A maid's worldview: Assessing aspirations in Guatemala City's domestic sector

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A maid's worldview: Assessing aspirations in Guatemala City's domestic sector

by

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A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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This is to certify that the Master's thesis of

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has met the thesis requirements of Iowa State University

Signatures have been redacted for privacy
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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the current socioeconomic situation, worldview, and aspirations of a sample of 20 domestic workers in Guatemala City. Studies of the domestic sector in Latin America indicate that women typically migrate to cities at a very young age, intending to work in such a position temporarily before moving onto other lines of work. Interviews and informal discussions with women at various stages in this line of work provided insight into the degree to which domestic servants view their occupation as a step towards upward mobility, with specific regard to how their worldview relates to and affects their aspirations. This study also describes domestic workers' knowledge of their rights and the degree to which they believe such organizations are capable of effecting change.

Significance of the study

Domestic workers comprise approximately 20 percent of women in the paid work force in Latin America and the Caribbean (Chaney and Castro 1989). In a number of countries, the proportion is estimated to be even higher, with one-fifth to one-third of the female labor force working in the domestic sector (Chaney and Castro 1989). Importantly, if there were a way to include women who do domestic work but are not counted in the official statistics, these percentages would be still greater. Nevertheless, despite the significant numbers of women employed as domestic servants, this important social and economic sector has only recently become a topic of scholarly interest.

In the past decade, there have been studies addressing the inequalities that permeate the relationships between women who manage households and their female servants (e.g.
Gill 1997; Bunster and Chaney 1998; Chaney and Castro 1989). Such studies place these relationships in the context of macro-scale culture change, focusing on such issues as ethnicity, migration, and social class. Although some scholars have incorporated the oral histories of domestic servants (Gill 1997; Chaney and Castro 1989), few have focused specifically on these women, their changing aspirations, and their worldview. Most researchers are more interested in the power dynamics of the employer-employee relationship, possibly causing them to neglect other important observations that can only be discovered after establishing good rapport. Such a relationship would be easier to formulate if the researcher were not seen as connected with or similar to their employers.

Although there has been an influx of studies of domestic servants in Latin America, little attention has been afforded to this sector in Guatemala. Interviews with domestic workers elsewhere in Latin America have brought attention to what has remained among the most oppressed and neglected sectors of the working class (Chaney and Castro 1989). The oppressed state of domestic workers is exemplified by a Peruvian survey in which women placed only two occupations lower in desirability: prostitution and begging (Chaney and Castro 1989: 4). The information, gathered through interaction and interviews with current Guatemalan domestic workers, could serve as a reference for the development of future studies in Guatemala.

Furthermore, this study is intended to provide important information that might be of use in the effort to organize domestic workers in Guatemala City. Presently, domestic workers are not covered by ordinary legislation for manual workers because "they do not have a common workplace, do not produce a tangible product, and are paid partially in
kind'''' (Chaney and Castro 1989: 4). Securing a fair salary is a major priority of domestic workers’ organizations.

**Introduction to the research environment**

The research for this study was conducted in Guatemala City during June and July of 1998. During this eight-week period, I spoke both informally and through structured interviews with female domestic workers, former female domestic workers, and with female organizers of and participants in domestic workers’ organizations. The majority of the structured interviews were conducted during weekends at Casa Maria, a domestic workers’ organization sponsored by a Catholic Church. Additional information on the domestic sector was gathered through informal conversations female domestics outside of Guatemala City (i.e. in Quetzaltenango and Santa Rosa), female employers of domestic workers both inside and outside of the city, and with women who are involved in domestic workers’ organizations.

**Brief overview of Guatemala**

Guatemala is the second largest of the Central American countries and includes the region’s greatest indigenous population among its 11 million individuals (see Figure 1). Approximately half of the Guatemalan people are of Mayan descent, whose past sophisticated civilization continues to educate us through an extensive archaeological record. Mayan culture continues to flourish today with millions of indigenous Guatemalans dressing, speaking, working, and worshiping almost exactly as they did when the Spanish conquistadors entered the country nearly five centuries ago.
Figure 1. Guatemala
Remnants of Spain’s 16th century conquest still stand in contrast to Guatemala’s indigenous culture. Along the Caribbean coast, the fort of San Felipe and a number of colonial mansions preside amidst the shantytowns of the Garifuna and other ethnic minorities. The city of Antigua, with its massive churches and ornate public buildings, is a further reminder of the country’s Spanish heritage.

**Guatemalan ethnic relations**

Since the colonial period, Spaniards, Creoles (i.e. whites born in the New World), and *ladinos* or *mestizos*\(^1\) have sought domination over the largely highland indigenous population through the control of their land and labor. The process of domination intensified when Guatemala entered the world market between 1870 and 1920. At this time the ruling classes began to purchase or more commonly seize Indian land for cash cropping (Goodwin 1996:36). Denied sufficient land, Indians were forced onto plantations as either permanent or seasonal laborers.

Traditionally, the ladino population perceived of Indians as “backward”, “uneducated”, and “inassimilable” (Goodwin 1996:36). Unfortunately, these perceptions persist today and Guatemalan governments have historically explained “the Indian’s lack of material prosperity in terms of the ‘deficiencies’ of Indian culture” (Dow quoted in Goodwin 1996:36). However, between 1945 and 1954, there was a period of marked social reform during which Guatemala’s government made a concerted effort to incorporate the Indian

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\(^1\) The word *ladino* refers to a person who has adopted Western culture. The word has several meanings throughout Central America and in Guatemala it refers to a person of mixed Indian-European descent, or *mestizo* (Goodwin 1996:21).
population into ladino life. The reforms were quickly ended by resisting landowners, military factions, and an invasion sponsored by the Central Intelligence Agency (Goodwin 1996:36). Fortunately, before the reforms were cut short, some Indians learned that they had the power to effect change through their vote. Moreover, they recognized that their inequality was not because they were poor, illiterate, and did not speak Spanish, but because past governments had refused to reform social, political, and economic structures (Goodwin 1996:36). Therefore, although Indians held equal rights under the Constitution, they remained outside of the national culture and economy.

**Civil war**

Beginning in the 1960s, violence attributed to the anti-government guerrillas and the Guatemalan military and paramilitary forces plagued Guatemala. Between 1978 and 1984, Guatemala’s government was wracked by a series of military coups, causing a near collapse in its economy and a breakdown in social order (Mahler 1997:12). During these years, aggressive, reform-minded insurgencies in rural areas and armed forces’ counterinsurgency operations plunged Guatemala into open civil war. According to estimates from Amnesty International, more than 150,000 people were killed, 50,000 “disappeared”, and 300,000 were wounded during the decade of violence (Mahler 1997:12). Government massacres of guerrillas and their suspected supporters were sometimes selective affecting solely community leaders and their families, but more frequently entire villages were destroyed, and their inhabitants slaughtered (Goodwin 1996:36). Approximately 440 villages were completely destroyed and over 1 million Guatemalans were internally displaced (Mahler 1997:12).
By the mid-1980s, most of the guerrillas' military organizations were eliminated due to the success of counterinsurgency tactics and because the guerrillas overestimated the willingness of the people to rebel. The surviving guerrilla units remained dormant for the remainder of the decade until 1989 when they regrouped. The horrific and numerous human rights abuses that occurred until the signing of the peace accords is a result of the military's response to resurgence of the guerrilla forces.

