed concerns about this phenomenon. In her critique of neoliberalism, Linda Mcdowell argues for an "ethic of care" - a system that encourages supportive social interaction, rather than individualistic competitiveness (Mcdowell, 2004). Building on this work, Helen Jarvis agrees that the neoliberal market is designed to allocate resources - in this case, the resource being caretakers - most efficiently, rather than most appropriately (Gallagher, 2018; Jarvis, 2007; Mcdowell, 2004). This efficiency benefits the employer, because when the platforms allocate resources for them, the process of recruiting care workers becomes less burdensome and time consuming. This links us back to the earlier discussion of how outsourcing reproductive labor allows more privileged women to have more time and energy at their disposal. Platforms allow these women to outsource not only the labor itself, but some of the labor that goes into arranging outsourced labor.

Efficiency, of course, has long been a priority for capitalist production - time is money, after all - but it is the recent role of platforms in organizing reproductive labor to meet the standards of the productive economy that has centered it as a virtue in reproduction. The impact of prioritizing efficiency in production suggests that an efficiency model of childcare may negatively impact the quality of that childcare. The most "efficient" employment arrangements may not factor in community networks, negatively impacting the community networks that provide support for social reproductive functions beyond paid care work. Jarvis supports this point by noting that the dispersal

resulting from privatization leads to a breakdown in "community connectedness" (Jarvis, 2007).

Additionally, the "freedom of choice" lauded by supporters of the neoliberal economy, one of the

primary supposed advantages of the platform structure, is only truly available to those with financial

means (Jarvis, 2007). Furthermore, some households will not see themselves as having the freedom of

choice in whether or not to utilize childcare at all, as subsisting on a single stream of income is not a

realistic option for them.

Case Context

Richmond's growth and demographic change, which has coincided with changes in the city's

affluence, provide a significant opportunity to investigate how nannies navigate digital and public space

in their professional capacity. As incomes and the white population increase (particularly white

households with children) (US Census Bureau, 2010a, 2019b), and the city becomes more appealing to

the creative class, it leans into the identity of a neoliberal city that supports the new economy. As a

result, the relationship between nannies and public space in Richmond holds value as an intrinsic case

study, meaning I as a researcher have an interest in this particular case (Stake, 2005). Considering the

history of enslavement, segregation and centering of whiteness in Richmond, the geographic effects of

the new economy on the historically subjugated role of care work are likely to be different than they

would be in other neoliberal cities, where racial identity is less imbued in the history of the land. For

Richmonders, the care arrangements that place marginalized women in the homes and service of

privileged women are part of the legacy of enslaved and oppressed Black women's labor being exploited

by a white, propertied class. In instances where the demographics of employers and employees may

change, the echoes of that legacy persist and contextualize employer-employee dynamics.

Demographics

As shown in Table 1, between 2010 and 2019, the city grew by nearly 25,000 people. In this time, the white non-hispanic population grew by 2.7%, while the Black population declined by 4.2%. At the same time, the Latinx population saw a modest 1.3% increase. The median household income grew, along with the proportion of residents at or above 200% of the poverty level. The proportion of residents below the poverty level shrank. This implies that as the city gentrifies, the increase of middle-class households will increase the demand for nannies. However, because rents have also increased by $220 per month (or 27%), the housing available to the women likely employed as nannies is increasingly outside of the city.

Table 1: Select Demographic Characteristics in Richmond City, 2010 to 2019

Characteristics	2010 Estimate	2019 Estimate	Change
Total population	201,828	226,622	+24,794
White	41.9%	45.5%	+3.60%
Black or African American	51.1%	46.9%	-4.20%
American Indian and Alaska Native	0.4%	0.4%	0.00%
Asian	2.2%	2.1%	-0.10%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	0.0%	0.0%	0.00%
Some other race	1.7%	1.7%	0.00%
Two or more races	2.7%	4.1%	+1.20%
Hispanic or Latino origin (of any race)	5.6%	6.9%	+1.30%
White alone, not Hispanic or Latino	38.5%	41.2%	+2.70%
Median Household Income (inflation-adjusted dollars)	$38,266	$47,250	+$8,984
Below 100 percent of the poverty level	25.3%	23.2%	-2.10%
100 to 199 percent of the poverty level	20.8%	20.5%	-0.30%
At or above 200 percent of the poverty level	54.0%	56.3%	+2.30%
Median Rent	$805	$1,025	+$220

Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates 2010, 2019

An analysis of the youth population of Richmond over this same period similarly emphasizes the relevance of this study. As Table 2 shows, the youth population did not grow at the same rate as the rest of the city, but the majority of this population is under the age of 11 - ages at which children need adult supervision. Additionally, the changing race demographics identified in Table 1 are even more pronounced amongst the population under 18. Proportional white population has grown by a greater degree, and proportional Black population has shrunk by a greater degree in Richmond amongst the population under 18 than the city's population as a whole.

Table 2: Select Demographic Characteristics of Children in Richmond City, 2010 to 2020

Characteristics	2010 Estimate	2019 Estimate	Change
Number of Children under 18 years in households	39,369	39,774	+405
Population % 17 and under	19.70%	17.60%	-2.10%
% Under 6 years	38.7%	39.9%	+0.80%
% 6 to 11 years	32.5%	32.8%	+0.30%
% 12 to 17 years	28.8%	27.3%	-1.50%
White, any ethnicity	25.1%	30.9%	+5.80%
Black or African American	65.5%	57.8%	-7.70%
American Indian and Alaska Native	0.4%	1.1%	+0.70%
Asian	0.7%	0.9%	+0.20%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	0.0%	0.0%	0.00%
Some other race	2.5%	3.6%	+1.10%
Two or more races	5.7%	5.8%	+0.10%
Hispanic or Latino origin (of any race)	7.6%	13.2%	+5.60%
White alone, not Hispanic or Latino	20.9%	22.5%	+1.60%
Household Income in the past 12 months below poverty level (households with children)	38.7%	37.0%	-1.70%
Household Income in the past 12 months at or above poverty level (households with children)	61.3%	63.0%	+1.70%
Median Family Income for Households with Children	$34,403	$44,242	+$9,839

Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates 2010, 2019

Economics

As identified in the review of relevant literature, childcare costs have been growing nationwide. Thanks to Childcare Aware of America, data is available on the average cost of childcare state-by-state. As shown in Table 3, the cost of center-based and family child care (FCC) ranges from just over $9,000 to nearly $14,000 annually, for young children up to age four. This amounts to between 42.7% and 63.1% of the federal poverty-level income, making childcare an unrealistic expense for families in Virginia at or below the poverty level. Looking at Richmond more specifically, the FY2019 Area Median Income was estimated to be $86,400 (Department of Housing and Urban Development, n.d.), making the "very-low income" threshold of 50% AMI $43,200. The childcare cost estimates outlined in Table 3 range from 21.4% to 31.2% of that figure, making childcare a financial burden at best, and near impossible at worst, especially for those who are rent-burdened and/or have multiple children that require care. Unfortunately, data is not available at the locality level, meaning we don't have particular insight into the cost of childcare in Richmond. Data is also not available for the average cost of nanny services state- or city-wide, reinforcing the lack of visibility around the profession.

Table 3: Cost of Childcare as Compared to the Poverty Level for Varying Ages in Virginia (2021)

Age of Child	Average Annual Cost (Center-Based Care)	Cost as Percent of the Poverty Level	Average Annual Cost (Family Child Care)	Cost as Percent of the Poverty Level
Infant	$13,709	63.10%	$10,597	48.80%
Toddler	$12,993	59.80%	$10,451	48.10%
Four-Year Old	$10,222	47.10%	$9,265	42.70%

Source: Child Care Aware® of America's January 2021 survey of Child Care Resource and Referral State Networks, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 2020 Federal Poverty Guidelines

Table 4 depicts employment and wage data retrieved from the Bureau of Labor Statistics for childcare workers in Richmond City. The mean and median wages shown in Table 4 are roughly twice the cost of childcare shown in Table 3, indicating that childcare workers are likely amongst the population mentioned above that would struggle to afford childcare for their own children, highlighting a contrast between the care childcare workers provide to their employers' children versus the childcare options available to their own children. As with the data in Table 3, the employment data lacks specificity; the occupation category is not narrowed further, meaning the statistics in Table 4 are for daycare workers, nannies, and all other kinds of childcare workers for whom employment data is reported. Additionally, the high relative standard error of 11.9% indicates a lack of reliability in the data itself, and the greater lack of reliable data on invisible workers at the edge of the formal and informal economies.

Table 4: Employment Characteristics for Childcare Workers in Richmond City, VA (2021)

Occupation	Number of Individuals Employed	Employment percent relative standard error	Hourly mean wage	Annual mean wage	Annual median wage
Childcare Workers	1,640	11.9%	$11.81	$24,560	$23,240

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics - Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics

Digital Landscape

Fortunately, the prevalence of online platforms organizing gig work makes it easy to discover which platforms are being used to connect parents and nannies. A review of two recent threads of parents seeking advice on where to find a nanny in the Richmond-specific subreddit (r/rva) revealed Care.com, facebook groups, and the NextDoor app to be the most recommended (GuacaMolly0909, 2022; Mew_1991, 2022). Table 5 (below) outlines the requirements for accessing these three platforms.

Table 5: Requirements for Joining Different Childcare Platforms

Platform	Care.com (Guardians)	Care.com (Nannies)	Facebook Groups	NextDoor
Account	✓	✓	✓	✓
Name	✓	✓	may be a username	✓
Email Address	✓	✓	✓	✓
Zip Code	✓	✓	✗	✓
Address	✗	✗	✗	✓
Ages of Children	✓ - specific ages of their children	✗	✗	✗
Schedule	✓ - schedule of when care is needed	✓ - availability	✗	✗
Compensation	✓ - amount willing to pay	✓ - amount they charge	✗	✗
Screening	✗	✓	✗	✗
Admin Approval	✗	✗	✓	✗

Care.com is a third-party platform that allows families to connect with nannies, babysitters, housekeepers, tutors, and senior caretakers. Those seeking and those providing social reproductive services create profiles, and only then are they able to view the profiles of the employers or employees they seek (*Company Overview*, n.d.). As shown in Table 5, those seeking a nanny must provide personal information, as well as a description of when, how often, and how much they will pay for care. A free account allows you to post jobs that nannies can apply for, but the ability to pay employees online, message individual nannies, access background checks, and communicate with support are only available with a premium paid account (*Babysitters, Nannies, Child Care, Senior & Home Care Services*, n.d.). Similarly, nannies must provide their personal information and basic employment expectations,

but they must also undergo a screening process not required of those seeking a nanny (*Babysitters, Nannies, Child Care, Senior & Home Care Services*, n.d.).

There are several groups on Facebook that exist to connect parents and nannies in Richmond. In order to view and join any of them, the user must first have a facebook account. Most, but not all, are private, and require potential members to answer questions about whether they are seeking jobs or childcare, as well as agree to the rules of the group. The groups specifically mentioned in the aforementioned Reddit threads are "Richmond Nannies and Parents" and "Mama Needs a Sitter RVA", both of which are private. In these groups, parents and nannies alike can advertise their jobs or services. The forum-like structure of these platforms made them best suited for observation and engagement with potential research participants.

NextDoor is the platform least tailored for organizing childcare services. As with the other platforms, it requires you to create an account, which entails providing the personal information noted in Table 5. Users can post to a feed that compiles posts from users in surrounding areas on a variety of topics. Among these posts will occasionally be parents seeking childcare workers or providers seeking childcare jobs. There is an option to search, which means that users could use keywords to search for relevant posts.

All three platforms are important parts of the ecosystem of organizing care work online for the Richmond community. However, due to the high barrier of entry and lack of freedom for interaction on Care.com, it is not ideal for observational analysis. Likewise, the lack of specificity in the arrangement of NextDoor interactions makes it similarly ill-suited for my purposes. As a result, the ethnographic study I conducted as part of research outlined below was limited to Facebook groups.

Methodology

Author Positionality

In the interest of transparency and to acknowledge the limitations of this study, I'd like to address my positionality in relation to my research. I am a white, female graduate student. My personal network skews young, collegiate, and white, which is why I am relying on the same digital platforms included in my study to recruit participants. I have several years of experience working in childcare, both formally and informally, but I have not worked as a nanny, nor did my family employ a nanny when I was a child. My interest in this work stems from a personal stake in the roles of women and children in the urban environment, and the way feminized labor is handled in the urban environment. My existing knowledge of the city as a Richmond resident has informed my analysis of geographic and community networks in the city. My status as a non-Spanish speaker limited the pool of participants that I was able to engage with in my research, particularly because past studies have found that white families often employ Latina women as domestic workers.

Research Questions

The overarching question that guided this study was *What is the geography of nannies in Richmond?* This question is broad, and in order to narrow my research, I broke it up into two sub-questions as follows:

Q1: How does the built environment impact the geography of nannies and their labor networks?

Q2: How do digital platforms shape that geography and those networks?

Previous research shows that the "new economy" is producing more opportunities for feminized gig work, which is a space nannying has long occupied. Research has also shown that this shift is heavily reliant on digital platforms and led to the dispersal of labor markets in urban areas. My intention with this study was to fill the gap of knowledge at the intersection of these geographical implications of neoliberalism, and the position of care work in this changing geography. In so doing, I aim to shed light on how workers typically made invisible by their position in the private sphere navigate the public sphere. I've done this by exploring the geographic dispersal of nannies in Richmond, their experiences with conducting care work in various spaces in the public realm, the role digital platforms play in the labor market for nannies, and how digital platforms impact the working relationships nannies have with their employers and each other.

Based on my reading and past observations, I expected to find that certain public spaces, parks in particular, were consistently regarded as safer and most ideal by nannies in the same neighborhood. I expected that nannies would be most comfortable bringing the children in their care to spaces frequented by other working nannies. I also expected that nannies did not reside in the same neighborhoods in which they work, and would share few community connections to their employers. I expected that the digital spaces created by online platforms were more accessible and user friendly for younger nannies, and that younger nannies had a more positive perception of these platforms than older nannies. I anticipated that as the use of platforms leads carework to resemble other, more formal occupations in the gig economy, the care work industry will be taking on some structure that results in it being more formalized, much like other economic functions are being informalized.