In July 1993, President Ramiro de León Carpio, a human right's activist, announced a set of proposals that he hoped would put an end to the 30 years of civil unrest that had caused more than 150,000 deaths (Goodwin 1996:36). By early 1994, the government and the guerrillas of the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG) had begun negotiations and in March of that year the Guatemalan government, the URNG, and the United Nations signed the Human Rights accord. Over the next two years, peace accords including those that verified human rights violations against indigenous populations, secured social and economic justice, and detailed the future role of the army were signed. On December 29th, 1996, the final accord was signed thus formally ending a 36-year-old war (Mahler 1997: 13).

Guatemala City

Nueva Guatemala de Asunción was founded as the nation's third capital on the first day of 1776. Guatemala City became the country's capital after the original Spanish colonial capital at Santiago (since renamed La Antigua Guatemala) was leveled by a series of earthquakes. The city was located in the Valley of the Hermitage, in classic colonial grid pattern around a central plaza, whereas Guatemala City rests on a high plateau (about 4,500 feet above sea level), surrounded by volcanoes.
Presently, Guatemala City is home to approximately one-third of the country’s population, but rural-to-urban migration is increasing the city’s population with each passing day. It is the most industrialized and populated city in the nation and thus faces resultant pollution problems and shortages in housing, water, electricity, and jobs (Mahler 1997:89). Class inequalities are exemplified in city housing, with wealthier ladino families hidden behind high walls in the city’s quiet suburbs, while the noisy inner city is full of the simple box houses of the middle class and the shanties of primarily indigenous peasants.

Guatemala City is divided into 21 geographic zones (zonas), the oldest of which is Zone 1. Zone 1 includes the main plaza (Parque Central) and is the oldest, busiest, and loudest neighborhood in the capital. Traditionally, Zone 1 was the city’s central market but the locus of commerce has since moved south to Zone 4’s high-tech civic center and financial headquarters as well as to the avenues of Zone 9 and 10 (Mayler 1997:91). Nevertheless, the streets of Zone 1 bustle with both residents and tourists who still consider it the true heart of the city and frequent the area for shopping, prayer, sightseeing, and governmental business. Zone 1’s central plaza is devoted in part to a huge public market surrounded by historic and commercial buildings including the National Plaza, the city’s main cathedral, and a three level central market.

**Domestic workers’ organizations**

Zone 1 is also home to Centro de Apoyo Para Las Trabajadoras de Casa Particular or CENTRACAP, one of the domestic workers’ organizations visited during fieldwork. CENTRACAP’s primary concern is to build a force of domestic workers to lobby for new legislation that will recognize domestic service as an occupation, thereby entitling them to the same benefits as all other employees. In addition to its offices, library reading rooms,
and conference rooms, CENTRACAP offers housing for unemployed and/or pregnant domestic workers, and has recently expanded to include inexpensive tourist accommodations. Of the five domestic workers’ organizations in Guatemala City, CENTRACAP is not only the largest but also the sole organization not sponsored by the Catholic Church.

Casa María, a domestic workers’ organization, is a shelter sponsored by the Catholic Church, located in a residential neighborhood in Zone 7. Similar to CENTRACAP, Casa María provides free housing to unemployed and/or pregnant domestic workers. Unlike CENTRACAP, which is the driving force behind legalizing benefits for domestic workers, Casa María is not preoccupied with legal issues, focusing more on combating the effects of ethnic discrimination, promoting education, and building the self-esteem of domestic employees. Casa María is furnished as a typical home and domestic workers are encouraged to utilize all facets of the house as often as they like. Casa María also utilizes its front hall for weekly Sunday events such as lectures or craft activities. Additionally, the top floor of the house is split into two classrooms, each offering weekly typing and sewing classes.

Summary

This study documents the interrelationships between ethnicity, number of years working, level of education, socioeconomic situation, aspirations and the degree to which domestic work is viewed as a step towards upward mobility for a small sample of domestic workers in Guatemala City. Domestic work is one of the few occupational choices available to female migrants and by lifting the occupation from its current oppressive state, domestic labor could serve as a positive stepping stone towards socioeconomic advancement. Organizations promoting the legal recognition and respect for domestic workers are on the rise throughout Latin America. A significant number of the women interviewed for this
study were connected with two of such organizations – Casa María and CENTRACAP – thus, providing an account of participant assessment of such organizations.

In order to place the results of this study in the proper framework, a review of literature concerning the domestic sector and associated organizations will follow. Despite the vast amount of research conducted in the domestic sector throughout Latin America, Guatemalan domestic workers have lacked scholarly attention. Thus, Guatemala’s domestic sector must be considered in connection with the domestic sectors of other Latin American nations.
CHAPTER 2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter provides a review of the relevant literature pertaining to the domestic service sector in Latin America. It includes a history of domestic work in Latin America, along with a presentation of the theoretical basis of this thesis. Current feminist anthropological research concerns itself with either the social construction of gender as expressed in cultural institutions or in assessing gender-related activities with regard to degrees of social, economic, and political power (McGee and Warms 1996:392). Feminist approaches in either direction can be used to assess the situation of female domestic workers. Taking a feminist approach to anthropological research means that the researcher applies gender as an important analytical concept, meanwhile recognizing that the definition of gender varies from one culture to another (McGee and Warms 1996:392). This chapter presents feminist analyses of the subordinate status suffered by female domestic servants. Applying a feminist approach to understand the situation of domestic workers in Guatemala entails placing the occupation in its appropriate historical, regional, and cultural context and then analyzing how cultural expressions of gender shape the role of female domestic workers. Additionally, a feminist approach recognizes all factors that influence the social construction of gender and the resultant socioeconomic and political status for each gender. Thus, this section includes an analysis of the extent to which patterns of class, ethnicity, and gender discrimination determine the social, political, and economic status of female domestic servants. To set up this discussion, one must first become familiar with what domestic work is and who the people that engage in it are.
**Domestic work**

Latin America heads the Third World with its vast domestic service sector and the percentage of women working in the occupation. In fact, in her survey of twenty-one Third World countries, Boserup found that only in Latin America did women constitute over 90 percent of domestic workers (Rollins 1985: 38). Guatemala’s population census of 1994 supports Boserup’s claim that women dominate the domestic sector (Hernandez et al. 1997).

In an unpublished manuscript, Hernandez and colleagues (1997) report that 34,491 of Guatemala’s 38,792 domestic servants are women. The explanation of the feminization of domestic work is twofold. First, Latin American urbanization is characterized by the fact that more women than men migrate to cities, thus creating a large, cheap female labor pool (Rollins 1989: 39). When white-collar female employment began to expand beginning in the 1940s, the market for domestic servants enlarged (Kuznesof 1989:29). By hiring domestic servants, upper and middle class women were able to go to work without threatening the traditional organization of the household, which in essence is the second reason for the feminization of this sector. Specifically, there is a widespread assumption that the responsibility for household chores falls on women, as such work is considered “naturally feminine” (Chaney and Castro 1989:7). Thus, paid domestic work seems a natural extension of this concept.