In order to answer my research questions, I disseminated a survey for nannies in Richmond to complete digitally, through the Richmond Nannies Facebook group. The Richmond Nannies Facebook group is designed to connect nannies with each other in Richmond, so they can share experiences and advice, as well as to socialize away from the parent community. I also invited respondents to share the survey with members of their personal networks who would be interested and eligible to participate in the study, but who may not be a part of the Facebook group. I then disseminated the survey on the r/rva subreddit. I hoped to collect at least 30 survey responses , but I only received 19. Survey responses were stored in VCU's REDCap system, and access was not shared with any other users. Data that I downloaded to my VCU Google Drive was de-identified.

Once the survey was closed, I visited the parks that were mentioned most frequently by survey respondents in order to learn more about what distinguished them. While there, I was able to make observations about the amenities and visitors of the parks, as well as have some conversations with visitors themselves, including nannies and parents. I made note of the major themes that emerged in these conversations, but I didn't collect quotes or any identifying information.

Meanwhile, I also performed a content analysis reddit threads in the r/Nanny and r/Nannies subreddits. These subreddits are not geographically bound, and the discussions I came across allowed me to triangulate and contextualize my findings about Richmond. Additionally, I supplemented the insights I gained through my survey and field observations with content analysis of the websites for a few local Nanny Agencies, as well as the parks identified in the survey.

Q1: How does the built environment impact the geography of nannies and their labor networks?

The investigation into this question began with a survey. Survey questions are outlined in full in Appendix A. In addition to asking for basic biographical information, the survey asked respondents about what neighborhoods they nanny in, what neighborhoods they live in, and their commute length and mode. This helped to establish the dispersal of the nanny labor market in Richmond, answering the question of how close they reside to their places of work. There were also questions about the kinds of third spaces to which they bring kids in their care, how comfortable, safe, and welcome they feel in those places, and if they see other nannies in those spaces. This helped to determine where and how nannies' care work is performed in the public realm, and whether they feel like they belong in the public realm while doing that work, answering the question of what spaces they frequent and prefer when performing care work in public.

My in-person visits to PARK365 and Deep Run Park helped to contextualize the information gathered via the survey. I was able to characterize the layout and identify specific amenities, as well as make note of who I saw in the parks. I was also able to have informal conversations with parents and nannies about what amenities were most important to them, and discuss what transportation to and from the parks looked like for them.

Q2: How do digital platforms shape that geography and those networks?

The survey asked respondents about their experiences with digital platforms as well. They were asked how digital platforms rank against each other and other avenues for finding nannying gigs, as well as how digital platforms impact the way they find gigs. This helped to establish the role that digital platforms play in the organization of the nanny market in Richmond. There were also questions about what nannies consider to be important elements of job postings and posts advertising their own

services, and their comfort level with the sharing of personal information. These questions were designed to investigate the claim that the accessibility of personal information on digital platforms expedites the formation of trust necessary between employer and employee in these work relationships. Finally, the survey asked respondents about their interactions with other nannies on digital platforms, as a way to investigate the role these platforms play in forming a work culture between nannies.

Content analysis of the subreddits r/Nanny and r/Nannies provided multiple threads of insight. Some conversations recounted anecdotal experiences with Facebook nanny groups like "Richmond Nannies", which helped to build a profile of digital platform users in the nanny sphere. Other conversations discussed ways of finding nannying gigs, which both corroborated and contradicted the responses from my survey. As these Reddit threads are not geographically bound, the contradictions may be evidence of ways that the Richmond nanny labor market differs from others across the country. This is what led me to do a content analysis of some Richmond-area nanny agency websites, in an attempt to clarify what observations may be linked to the Richmond nanny labor market, and which may be linked to the population of nannies that prefer digital platforms to traditional agencies in their pursuit of nannying gigs.

Data Analysis

The findings of this study stem from the themes and patterns I identified in the collected data. The survey was made by the VCU RedCap survey tool. This tool allowed me to export the responses to the survey in the form of a spreadsheet, which facilitated my ability to visualize nominal and ordinal data, and the content analysis produced observational notes on themes and relationships.

Upon completion of data collection, I began thematically coding responses to open-ended questions from the survey, and my observational notes from site visits and content analysis. Once these were coded individually, I sorted the codes into categories. I then used axial coding to identify patterns across the survey and observational data. Additionally, the RedCap system aggregated responses to likert scale questions, allowing me to compare average levels of comfort, feelings of safety and welcome, and comfort with connecting with potential employers online reported by survey respondents. The findings highlighted in the following section reflect the primary patterns I triangulated across research tools, those which answered my research questions. Finally, I mapped the location-based responses from the survey regarding where respondents bring the children in their care and where they both work and live, in order to visualize the dispersal of the labor market and contextualize my findings.

Findings

Based on my analysis of the data I collected, I assert the following findings: with regard to the built environment, the geography of Richmond nannies is highly dispersed, they express a preference for public rather than privatized spaces, and amenities play heavily into the decision making process of which spaces to frequent. With regard to digital platforms, it appears that online spaces have made it easier for Richmond nannies to find job opportunities, but they have not fully replaced traditional methods, and these online spaces are potentially exclusive.

Physical Dispersal of the Nanny Labor Market

Upon reviewing the data I collected, it was immediately apparent that Richmond nannies are dispersed across the region. This dispersal is evidenced by and contributes to heavy car dependency in

the nanny labor market. It is also evidenced by the disparity in where nannies live versus where they

work - and the difference in median household income between those two sets of locations.

Car dependency jumps out most immediately in the survey results. 17 out of 19 survey

respondents indicated that they drove to work as their primary mode of transportation. The most

common commute length amongst respondents was between 10-20 minutes, followed by 30-45

minutes, indicating that in many cases, alternate modes of transportation would be less convenient. As

shown in Figure 1, the nanny labor market in Richmond as represented by survey respondents is quite

dispersed; while the majority of nanny families are concentrated in the North-West part of the city into

Henrico, many nannies themselves live far outside the City, making public or active transportation

impossible. Additionally, only two neighborhoods within the City and one area outside of it are home

to both nannies and nanny families, indicating little overlap in the geography of employees and

employers.

The difference between where nannies live and where nannies work is contextualized when

looking at income in the Richmond region. Figure 2 depicts a heat map of Area Median Income

(AMI) for the area, and when compared to Figure 1, it's clear that there is a correlation between the

neighborhoods where nannies work and the areas of Richmond with the highest AMI, represented by

the darkest red coloring. This means that nanny employers are living in some of the wealthiest areas of

the City. Meanwhile, there is also a correlation between the neighborhoods where nannies live and the

parts of the region with the lower AMI, represented by the white and lightest red coloring. This

illustrates the economic privilege employers have over employees, even outside of the employment

relationship, consistent with the narrative described by Federici (2004), Armenta (2009), Grienco &

Sen (2020), and Glenn (1992).