The aforementioned study, in which only prostitution and begging are reported as less desirable occupations demonstrates the oppressive lot suffered by women employed within the domestic sector (Changy and Castro 1989:4). This and other recent studies have attempted to shed some light on this historically neglected and characteristically oppressive sector of the working class. Neglecting to include domestic work under the protection of
labor laws arguably demonstrates the negative value placed on this sector. In 1972, the Industrial Relations Act of Trinidad and Tobago decreed that “households workers are not workers under the law; therefore they do not come under the protection of labor laws designed to look after the interests of workers in this country” (Mohammed 1989: 161). Similarly, Guatemalan labor laws do not apply to domestic workers. The verbal, rather than written, contract that employs a domestic worker in Guatemala maintains the invisibility of the occupation. Because the occupation is not officially recognized, the labor laws securing worker benefits do not apply to domestic workers (CENTRACAP 1998). Furthermore, the gross national product and national income accounts do not include the value of domestic service and related activities (Mohammed 1989: 161). Clearly, a negative value is attached to domestic work and domestic workers throughout Latin America and the Caribbean.

Mohammed (1989:162) views the perceived essence of “work” as something that has “come to be associated with outside the home, done for a wage or salary, where the mental or manual labor that has gone into it remains concretely evident”. This definition of work, internalized by society, completely excludes domestic labor. Moreover, a high value is placed on skills training and domestic work requires minimal, if any, formal training. Consequently, domestic labor, whether paid or unpaid, is always viewed as “non-work” and assigned a negative and demeaning status in the hierarchy of work roles (Mohammed 1989: 161). Therefore, the domestic worker is automatically designated to the lowest status in societies such as those found throughout Latin America that define social class on occupational classification (Mohammed 1989: 161).
The domestic servant

Most domestic servants in Latin American cities are Indian or mestizo women who migrated from provincial areas of the countryside (Smith 1989). These women usually are very young, have few years of formal education and little, if any, urban job skills (Smith 1989). The majority of domestic servants range in age from fifteen to twenty-four years and are almost exclusively unmarried (Smith 1973). Domestic service is often the only job opportunity open to them. Smith (1973) and Jelin (1979) argue that such work plays a crucial role in an individual migrant’s adaptation to urban life and the urban labor market. Gill’s study (1997) of domestic service in La Paz, Bolivia, provides us with a scenario of the opportunities awaiting rural-to-urban migrants.

Gill (1997) explains that when rural women enter La Paz they are entering a city where the manufacturing sector is not large enough to provide employment for everyone. Therefore, migrant women must either create work by selling on the streets or take a position as a domestic servant. Both positions force the migrant woman into subordinate relations with her employer. Gill (1997) appropriately questions why women continue to arrive in the city when their opportunities are so minimal and depressing. The answer is simple: many need the money that any job has to offer and the city certainly offers more opportunities to find work than the rural areas. Furthermore, young peasant women often desire to escape the monotony of rural life and are enchanted by what the city has to offer in terms of consumer goods, new people, and personal autonomy (Gill 1997).

Once in the city, personal channels become the best means by which a woman can secure a position as a domestic worker (Gogna 1989; Gill 1997). In fact, approximately 60 percent of the women Gill (1997) interviewed migrated to the city and lived temporarily with
urban kin who provided them with the necessary contacts to find a job. Another third of Gill’s (1997) informants were recruited by personal contacts with other migrants who had returned home with instructions to recruit a new worker. Gogna (1989) posits that the reason most employers rely on personal channels is because trust is one of the primary requirements for this line of work (Gogna 1989). Moreover, Gogna (1989) observes that personal connections often work as a form of social control, whereby the intermediary continues contact with the employer to ensure that the worker is performing up to the employer’s expectations.

In addition to personal channels, Gogna (1989) and Gill (1997) cite a number of other ways women can secure domestic positions. For instance, women use parishes, newspaper ads, employment agencies, and labor unions to obtain work (Gogna 1989). If all else fails, women try to find work by lining up outside of the food market or by going door to door and offering their services to housewives (Gill 1997).

Once a woman has secured a position, her employer may coerce her into partaking in training offered by lay-religious institutions. Castro (1989) reports that employers commonly take recent migrants to these centers. Employers encourage involvement in such programs because lay-religious centers are commonly committed to maintaining the institution of domestic service and “they manipulate the ideological framework of the workers, promoting the ethic of servitude” (Castro 1989: 112). Castro (1989) provides

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2 Such institutions are organizations sponsored by religious orders for the lay public; they typically target members of the working class. Examples of such organizations include Opus Dei and Casa Maria.
excerpts from interviews that demonstrate the extent to which domestic servants have
internalized this ethic. One worker’s response to the question, “do you like to work in
domestic service?” was:

Yes, because I have learned to appreciate the work and, more than anything, because
I get training at the center... they teach us about the work... we do it more efficiently,
or rather we don’t waste any time, and because our employers respect us more

This woman’s comment demonstrates the degree to which the courses offered at lay-religious
centers internalize subordination. Gálvez and Todaro (1989:316) claim that domestic
workers’ low level of education has an important role in this process of “internalizing
inferiority”.

Moreover, the servile elements found in the domestic’s work relation clearly reflect
the domestic worker’s low self esteem and the negative value domestic work has in the eyes
of society. Gálvez and Todaro (1989:316) provide a list of some rules of behavior that
enforce inferiority:

[T]he maid must go as unnoticed as possible; she must not give her opinions; she
must obey; she must be ready when she is needed and vanish when she is not.
Visitors should be made aware that she is a member of the service staff, not of the
family; when she goes out, her status must be reflected in the way she dresses: she
must make a good appearance but not look so chic that she is mistaken for family.

Flora’s (1989) review of household workers in the Latin American fotonovela (illustrated
romance) supports the notion that there is a threat to the integrity of the person who partakes
in domestic service. Flora’s (1989) analysis of the representation of domestic workers in
fotonovelas reinforces the negative images associated with domestic service. Flora found
that although domestic service continues to be presented in fotonovelas as an option for
women, it is always depicted as a poor one, superior only to prostitution and begging (Chaney and Castro 1989:158).

**Domestic service wages**

Castro (1989: 115) reviews the complexities involved in evaluating wages paid to live-in domestic workers. Wage, “a capitalist instrument that regulates how labor power is bought and sold,” is linked to a number of economic indicators such as productivity, hours worked, the amount of goods required to feed the family, and the components necessary for the daily reproduction of the labor force (Castro 1989: 115). This, however, does not provide the means necessary to evaluate the wage of a live-in domestic worker. That is, the domestic worker’s productivity can not be measured by the relationship between the employee and the product, since the products prepared by a domestic worker materialize in her presence in the course of her daily routine (Castro 1989: 115).

Furthermore, the majority of literature concerning domestic service never fails to mention the long work hours suffered by domestic workers (e.g. Gill 1997, Smith 1989, Castro 1989). For instance, Castro reports that “in Bogotá in 1977 approximately 78 percent of the women engaged in live-in domestic service worked more than a fifty-six-hour week” (Castro 1989:115). However, it can be argued that since the workplace is the home of her employers, the domestic worker is always on call and the time when her labor is potentially available is actually work time (Castro 1989: 116).

Another factor affecting the calculation of a domestic worker’s wage is that a significant portion of it is in-kind wage in the form of shelter, food, clothing, medical supplies, and so forth. In spite of what they do receive, domestic workers frequently complain that they are unable to acquire any assets to safeguard themselves against job loss
Goldsmith (1989: 222) found that most live-in domestic workers in Mexico earn somewhat less than half the general minimum wage, thus supporting the notion that the domestic sector does not provide the opportunity for workers to save for future socioeconomic advancement.

**Employer-employee relations**

Every new domestic worker experiences a difficult period of adjustment during which they must learn to overcome intense feelings of loneliness and isolation (Gill 1997). They must adjust to extremely long hours, especially on holidays and other special occasions. More often than not, an employer will expect that their servant be on call all day and night. In addition to working long hours, Smith (1989) has found that domestic workers are frequently physically taken advantage of and treated badly.

Feelings of loneliness and isolation are reinforced by the employer-employee relationship. For instance, employers create social distance by the imposition of particular linguistic practices. Most household servants are referred to as “muchacha” or “chica,” (two terms meaning “girl”) regardless of the woman’s age. Such address terms are demeaning and carry the message that the worker is childlike and irresponsible (Gill 1997). Furthermore, domestic workers are usually addressed by their given name with the familiar Spanish *tu* but are expected to call their employers’ “señora” and use the formal *usted*.

This blatant sign of disrespect does not go unnoticed by domestic workers, as indicated by the findings of 1975 study by the Housewives Association of Trinidad and Tobago (HATT). HATT results show that live-in domestic workers frequently complained of improper and discourteous modes of address from their employers and their employers’ offspring (Mohammed 1989). Furthermore, Castro (1989) notes that “good treatment” is
valued more than any other factor by nonunionized domestic workers. Particularly for live-in
domestic workers, who spend most of their time in the workplace, a good employer-
employee relationship is of utmost importance.

Unfortunately, “good treatment” is rarely experienced by domestic workers. Instead,
aspects of domination present within the employer-employee relationship prove particularly
humiliating for the domestic worker. Goldsmith (1989:228) describes a few:

being required to use separate dishes and utensils, eat different foods, or serve the
employer breakfast in bed; being denied phone access or the right to receive friends
and family in the workplace; having to ask permission to leave the house for any
reason.

Without a doubt, such treatment reinforces the employee’s isolation and negative self-
esteeem. As a result, domestic workers usually do not have close friendships and their main
relationships are with relatives or members of the household in which they work (Goldsmith
1989: 228).

In general, live-in domestic workers are both dependent on and exploited by their
female employers. Domestic workers find themselves “obliged to negotiate tension-ridden
relationships with employers in the language of paternalism” (Gill 1997: 144). Frequently,
an employer will adopt a maternalistic attitude, referring to an employee as another daughter
(Goldsmith 1989: 226). This relationship, marked by power based on class and age, is
demystified when the employer demands work from her “daughter”. Goldsmith (1989: 226)
found that employers also commonly encourage their domestic servants to imitate them in
personal appearance by giving them hand-me-down clothing. However, when the worker
tries to mimic her employer on her own, by wearing nail polish for example, she becomes an
object of ridicule (Goldsmith 1989: 226).
In return for room and board, domestic servants are expected to be trustworthy, hard working, and obedient. Nevertheless, a strong element of distrust continues to exist between employers and their employees, the cause of which Mohammed (1989) declares to be class differences. This layer of distrust is especially significant when considered in light of the intimate context in which the domestic employee must work.

The inequalities that permeate the relationships between female employers and their domestic servants are of particular interest to feminist scholars, because it is the employers who perpetuate the subordinate status of their servants. Gill (1997:7) notes that many feminists in the United States are insulted by her analysis of exploitative mistress-servant relationships in Bolivia because they feel it “demonstrates uncomfortable parallels to their own experiences”. For women of affluent backgrounds who may have grown up with servants or at least encountered families with servants, it is difficult for them to identify their past experiences as oppressive. Gill (1997:7) notes that most of these women rush to defend their relationships with their servants and “entirely overlook the vast gulf created by race, class, and national origin that separates employers from servants”.

Like several other scholars (e.g. Bossen 1980; Rollins 1985), Gill (1997) seeks to understand how the general subordination of women can be discussed when some women, typically women of a “superior” class or ethnic group, hire others to carry out the domestic duties commonly associated with women. It is of interest to note, however, that the socioeconomic condition of the employer family is reflected in the employer-employee relationship, with upper-class families commonly maintaining a paternalistic attitude toward their employees and treating them more considerately than do employers of other socioeconomic strata (Castro 1989).
**Domestic work and the status of women**

Domestic labor has been almost universally assigned to women as their fundamental role, defining them as mistresses of the house. For the most part women have internalized the ideology of “service to others” as a natural condition of their social role (León 1989: 324). A woman’s work for her family, which is performed as a service without a wage, is not considered work. As a result, women who perform this “non-work” are socially devalued and placed in a subordinate position in society’s power relations (León 1989: 324).

Moreover, women who perform domestic labor for a wage are subject to the same social stigma as the women who perform domestic labor for their families. Although this argument is undeniably applicable to the situation of domestic workers in the United States where motherhood is clearly devalued, it does not directly translate into the Latin American situation.

For Latin Americans, it may be true that the services a woman performs for her family are not considered work per se, however the “non-work” of Latin American mothers is not devalued at the same level as it is in the United States. Latin American feminists argue that it is their role as mothers that empowers them both socially and politically. Contrary to United States feminists, Latin American feminists use prevailing gender stereotypes to gain access to and power within traditionally male-dominated arenas. Some may argue that by accepting that the marianismo-machismo behavior and attitude dichotomy provides a stable symbiosis in their culture, women can then manipulate the stereotypes for the benefit of their own gender (Stevens 1997:132). For instance, Latin American women manipulate their roles as women to gain access to the political arena and become involved in the issues associated
with gender such as health, social welfare, art, education, and children’s welfare (Nader 1986:388).

In light of the Latin American opinion of motherhood, one would still be hard pressed to argue that in Latin America women enjoyed equality with their male counterparts. Nader (1986:382-3), argues that due to the almost universal nation-state government which is “constructed on male-dominant lines, evidenced by the predominant participation of men, rather than women”, the male construct predominates, thereby supporting the thesis of the universal subordination of women. However, the means by which the male construct is manifested varies according to political philosophy, religious dogma, or economic ideology. Moreover, both United States and Latin American cultures have patriarchal origins, male dominant governments, and male dominant family structures, which institutionalize and culturally rationalize women’s subordination. The cultural perpetuation and rationalization of women’s subordination exposes them to conditions of dependency, powerlessness, deference, and poverty (Nader 1986:383).