Figure 1: Map of Neighborhoods Where Nannies Live and Neighborhoods Where Nannies Work
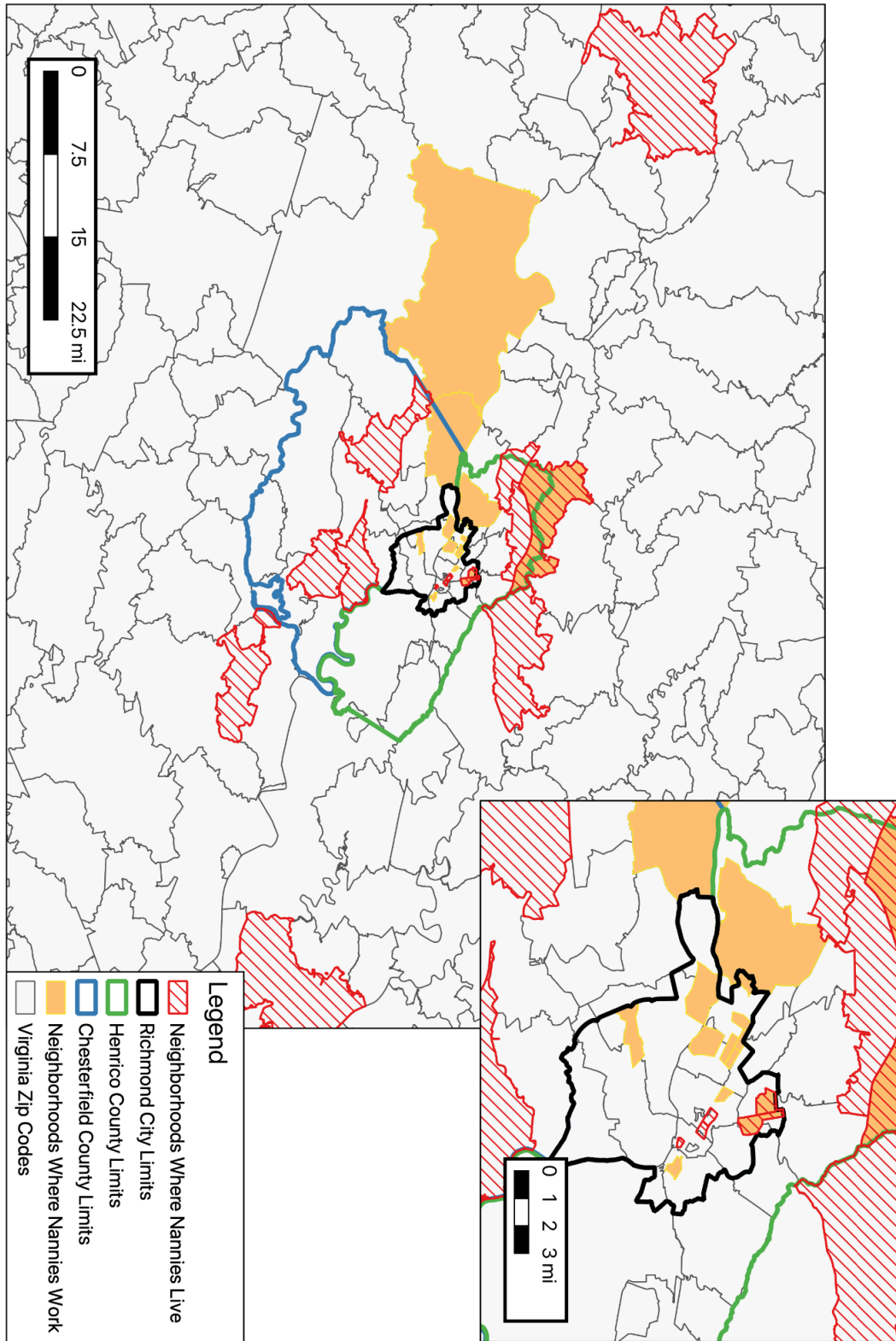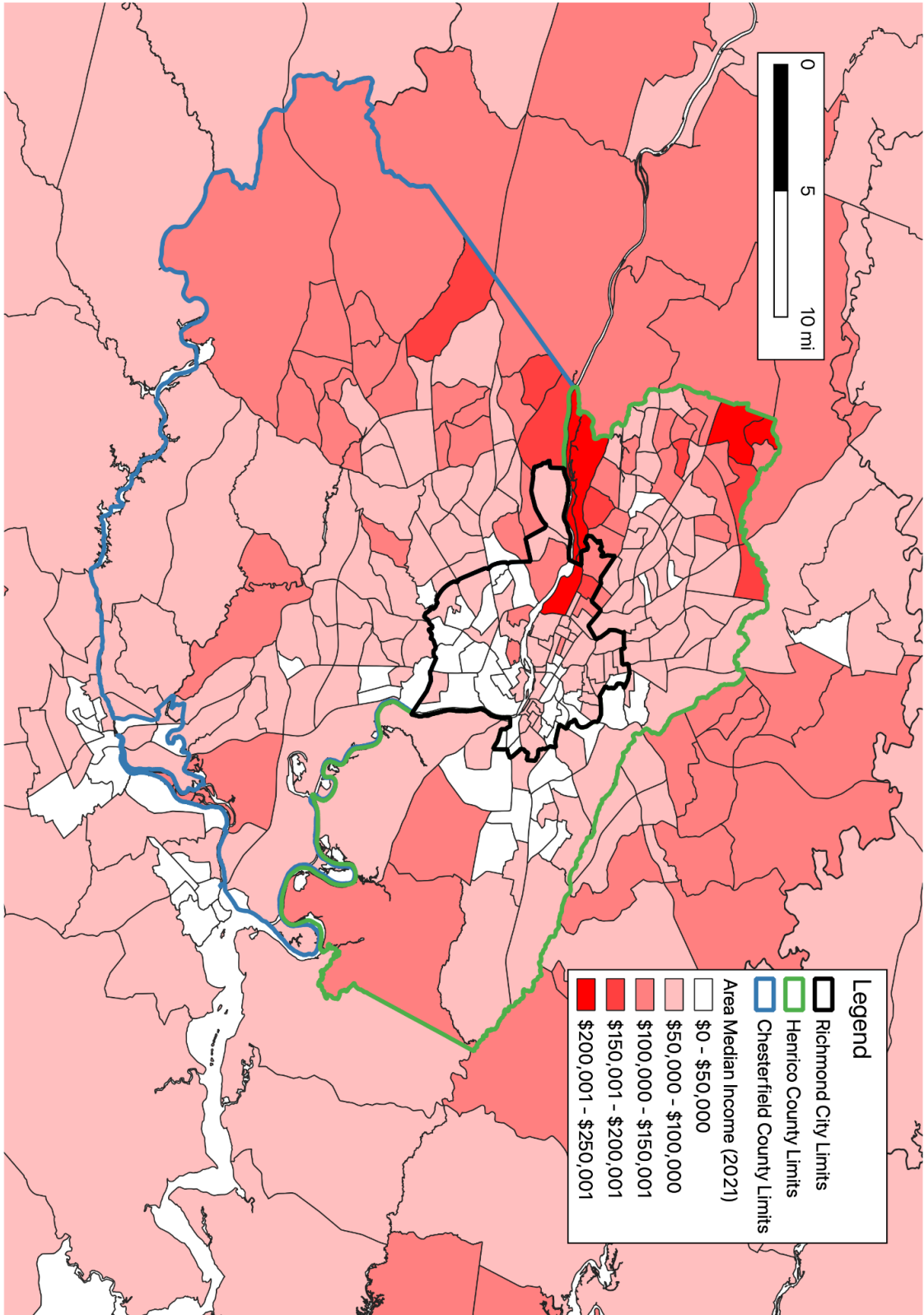
Figure 2: Richmond Region Area Median Income (2021)

The car dependency noted above was corroborated by the informal conversations I had with parents and nannies at Park365. All of the folks I talked to had driven there, and many said it was typical for them to drive the children in their care to parks. One nanny, who told me she worked with four families across the Richmond area, said that toll roads are a typical part of her commute; she took a toll road to bring the kids in her care up from where they live on the Southside of the City, and the trip was only 10 minutes or so, whereas it would've taken closer to 30 minutes without the toll road. This indicates that the car dependency does not just exist in relation to the nannies' commute, but there is also an expectation that car travel will be a part of fulfilling the requirements of their job.

In many ways, this car-dependency is Richmond-specific. Looking at the GRTC service map indicates why. As shown in Figure 3, frequent bus service is only available in the central part of the city. The lines indicated in teal and dark blue, which run to the more decentralized, residential parts of the city, only run the half hour or the hour, respectively. That service is at peak times, and the regularity assumes the buses will be on time. For nannies living or working in these outer parts of the city (or into the suburbs), public transportation isn't a reliable way to get to work. Bus stops in these areas are also fewer and further between, making it a challenge to travel via public transportation with children. Even in areas where bus service is readily available, it is not always child-friendly. Navigating public transportation with kids can be challenging at best, hazardous at worst, especially when caretakers are attempting to engage in trip-chaining (Hensher & Reyes, 2000; Leslie Kern, 2020).

Figure 3: GRTC Service Map (May 2023)

The necessity of car travel is further supported by the content analysis of Richmond nanny agency websites; both the Richmond Nanny Bureau and Capital City Childcare require nannies to have valid driver's licenses. The Richmond Nanny Bureau requires that these be Virginia licenses, and that nannies have a clean driving record. Capital City Childcare requires nannies to have access to "reliable transportation". Neither asserts that prospective nannies must have their own personal vehicle, but the inclusion of these requirements indicates that driving is such a typical expectation of nanny families that they will only place nannies that are capable of fulfilling that responsibility.

Preference for Public Spaces

Several survey questions were designed to understand the preferences Richmond nannies have for certain spaces in the course of their work, and responses to these questions showed a clear preference of public rather than privatized spaces. Respondents were asked about four kinds of spaces: parks, libraries, restaurants, and shops. Borrowing Nissen's definition of public space (2008), parks and libraries are considered public in this study regardless of ownership, as they are accessible and unrestricted for all patrons. Restaurants and shops, however, are generally restricted to patrons who intend to spend money. Restaurants in particular often have restrictions on how long patrons can linger as well. As a result, shops and restaurants are considered to be privatized spaces.

Overall, more respondents indicated that they visit public spaces with the children they nanny than privatized spaces. All respondents indicated that they visit parks and that they see other nannies in parks. 83% of respondents indicated that they visit libraries, and 88% of nannies that visit libraries indicated that they see other nannies in libraries. 55% of respondents indicated that they visit shops, and only 31% of those nannies indicated that they see other nannies in shops. Only 33% indicated that

they visit restaurants, and 54% of those nannies indicated that they see other nannies in restaurants. Clearly, respondents are not only frequenting public spaces at a higher rate, but they are recognizing other nannies in those spaces at higher rates. Further research would have to be done to determine if this is because there truly are fewer nannies in privatized spaces, or if their biases about whether or not they should be in those places as nannies impact their ability to recognize their peers.

Respondents were also asked to express their feelings of comfort, safety, and welcome in these four types of spaces on a sliding scale. On this scale, a value of 0 represents feeling completely comfortable, safe, or welcome, and a value of 100 represents feeling completely uncomfortable, unsafe, or unwelcome. Table 6 shows the aggregate results of those questions. Overall, respondents indicated feeling most comfortable, safe, and welcome in libraries. In parks, responses ranged from comfortable/safe/welcome to neutral, with average values of 10.31 for comfort, 8.25 for safety, and 8.13 for welcome. This can be interpreted as the average ranking for parks being at or above roughly 90% comfortable, safe, and welcome. In shops, responses ranged from comfortable to neutral and welcome to neutral, but from safe to unsafe. One respondent reported a value of 76 for safety in shops, meaning they felt only 24% safe. The average safety value was 12.64 however, which indicates respondents felt safer on average in shops than they felt comfortable or welcome. Respondents expressed feeling the least comfortable, safe, and welcome in restaurants.

This apparent preference for public spaces - parks and libraries - is consistent with the historical and contemporary understanding of public spaces being important to the geography of children and their caretakers. As past studies have established that parks are child-friendly urban spaces (Huynh et

al., 2013; Mertens et al., 2019; Rivera et al., 2022; Travlou et al., 2008), these results suggest that care workers feel most comfortable, safe, and welcome in spaces that are child-friendly.

Table 6: Feelings of Comfort, Safety, and Welcome

	Comfort			Safety			Welcome		
	Max Value	Mean Value	Median Value	Max Value	Mean Value	Median Value	Max Value	Mean Value	Median Value
Parks	50	10.31	4.5	52	8.25	0.5	50	8.13	0
Libraires	27	2.21	0	12	1.43	0	33	2.93	0
Restaurants	87	31.64	32	75	15.82	1	70	26	22
Shops	51	15.21	1	76	12.64	0	54	16.64	6

Respondents were also asked for examples of the places they frequented in each category. Of the restaurants listed, the majority could be classified as fast food or fast-casual restaurants - establishments that are more affordable, where patrons aren't being waited on and patrons can get in and out relatively quickly. This implies that when respondents do bring the children in their care to restaurants, they are minimizing the time spent there and the potential interaction with employees or other patrons, which is a preference that would be consistent with feeling less comfortable and welcome in restaurants as opposed to other spaces. It may also simply be a result of these more casual restaurants being more affordable and informal, which still betrays a preference for public spaces that can be accessed for free

Amenities Take Priority

When looking at the specific parks that survey respondents listed as spaces they frequented, park amenities linked the most popular responses. Proximity was much less of a factor, implying that convenience for nannies is defined less by location, and more by availability of resources.

Of the 33 parks listed, the one mentioned most frequently was Park365, followed closely by Deep Run Park. Both parks have public bathrooms, play equipment, ample parking, and are located in the Northern Richmond region. Other than that, the parks do not have much in common. Park365 is primarily a playground, run by the nonprofit SOAR365, and is designed to be accessible to children of many ages and abilities. In informal conversations, when asked about why they frequented PARK365, the bathrooms were the amenity mentioned most often by parents and nannies. Other amenities they mentioned included the quality and modernity of the play equipment, clear sightlines across the park, and the gate surrounding the park. All of the patrons I spoke to were willing to drive to the park for the sake of the amenities. When asked about neighborhood parks, one patron expressed frustration with the lack of bathrooms at school or church playgrounds; while they may be closer, the convenience of proximity is negated by the need to bring the children home every time one needs to use the restroom. Meanwhile, other patrons commented specifically on the cleanliness of the bathrooms at Park365. The concern over bathroom availability and quality is consistent with the existing discourse around bathrooms and public space explored by Carmenga et al. (2019), Kern (2020), and Németh & Schmidt (2007).