In essence, although motherhood may be afforded more respect in Latin America than in the United States, Latin American women are not necessarily granted greater equality with their male counterparts. While motherhood may be somewhat more respected in Latin America, women still are subject to sexual subordination in the home, resulting from a strongly patriarchal society (Safa 1976:70). But elite women do benefit from certain privileges because of their class position, making their sexual subordination somewhat less visible. However, working class women do not enjoy the privileges of the elite class position and therefore carry a dual burden of sexual subordination in the home and class oppression outside of it (Safa 1976:70). Therefore, as members of the working class, the
status of domestic servants in Latin America can not be understood simply in terms of the social devaluation created by gender. In addition to the subordinate status that domestic workers occupy because they are women, they are further subject to class exploitation by employers of their own gender.

Duarte (1989: 199) postulates that the availability of domestic service “reaffirms *machismo* and patriarchy in the heart of the family”. According to Duarte (1989: 199), the reinforcement of patriarchy and the subordination of women derives from the fact that the “*pequeña-burguesa*” woman is in a position to employ a domestic worker. A new chain of hierarchical subordination is established in the family, with the *pequeña-burguesa* woman in the position of protagonist-executor in relation to the subordination of another woman (Duarte 1989: 199). Safa (1976:74) argues that “the domestic servant is one of the chief instruments by which elite women maintain their privileged status in capitalist society”. Duarte (1989:216) feels it is incumbent upon the feminist movement to challenge this particular form of servitude. Otherwise, domestic servants will continue to be placed in an extremely demeaning and dependent patron-client relationship by someone of their own gender, making it nearly impossible for them to develop any class consciousness or collective solidarity (Safa 1976:73).

Furthermore, the presence of a domestic worker discourages male involvement with household tasks. Rather than allowing for the redistribution of tasks within the family, regardless of age or gender, the middle-class woman simply transfers all the domestic responsibilities to the domestic servant, thereby reaffirming *machismo* and patriarchy within the family (Duarte 1989).
Occupational mobility

A number of scholars argue that domestic service provides one of the few opportunities available to lower-class women for upward socioeconomic mobility (e.g. Smith 1973; Gogna 1989). Others counter that it is a dead-end job that allows for little occupational change and proves incompatible with marriage and childbearing (e.g. Jelin 1977; Kuznesof 1989). Given the low-class migrant background of domestic workers, most studies revolve around a discussion of rural-to-urban migration (e.g. Hogman 1989; Shellekens and Van Der Schoot 1989; Jelin 1979; Smith 1973). Smith (1973) believes that domestic service plays a crucial role in the acculturation of lower class provincial women into the urban lower class. In Smith’s (1973: 196) study in Lima, Peru, she noted that after approximately a seven-year career in domestic service or around the age of twenty-four, most women leave the servant world to concentrate their efforts on a family of their own. Reportedly, many middle-aged former servants believe they and their children will be afforded a “better” life in the city than they would have had they remained in the countryside (Smith 1989).

A number of studies have shown (e.g. Jelin 1979, Gogna 1989, Smith 1973) that a typical servant’s career follows a distinct pattern in which the worker frequently changes jobs, each lasting approximately six months to two years, in order to obtain a better salary. The first jobs are often ones in which the servant earns a low salary and receives few or no fringe benefits beyond room and board. However, each job gets progressively better and Smith (1973) notes that towards the end of her career, a servant is likely to set her own salary and demand certain fringe benefits (e.g. permission to study, Social Security, gifts).
As previously mentioned, despite the lack of diversity in job opportunities available at the end of her career, most Latin American migrant women working in the domestic sector will drop out after an average of seven years to run their own household and raise their own children (Smith 1973). Support for this assertion is provided by a number of more recent studies. For instance, Gill (1997) notes that the majority of domestic workers in Bolivia do not view their work as a long term career and a number of Gogna’s (1989) interviewees left their positions as live-in domestics in order to get married. Furthermore, Smith’s 1989 follow-up study of domestic workers found that a number of women trade their position as a domestic worker in for one as a housewife. However, in the same report, Smith (1989) also found a number of ex-domestic servants working as street vendors.

Smith (1989) agrees with Bunster and Chaney (1985) that vending is essentially a lateral socioeconomic move. However, Smith (1989) points out that although their lives as vendors will continue to be economically precarious, their occupation is finally viewed positively. Vending is valued because it is self-employment and not domestic service (Smith 1989: 139).

Smith (1973: 176-7) identifies three factors characteristic of Lima servitude that facilitate upward mobility within the lower class. First, there is the pressure from a servant’s peers and relatives to strive for upward mobility. Second, the extent to which employers allow or encourage servants to better themselves clearly affects a servant’s current and future status. The final factor is that employment as a servant provides these women with a means of self-support while they may work toward goals they were unable to pursue while unemployed and living in a rural community.
As Smith (1989) appropriately notes, the extent to which employers encourage their employees to improve their position has direct bearing on whether or not domestic service will be used as a step towards upward mobility. For instance, when one considers the training programs available to domestic workers and the fact that the overwhelming majority of employers encourage involvement in the aforementioned lay-religious training centers, it becomes apparent that employers have an interest in curbing the socioeconomic advancement of their employees. These centers promote a conservative work ethic and a sex/gender ideology patterned on traditional models. In contrast, the domestic service unions, such as the Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores del Servicio Doméstico or SINTRASEDOM (National Union of Household Workers) of Colombia, run training programs that promote occupational mobility (Castro 1989: 113). However, employers heavily discourage involvement in domestic workers’ unions. This is so because SINTRASEDOM and other similar unions are committed to imparting basic formal education and knowledge of labor legislation pertaining to work-related demands (Castro 1989: 113). Such objectives work against employer interests by placing the bargaining power in the hands of the employee (Castro 1989: 113).

**Domestic workers’ unions**

Domestic workers face a series of problems. Most notably, domestic workers want the right to an education in order to improve their lot, but they are unable to get one because they do not have any rights. In essence, a domestic worker belongs to the family she works for. Because domestic service workers are an extremely fragmented sector of poor urban women, they need organizations that will extend their perspective beyond individual
participation to stimulate collective action and reflection concerning their rights as workers and women (Prates 1989).

Chaney and Castro (1989) recognize that there is a search for a class identity among domestic workers. Domestic workers have been fighting for the recognition that they are workers, not "maids". They want their work to be respected and they want the treatment between employer and employee that characterizes labor relations among all other wage earners. Specifically, domestic servants are fighting for an adequate salary, the right to organize, a regulated workday, social security, and the same fringe benefits provided to all other members of the paid work force. Unions and domestic workers' organizations, such as Guatemala's CENTRACAP, are forming throughout Latin America in an effort to legally secure equality for the domestic sector.

The first domestic workers' unions were founded in the early 1970s with the short-term goal of improving legislation to obtain equal rights with other workers (Schellekens and Van Der Schoot 1989). Throughout the history of domestic workers' unions religious institutions have played an integral part by offering training courses and providing assistance services (Schellekens and Van Der Schoot 1989). Notably, in almost every Latin American country, domestic workers began to organize under the Juventud Obrera Católica or JOC (Young Catholic Workers), the previously-radical Catholic youth movement with origins in Belgium (Chaney and Castro 1989). Since then, both militant Catholic and leftist groups have worked to unite domestic workers. Chaney and Castro (1989) point out how unique the orientation of domestic workers' unions is. They are "at once the place for political education, the front line of the struggle for working-class rights, and the locus of the
domestics' own battle for legal recognition and rights as workers” (Chaney and Castro 1989:10).