Overall, the most popular parks mentioned in the survey are geographically concentrated in the Northern half of the region. This pattern is especially interesting because as shown in Figure 4, it

doesn't correlate with the neighborhoods where respondents from the same sample work or live. This not only reinforces the idea that amenities are prioritized over proximity in park preferences, but it also suggests that the car dependency of Richmond nannies is interconnected with the value placed on amenities in public spaces. If public spaces with high quality amenities were either located in closer proximity to where nannies work and/or live, or if they were easier accessed via active or public transportation, Richmond nannies may not be so car dependent.

Meanwhile, the geographic pattern of parks mentioned in the survey does correlate with income in the Richmond area, which can be seen in Figure 5. The parks mentioned in the survey are concentrated largely in and around block groups with higher median incomes. Considering the value placed on amenities by caretakers, we can conclude that the parks in wealthier neighborhoods have more desirable amenities and/or are better maintained. As a result, the geography of wealthier neighborhoods lends itself to care work more so than lower-income neighborhoods. Furthermore, much as Federici and Greico & Sen (2004; 2021) describe care workers performing their labor in the homes of their wealthier employers while operating in the private sphere, it appears that care workers find themselves amidst wealthier communities in general while performing their labor in the public sphere, even if they are not the same communities that their employers are a part of.

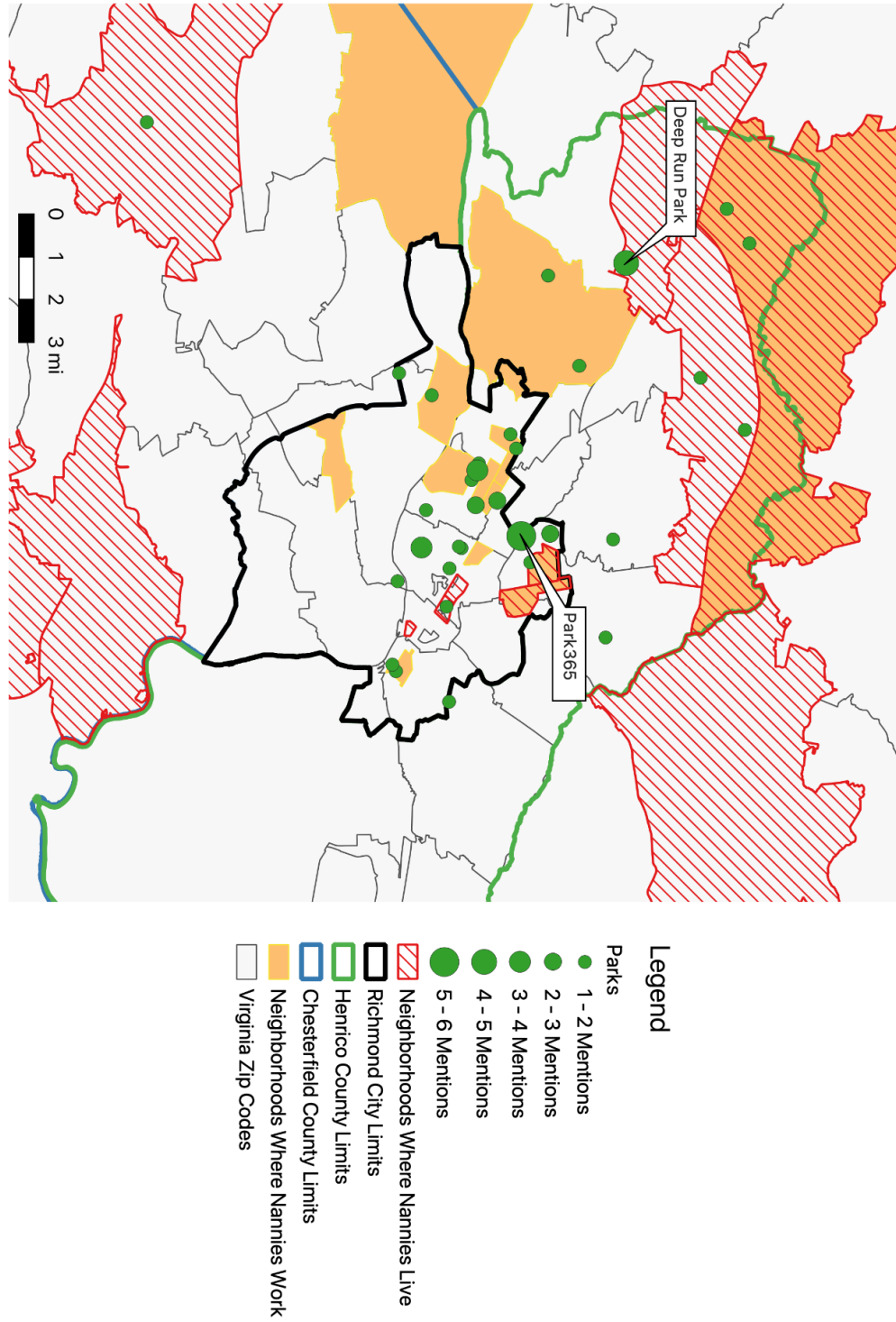**Figure 4: Frequency of Park Mentions in Nanny Survey**

Legend

Parks
- 1 – 2 Mentions
- 2 – 3 Mentions
- 3 – 4 Mentions
- 4 – 5 Mentions
- 5 – 6 Mentions

Neighborhoods Where Nannies Live
Richmond City Limits
Henrico County Limits
Chesterfield County Limits
Neighborhoods Where Nannies Work
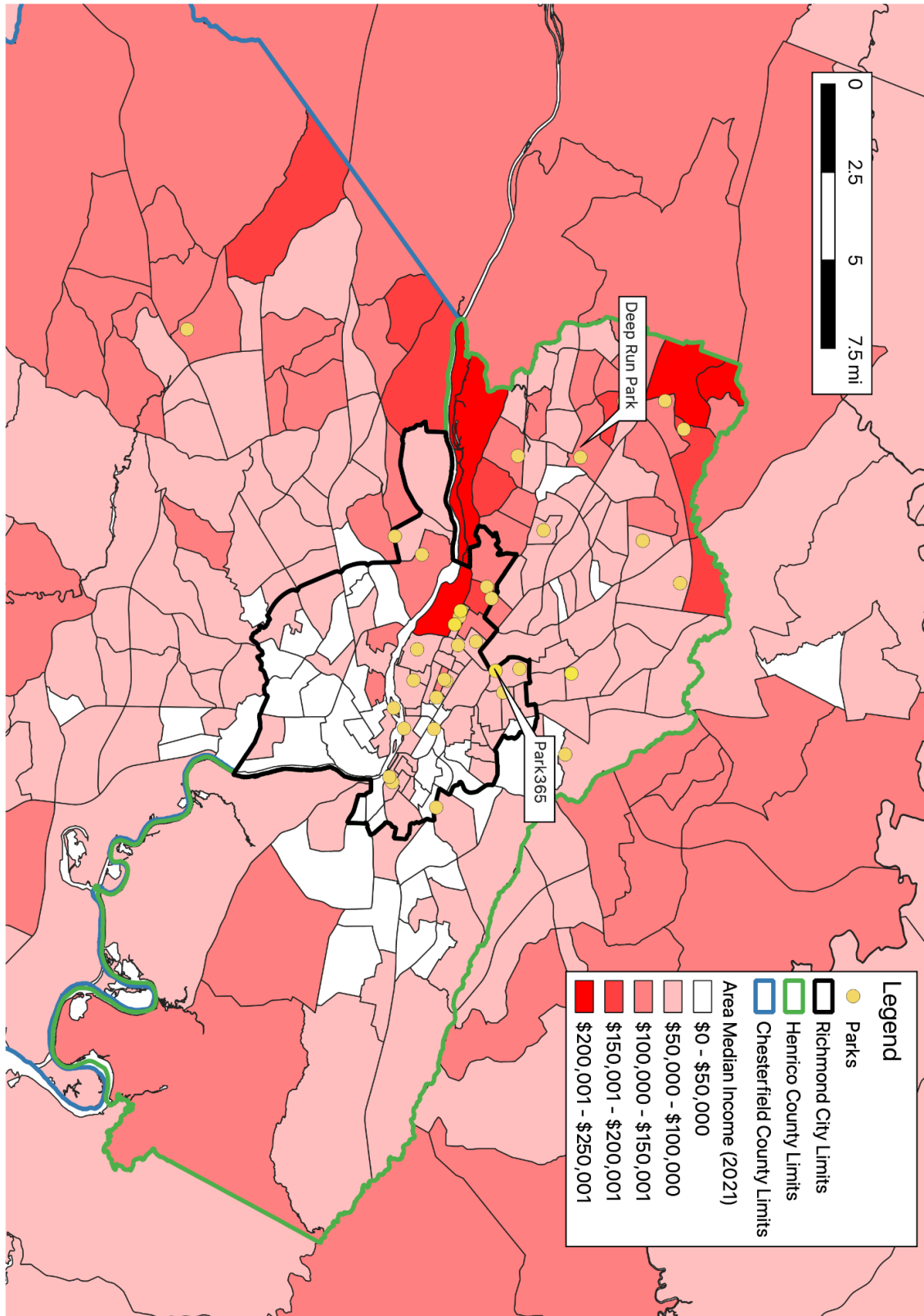Virginia Zip Codes