Gálvez and Todaro (1989) report an increase in self-esteem for domestic workers who actively participate in labor unions. An increase in self-esteem frequently causes domestic workers to be less submissive and more knowledgeable about their labor rights (Gálvez and Todaro 1989: 318). Comments from Gálvez and Todaro’s (1989:316) informants demonstrate the preference employers have for their workers to limit contact with members of labor unions:

She says to me “I do not know who you are running around with that you return so argumentative”. If I told them that I went to a labor union meeting, they would instantly fire me.

Thus, from the employer’s viewpoint, their dislike of labor union activity is justifiable because employees can develop unwanted characteristics such as independence (Gálvez and Todaro 1989: 318).

De Oliveira and Da Conceição (1989: 367) report that it is difficult to get domestic workers to bring their complaints to trial because they fear that they will be fired. Unfortunately, such is the reality. De Oliveira and Da Conceição (1989: 367) write of a woman who was fired for attending the Domestic Workers’ National Convention in Porto Alegre and was still out of a job at the time of their publication because nobody wanted to hire a woman involved in union activity.

Despite the many drawbacks, domestic workers still struggle to organize throughout Latin America. In her autobiography, Uriarte (1989) describes her union work in Peru and the slow but steady increase in numbers of involved domestic workers. In 1975, there was a meeting of household workers in which seven hundred workers participated, a much greater
turnout then Uriarte (1989: 403) had expected. By 1976, the first meeting of household workers at a national level occurred and the National Union Committee of Household Workers was formed. In 1979, the first National Congress of Household Workers successfully met in Lima and their platform was improved (Uriarte 1989:404). Despite the success some unions have had, the number of unionized domestic workers is not a fair representation of the amount of domestic workers in Latin America. Furthermore, the union organizations are still in their formative years and working on creating objectives and formulating plans to achieve their goals and expand the knowledge of domestic workers’ rights.

Mohammed (1989:168) pinpoints four major areas that she believes need immediate acknowledgement by domestic workers’ organizations. The first area addresses the attitudes held by society that domestic servants are less deserving of respect than other workers because what they do is “non-work”. Mohammed (1989) recommends that a change in attitude can be achieved by greater employer consideration to household servants with regard to overtime, living accommodations, and the like. Mohammed’s (1989) suggestion of greater employer consideration will not only help to redefine domestic labor but will also work at changing the employer-employee relationship. Gálvez and Todaro (1989:318) argue that the servile characteristics of domestic labor can be minimized and the work condition improved by:

the establishment of normal working hours with absolute respect of free time and how that time is spent; a clear definition of the tasks that are expected of the worker so that she is not always on call simply to serve and attend in general; a distinction between work activities and personal activities, including the right to use freely the facilities allotted to her and the freedom to relate to others: friends, boyfriends, organizations.
Like Mohammed (1989), Gálvez and Todaro (1989) believe that these norms can only be instituted through massive and concerted action by workers and coordinated by their organizations. Domestic service unions such as SINTRASEDOM argue that “the ‘natural’ contradictions between employer and employee cannot be resolved at the level of personal relations but must be defined at an institutional level, as a class conflict, and with the participation of the state” (Castro 1989:106).

Setting a minimum wage is the second item that Mohammed (1989) argues needs direct attention by domestic workers’ unions. Mohammed (1989: 168) reminds us of the importance of setting a minimum wage with the mindset that domestic workers also have families to support and must survive under the same cost-of-living conditions as the employer class. Many domestic workers’ unions are currently working to secure a fixed minimum cash wage and demanding that in-kind salary not be factored into this calculation (Castro 1989: 116). The problem lies in the fact that the state does not provide for the basic needs of the domestic worker (i.e. food, laundry, or recreation services) (Castro 1989:116). The private sector (i.e. the employer) satisfies these needs for the worker but at a much higher price. Thus, the domestic workers wage is calculated to include basic amenities at an exorbitant price.

The next area Mohammed (1989) focuses on is related to the lack of public provisions for basic needs. Specifically, Mohammed (1989:168) notes that support services for domestic workers are nonexistent. Furthermore, while domestic workers are employed to care for other people’s children, they must make alternative arrangements for the care of their own children. Mohammed (1989: 68) suggests that domestic workers’ unions fight for the provision of inexpensive day care or nursery facilities.
In her concluding remarks, Mohammed (1989) makes a point few would squabble with. That is, Mohammed (1989: 168) argues that for domestic workers’ organizations to be successful, women of the working class must head them. This is essential because women of the working class can best articulate the grievances of domestic workers and propose solutions that adhere to their interests. Unfortunately, even when working class women are organizers of such organizations, they frequently work within a hierarchy headed by middle and upper class ladinos of both genders.

Summary

Because rural-urban migration rates for females are generally quite high in Latin America, there continues to exist a large unskilled female labor force in Latin American cities. When white-collar female employment began to expand in Latin America beginning in the 1940s, the market for domestic servants enlarged (Kuznesof 1989: 29). By hiring domestic servants, upper and middle class women were able to go to work without threatening the traditional organization of the household. Employers frequently use lay-religious training centers to encourage the subordination of their domestic employees because these centers promote a conservative work ethic and sex/gender ideology patterned on traditional models (Castro 1989: 112).

From the outset, the domestic worker begins a process of “internalizing inferiority”. In addition to the oppression the female domestic worker suffers as a woman, she is further subject to class exploitation. A layer of inferiority is added to that which already exists as a result of her gender. Perhaps the domestic worker’s status is further weakened because the female employer seeks to discredit any foreseeable similarities between herself and her employee (e.g. shared female status). Using a number of tactics, ranging from linguistic
expressions to monitoring how the employee utilizes her free time, the employer reinforces subordination and isolation. Because the majority of domestic workers are poor women with minimal education, the employer faces little difficulty transmitting the message that the worker is of lesser social status. The domestic worker is secluded from news about society at large and is often clueless about her own labor rights. Underpaid and overworked, the domestic worker is unable to acquire any assets for socioeconomic advancement. However, life as a domestic worker is short-lived as the average worker retires from the occupation after seven years or around the age of twenty-four (Smith 1973: 196).

A number of scholars have found that while in the domestic sector, a typical servant’s career does follow a distinct pattern. Often with each new job the servant earns more money, enjoys the employers and the tasks more, and begins to receive benefits to which she had essentially always been entitled (e.g. permission to study, getting social security benefits) (Smith 1973; Jelin 1979; Gogna 1989). The majority of women who leave the occupation do so to get married and manage their own household. Others make a lateral socioeconomic move and become street vendors, a job that appears to be more compatible with marriage and childbearing than does domestic service.

As we have seen, domestic workers as a whole suffer from the stigma society has attached to the work. Their situation is further exasperated by the fact that most employers do not want to hire women who are knowledgeable about their labor rights. Domestic workers are struggling to organize and fight for an adequate salary, a regulated workday, and the same fringe benefits provided to all other members of the paid work force. They are fighting to change society’s perception of domestic work and are working to change the
employer-employee relationship to one that characterizes labor relations among all other wage earners.
CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

Research setting

Research for this study was conducted in Guatemala over an eight-week period, from May 30 to July 30, 1998. Data collection procedures included a variety of anthropological techniques such as participant observation, informal conversation, structured interviewing, and a survey of the appropriate literature. I lived as a participant observer in two households that employed female domestic workers. Living with both domestic workers and their employers provided for an invaluable advantage to the interpretation of structured interview responses. I also engaged in participant observation each time that I visited Casa Maria or CENTRACAP. My time in these organizations was largely devoted to listening to and observing group activities, organizational meetings, lectures, and friendly conversations. In addition to engaging in participant observation and interviews, I spent time in Casa Maria and CENTRACAP reviewing unpublished materials relating to the domestic sector. Both organizations made written documents that pertained to the history of domestic workers' organizations and the social and legal problems they have been targeting available to me for review whenever I visited.

Living with domestic workers

While in Guatemala City I stayed with the family of a Guatemalan friend I met in Ames, Iowa. My host family resides on the outskirts of the city in Zone 11. A few weeks prior to my visit, the domestic worker who was employed in their home for nearly eight years left to get married. The family did not hire a new live-in domestic worker until the day before my departure. In the interim, the mother of the house assumed most household
responsibilities, however she did hire a day worker to visit weekly and wash clothing. Although I was unable to observe the family's interaction with live-in domestic help in Guatemala City, I did visit their finca (i.e. family farm), where they do employ a full-time domestic worker. Occasionally I was able to observe employer-employee relations in this context, but most interestingly, I was afforded an opportunity to interview this woman and compare her responses to those of domestic workers in Guatemala City.

My two-week stay in Quetzaltenango was by far the best opportunity I had to observe employer-employee relationships. As a student in a Spanish language immersion school, I lived and ate meals with a family of four who employed a fifteen-year-old live-in domestic worker. This experience afforded me invaluable data and insight into the daily life of a domestic worker. Observations from this household are often called upon to support or make sense of the data collected through the structured interviews.

Introducing Casa María

In an attempt to disassociate myself with employers of domestic workers, I chose to conduct the majority of my interviews in a safehouse for domestic workers. Through a process of referrals, I was introduced to the organizers of Casa María and a school for domestic workers, both of which are sponsored by San Cayetano, the local Catholic Church. This was the setting for the majority of my interviews.

Casa María is a remarkably hospitable institution located in the midst of a residential neighborhood in Zone 7 of Guatemala City. In addition to the large letters, "B-I-E-N-V-E-N-I-D-O-S" (welcome), that drape the wall opposite the entrance, Casa María is filled with items creating a comfortable atmosphere and a sense of belonging. Whether it is the live-in volunteer organizer from San Cayetano, a temporary resident of the house, or a group of
women and children chatting, someone is always around to greet and converse with newcomers. Casa Maria is an organization that strives to overcome class, ethnic, and occupational discrimination. Their motto: "Somos personas y tenemos derecho a vivir dignamente" (We are people and have the right to live with dignity), sums up the organization's primary goal - to empower domestic workers via education so that they no longer suffer from class, gender, or ethnic exploitation.

Because Casa Maria was so agreeable and accessible, it became the center of my research. I visited the house every Saturday and Sunday, and occasionally on weekdays, for observation and interviews. Classes and activities were scheduled on Saturdays and Sundays, respectively, and domestic workers flowed through Casa María's doors all weekend long. It was here that most formal interviews took place, for Casa Maria was one of the few locations where domestic workers' could come together and socialize under the same roof.

In addition to serving as the primary center for interviewing and meeting prospective informants, Casa María's lectures and activities were the only opportunities for me to participate in group activities with domestic workers. Each Sunday offered a different occasion for participant observation. Over the course of my stay, I listened to lectures and participated in small-group discussions about dating and relationships, the importance of an education, and human rights. I also engaged in activities of a more relaxed state such as watching movies, taking a day trip to a water park, or simply drinking coffee and chatting. Casa Maria's doors were wide open to me and complemented my preliminary research design with a completely new perspective. Whereas originally I anticipated formulating an understanding of domestic workers as a group by piecing together data from a variety of
individual interviews, now I could complement individual interviews with observations of
domestic workers in a cohesive group.

**Introducing CENTRACAP**

El Centro de Apoyo Para las Trabajadoras de Casa Particular (CENTRACAP) is the only secular domestic workers’ organization in Guatemala City. It is run by mostly middle to upper class ladinos and management lacks adequate representation by actual domestic workers. Because CENTRACAP is focused on the formulation of new legislation for domestic workers, it cannot devote significant amounts of time to small-scale programs and activities for employed domestic workers. Events such as lectures, self-esteem workshops, and counseling are left to the other four church sponsored organizations such as Casa Maria.

Personnel at CENTRACAP allowed me access to the data they collected from a pilot study of domestic employees in Guatemala City. They also made available data concerning the legal status of domestic workers and the history of domestic workers’ organizations. Moreover, I had the opportunity to participate in their meetings with representatives from the other four domestic workers’ organizations in the capital. During these meetings they discussed plans to lobby congress in hopes to pass legislation that would entitle domestic workers to the same rights as all other workers.

**Sampling methods and interview procedures**

I spoke both informally and by utilizing structured interviews with a variety of females connected to the domestic service sector. Informants included current workers, past workers, employers, and organizers of and participants in domestic workers’ organizations. Interviews with twenty domestic workers were conducted following a ten page structured interview schedule, formulated on the basis of a preliminary literature review and later
adjusted to include questions specifically relating to Casa María, as well as the more general questions concerning similar organizations. The initial interview schedule covered biographic information, educational history and goals, work experiences, personal and professional relationships, past and present aspirations, and knowledge of and participation in domestic workers’ organizations. Although the schedule did include both closed and open-ended questions, an effort was made to minimize formality and closed response questions to encourage the interviewees to speak openly and at length. Additional information was collected through informal conversation with other domestic workers.

Informants were acquired through a system of referrals. A relative of my host family put me in contact with a member of the San Cayetano’s congregation. San Cayetano is the church that sponsors both Casa María and a school for domestic workers. The members of the congregation then introduced me to the program organizers and volunteers for both the school and Casa María. I explained my research interests to all of the organizers and most of them were anxious to assist me in finding informants. My first interviewee was a domestic worker who was referred to me by the organizer of San Cayetano’s school for domestic workers. Generally, interviews occurred at Casa María, although the very first interview was in an even more informal environment – at a water park during a trip sponsored by San Cayetano. I was lucky to have Clara as my first informant. She was one of the most outgoing and genuinely helpful women in the sample. Our interview lasted well over two hours, as she wanted to be sure to thoughtfully answer all of my questions. After the formal interview came to an end, Clara invited me to stick by her for the rest of the day so that she

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3 To protect the privacy of the informants, all names have been replaced with pseudonyms.
could introduce me to the other women in San Cayetano’s programs. Although I did not conduct any more formal interviews that day, Clara’s acceptance of me facilitated future interviews with some of the women I met that day.