Deep Run Park

Park365

0 1 2 3 mi

Figure 5: Median Household Income and Parks Mentioned in Nanny Survey

Online Platforms Carve Out a Niche in the Richmond Nanny Labor Market

Based on respondents' answers to questions regarding their use of online platforms for finding employment, it was clear that online platforms have made it easier for nannies to find gigs, but they haven't fully replaced more traditional methods. 100% of respondents reported that Facebook made it easier for them to find jobs, but this sample is made up of nannies who were either already part of the Richmond Nannies Facebook group, or active on the r/rva subreddit, so there is a bias among the group.

Despite this bias, the most popular *primary* method of finding nannying gigs amongst respondents was word of mouth. Of the respondents who indicated a comfort level with connecting with potential employers online under 90%, all of them cited either word of mouth or Care.com as their primary way of finding gigs. As previously mentioned, Care.com collects the most information from users, and is the only one of the three platforms discussed that requires background screening for nannies. The high information threshold may act as a shortcut for trust building in the employee-employer relationship, as discussed by Knaus et al (2021). In this sense, Care.com would compensate for the lack of interpersonal trust present in the word of mouth pipeline better than any other platform.

It is also notable that the aforementioned group that was less comfortable with connecting with potential employers online skewed younger. Older respondents tended to report higher levels of comfort conducting these professional interactions with strangers online. This is the inverse of what I hypothesized; I expected that the higher levels of digital literacy amongst younger users would make them more comfortable with these sorts of interactions. It is possible that this higher level of digital

literacy leads to higher levels of wariness in online interactions, or that the experience of nannies who have been in the industry longer makes them more confident in their ability to vet potential employers independently. It's also possible that younger nannies have greater access to families with young children through their organic personal networks, and have an inherent preference for finding work that way due to the ease and more traditional trust-building process described by Knaus et al (2021).

Only four out of 19 respondents reported using nanny agencies at all to find nannying gigs. Just one respondent indicated that agencies were their *primary* way of finding nannying gigs. According to threads regarding ways to find employment in the r/Nanny and R/Nannies subreddits, nanny agencies are still a popular tool. It is possible that the low popularity amongst respondents is due to the bias of the sample, all of whom have at least some online presence. There may be little overlap between Facebook and/or Reddit users, and nannies who use agencies in Richmond. It is also possible that nanny agencies have a more limited presence in Richmond than they do in other American cities.

Facebook Groups as Sites of Exclusion

One potential explanation for the lack of popularity nanny agencies had amongst respondents is cultural. More specifically, several factors combined paint a picture of Facebook nanny groups having a culture that is potentially exclusionary. While just one possibility, this scenario is supported by multiple observations. It is also consistent with the exclusionary nature of Care.com, which prevented this researcher from collecting data from that platform at all.

The demographics of my survey respondents were not what I expected to see. The ages of respondents varied, with most falling between the ages of 26 and 35. However, nearly all of the respondents were white women. While the female majority was to be expected, considering the earlier

discussion of the gendered distribution of reproductive labor, the whiteness of this sample population contradicts the racialized distribution of informal and reproductive labor found in previous studies, and certainly is not representative of the Richmond population at large. This is not to say that the nanny labor market in Richmond is disproportionately white, but the Richmond nanny Facebook community may be. It is also possible that nannies who are women of color were less comfortable engaging with the study, but even if that is the case, that would suggest that their presence in the community is undermined by feelings of reticence or discomfort that must be attributed, at least in part, to the culture of the community.

The Facebook group definitively represents a community. 83% of respondents reported making connections with other nannies via online platforms, and roughly half considered these connections to be coworkers. In this sense, the Facebook group serves a parallel purpose to physical public space, which Armenta (2009) describes as being integral to promoting community amongst peers in an industry which deprives employees of the traditional coworker network. What remains to be seen is how the digital community compares to its "real world" counterpart in terms of inclusivity.

Some threads in the r/Nanny subreddit provide additional context. Multiple of these threads are dedicated to venting about the "toxic" culture of nanny Facebook groups generally. Complaints target cattiness, rude behavior, overbearing admins, and in one case, a claim that an admin was racist. No additional context was provided for that situation. One post from April, 2023, which has since been deleted, was soliciting feedback from fellow nannies on whether or not they had similar negative experiences with a specific group. Most of these posts do not allude to toxicity or hostility that is rooted in the identities of members, but an exclusive environment may be particularly off-putting to

those who anticipate and/or have experienced hostility based on their identity. As a result, it is possible that the whiteness of the Richmond Nannies Facebook group is linked to the toxic culture of nanny groups more broadly described by Redditt users.

Exclusion in the nanny community would not be isolated to Facebook. Care.com was one of the platforms identified in the digital nanny labor marketplace early on in this study, but was not researched further because it could only be accessed as a nanny or a parent. As noted previously, Care.com requires the most information from nannies of any platform discussed. It also offers background check services on nannies, which may be intimidating or disqualifying for some candidates. The same isn't true for employers though, replicating the power dynamic in favor of the employer that has historically existed in domestic labor relationships.

Implications and Conclusions

Care Work at the Regional Scale

Due to the dispersal and car dependency of Richmond nannies, and the impact of digital platforms easing the way to finding gigs, it is clear that the Richmond nanny labor market functions at a regional scale. Therefore, planning for care work needs to be done at a regional scale. Richmond nannies are traveling not just between neighborhoods for work, but between localities. Relying on car transportation allows nannies to travel further in terms of their commutes and in the course of their work responsibilities. Digital platforms, which have made it easier for Richmond nannies to find jobs, connect nannies with employers from all over the region.

In this sense, Richmond fits neatly into Calthorpe and Fulton's framework for the Regional City. As described in their book, economic and social networks do not stop at jurisdictional

boundaries (Calthorpe & Fulton, 2001). The same is true for other cities with significant portions of the metro area population residing outside of the city limits, especially those with high levels of car dependency. As older urban neighborhoods are revitalized, a process central to Calthorpe and Fulton's framework (2001), wealth moves into the center of the city, but the working class remains dispersed. Any efforts to consider the needs of care workers in the process of resource or infrastructure planning must approach those things from a regional level, because the care worker's geography traverses localities. Therefore, the Regional City perspective is key to planning for care work. However, dominant approaches to regional planning create a dichotomy between residential areas and business districts. Much like understanding reproductive labor as labor requires us to break down ingrained distinctions between labor done in the private sphere and the public sphere, understanding and planning for the geography of reproductive laborers requires us to break down ingrained distinctions about the locations of the private sphere and the public sphere.

Transportation planning serves as a prime example. This is already largely done at the regional level, due to the number of people who commute between localities for work. Historically, the needs of commuters outside of the City have played an outsized role in shaping car infrastructure inside the City. As urban areas across the country shift focus to public and active transportation initiatives, success is dependent on working at the regional level as well. To make alternate modes of transportation a viable option for care workers, the service areas would need to be far-reaching. Public transit systems are typically designed to bring people from residential areas into business districts, then back out to residential areas. This structure fails to meet the needs of care workers and other reproductive laborers who travel from their own residential neighborhoods to other residential

neighborhoods. Viable alternate modes of transportation would also need to account for destinations beyond residential areas and centers of business; destinations such as schools, parks, libraries, and restaurants that care workers frequent over the course of their work day would need to be prioritized. Furthermore, alternate modes of transportation would have to be accessible to children. This means that public transportation would need to be able to accommodate strollers, bike lanes would need to be sufficiently protected for inexperienced riders, and e-bike or e-scooters would need to either provide sizes appropriate for smaller bodies, or provide options with sidecars to accommodate children.

The need to commute from one residential area to another also challenges the viability of dominant structures of workforce housing for care workers. Planning for workforce housing tends to be done at the regional level, because it is rooted in the problem raised by Calthorpe and Fulton: low- to middle-income workers are struggling to afford to live in the metropolitan areas where they work, leading to longer commutes and increased car dependency (Parlow, 2015; Rohe et al., 2012). The solution developed in response has been to invest in attainable housing located near "job-centers", or business districts (Rohe et al., 2012). The issue with this, of course, is that care work is not done in business districts - it is done in the residential neighborhoods of the employer, which this and previous studies show to be higher-income neighborhoods that will be less attainable to employees. There are affordable housing strategies, like inclusionary zoning practices, that can address this miss-match, but fully embracing those will require a move away from the perceived dichotomy between residential spaces that make up the private sphere and the business districts that make up the public sphere.

Preservation and Expansion of Public Space

The importance of public space to the Richmond care economy is consistent with the evident value of public space to the greater gig economy, as gleaned from the body of literature. Even though nannying does not lack a "central location" in the way most gig labor does, the results of this study show that when care work does venture into the public realm, as it historically has, it is most comfortably done in public spaces. As the economy continues to shift towards more service and gig work, digital spaces have grown to accommodate the needs of the gig economy. Physical public spaces will have to keep pace. The neoliberal economy's preferences for gig work and privatization are at odds. If left unchecked, the privatization of public spaces could cannibalize the public space that is integral to the health of a gig based economy. This is where localities must make a concerted effort to preserve and expand on existing public amenities and infrastructure, as the absence of formal work spaces pushes the labor of gig workers into the private sphere and third places (Knaus et al., 2021; Scott, 2010; Webster, 2016).

Ensuring that these preserved public spaces are worker friendly is also important. As evidenced by this study, the quality of public space is largely determined by its amenities and accessibility. In order to support all kinds of gig workers moving into the public realm, prioritizing accessibility in terms of physical infrastructure and expanding access to amenities will be necessary. This could include enhanced safety measures, improved wayfinding and physical pathways, and of course - high quality public restrooms.

If digital spaces are able to outpace physical spaces in their adaptation to the changing economy, this poses a secondary threat to gig workers. While this study corroborates the finding that

digital platforms can increase the spatial diversity of a labor market (Jarvis, 2007; Knaus et al., 2021),

the findings regarding a culture of exclusion in digital spaces means that digital platforms also have the

capacity to reduce socio-cultural diversity in the labor market - this is particularly important given the

range of ethnic, lingual and class backgrounds conducting caregiving activities. The persistent strength

of word-of-mouth communication as a primary mode of finding gigs suggests that exclusion from

digital spaces does not inherently mean exclusion from the labor market, it does segregate the labor

market. Furthermore, exclusion from digital spaces in an increasingly digital economy could mean

exclusion from worker communities that previous studies have found to be integral to the nanny labor

market (Armenta, 2009). If true physical public spaces are lost, Black and Latina nannies would suffer

most. Despite the findings of this study, previous research suggests that these demographic groups take

on the majority of informal care work in the United States (Armenta, 2009; Glenn, 1992; Grieco &

Sen, 2020). This makes it especially important to the nanny labor market that high-quality public

spaces are preserved and maintained.

Limitations and Further Research

While I believe the findings of this study are valuable and expand the current academic

understanding of the role care work plays in our transforming economy and how urban geography

impacts that role, this study was hindered by certain limitations. The potentially exclusionary nature of

digital nanny platforms was not anticipated, and while using digital platforms to recruit participants

was vital in order to understand the role of digital platforms in the nanny economy, it did result in a

survey pool that was more narrow than expected. A more thorough understanding of how race impacts

the experiences of nannies in the public realm, which I hypothesized that it does, could be gleaned

from a similar study with a more diverse pool of participants. It could also be valuable to expand such a study to include the platforms I was not able to include in this research, such as Care.com.

This study was originally designed to include a digital ethnography of Richmond nanny Facebook groups, but that was ultimately deemed to be infeasible due to IRB regulations and a limited timeframe to complete the study. Nevertheless, I believe that a digital ethnography component would have supported my findings, and provided additional insight into the composition of the nanny labor force in Richmond, as well as the ways that digital platforms can shape relationships between nannies and between nannies and parents. Furthermore, digital ethnography is a research tool that is underutilized in urban planning research, and if included in this study, it would have modeled how digital ethnography can allow us to better study the relationships between individuals and public space in the digital age. I believe future research would benefit from the inclusion of such a tool.

The findings of this study themselves have also opened the door to avenues of research that could expand our understanding of the relationship between care workers and public space. In light of the clear car dependency of Richmond nannies, it would be prudent to investigate how nannies navigate transportation needs in communities that are less car dependent than Richmond generally. The inconsistency of the perceived popularity of nanny agencies in this study, could be clarified by further research into the specific role of nanny agencies in disparate communities. Finally, the initial findings made here about the culture of online nanny communities sets the stage for a deeper dive into that culture, potentially spanning various geographies and/or various platforms.

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