As previously noted, interviews typically occurred in Casa María. Because Casa Maria offers activities and classes at various times over the weekend days, the number of women in the house fluctuates. And often when women are inside Casa Maria, they are engaged in some form of activity. Thus the first step in the sampling strategy at Casa Maria was one of convenience. In other words, interviews were with any unoccupied woman who was willing to participate. Often I would arrive a couple hours before classes began and talk with whoever arrived early. The only criteria for informant selection was that the person was female and had at some point in her life worked as a domestic servant.

To show appreciation for the help of my informants at Casa María, each week I brought beverages, cookies, cakes, and other snacks for all of the domestic workers. This method of compensation went over fairly well since because Sundays are days off, most domestic workers are expected to eat outside of their employer’s home.

Second, judgment or purposive sampling was used to acquire informants. With judgment sampling, it is not necessary to determine specifically who will be studied prior to entering the field, since the process of obtaining informants is a system of referral (Bernard 1994: 95). According to Bernard (1994: 95), judgment sampling is particularly suited to anthropological inquiry, as you “learn in the field, as you go along, to select the units of analysis (people, court records, whatever) that will provide the information you need”.

Initially I had not intended to collect much information about domestic workers’ organizations in Guatemala City. My preliminary interview did include questions concerning
a worker’s knowledge of their rights, their involvement in organizations, and their opinion of what should be the central focus of such organizations, but I had not intended to thoroughly research the history of Guatemalan domestic workers’ organizations, their social and legal struggles, and the opportunities they offer domestic workers. However, because the interview location I conveniently settled upon (i.e. an organization for domestic workers) promoted discussions with women who ran and/or participated in such programs, I adjusted my research direction to include a deeper exploration of this topic. Moreover, the use of judgment sampling, a strategy that does not limit the scope of research, provided me with the opportunity to meet and speak with a variety of people, representing notably different classes, who are involved in the social and legal struggles of Guatemalan domestic workers.

The interviews were conducted in Spanish. Because this was my first experience communicating full-time in a second language, an interpreter was present for the first half of the interviews and proximal for the remaining. The interpreter’s role progressively minimized until it became obsolete. The duration of an interview lasted anywhere from thirty minutes to two and a half hours with the average lasting approximately forty minutes. In addition to informant personality, interview lengths were affected by my command of the Spanish language. Therefore, interviews after the first three weeks of my stay usually did not surpass the average forty minutes.

Two-thirds of the informants spoke Spanish as their second language. Because most of the women had been living and working in the capital for a number of years, their Spanish far surpassed mine and communication of meaning was rarely a problem. However, on a couple occasions I spoke with recent migrants who were only just beginning to learn
Spanish. Although these women would assure me that they understood my questions, their responses reflected otherwise and these discussions would often end quickly.

Additional information on the domestic sector was gathered through informal conversations with women who work as domestics outside of Guatemala City (i.e. in Quetzaltenango and Santa Rosa), female employers of domestic workers both inside and out of the city, and women who are involved in domestic workers’ organizations. In general, this supplemental information was contained in casual conversation, although some discussions with organizers of institutions were in the form of a semi-structured, yet informal interview. As with the structured interviews, I relied on circumstance to produce interesting informants. Informal and unstructured discussions lasted anywhere from five minutes to two hours, and were always at the informants’ leisure.

At the completion of each interview or at the end of a day of discussions with women related to the domestic service sector, field notes were recorded. These went beyond the interview schedule to include topics such as interview location, presence of additional people (e.g. interpreter or interviewee’s friend), clarification of answers, interpersonal interactions, and personal reflection on the interview.

Responses obtained from the interview schedule were coded and entered into SPSS for analysis. Due to the small sample size and the level of data obtained (nominal and ordinal), analysis was limited to descriptive statistics (frequencies and cross-tabulations).

Sample description

The twenty women formally interviewed range from 16 to 45 years of age, with a mean age of 24 years. The vast majority of these women (90%) are unmarried, although one-fifth are mothers. The average education for this group of women is five and a half years,
with the education level ranging from no formal education to twelve years of schooling. Three-quarters of the women are currently enrolled in classes and of the women not currently in school, only one does not desire to return.

Two-thirds are of Mayan descent, but all speak Spanish as either their native or second language. All are migrants to Guatemala City, with the longest resident having arrived in 1968 and the most recent coming in 1996. The average respondent has been living in the capital nearly ten years, generally arriving just shy of her fifteenth birthday. More than three-quarters moved to the capital to find work. The average woman has worked as a domestic for six and a half years. Most of the women interviewed have worked in at least two different houses. They receive wages ranging from Q300 to Q1000 per month, with an average monthly income of Q550 (or approximately $88 US).

In sum, the typical female Guatemalan domestic servant interviewed for this study is a twenty-four year old unmarried women with a fifth grade education. She has moved to the capital in search of work and has since been employed in the domestic sector for six and a half years. Because Spanish is the preferred language of her ladino employers, she has learned the language and uses it to communicate in the capital, saving her indigenous language for visits with friends and relatives. She has left the job she first procured upon moving to the city and is now making Q550 a month at her present occupation.

Having provided a general description of the women in this sample, it is now appropriate to shift gears and focus on the variables of relevance in this study. To adequately

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4 At the time the research was conducted the exchange rate was approximately 6.25 quetzales to the dollar. This rate of exchange will be consistently applied throughout this report.
describe the relationship between the worldview and the aspirations of the women in this sample, the variables that interact to form a domestic worker’s worldview are given principal attention. Thus, the following chapter details the data that factor into the creation of a domestic worker’s worldview.
CHAPTER 4. DATA PRESENTATION

This chapter discusses the worldview of domestic workers in Guatemala City and how it relates to and affects their aspirations. In order to dissect the relationship between worldview and aspirations, the variables that interact and combine to form a domestic worker’s worldview first must be assessed. These variables include: length of time employed as a domestic, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, education, job satisfaction, belief in social and occupational mobility, participation in domestic workers’ organizations, and belief that such organizations are capable of effecting change. Because each variable is involved in a web of relations with the others, a discussion of one variable often makes reference to one or more other. Due to time constraints, some questions were not asked during an interview thus causing the total number of responses to vary with each question.

Prior to a discussion of worldview or even of the factors that comprise them, it is necessary to contextualize the lives of the individuals of concern. Therefore, a portrayal of the women’s lives prior to their entrance into the domestic sector is essential for an accurate depiction of their current situation and worldview.

Childhood and family life

Every woman in this study was born in a village outside of Guatemala City. The domestic worker’s nuclear family is relatively large, with Mayan women having an average of seven siblings and ladino women an average of five. Except for two women who lost a parent at an early age, all women grew up in two-parent households. Regardless of paid employment prior to marriage, the majority (two-thirds of eighteen responses) of the women’s mothers’ current occupation is *ama de la casa* (i.e. mistress of the house). When
another occupation was reported for a woman’s mother, it was always mentioned in addition to her household responsibilities. In these cases, the mother supplements the family income by working as a clothing or food vendor. The domestic worker’s father, therefore, is recognized as the primary provider for the family. Nearly all of the women’s fathers supported their families through agricultural labor. Only one worked outside of agriculture, and this man is a former mail carrier who sells paintings in Guatemala City.

A woman’s family and their financial security is the principal concern of domestic workers. Not only does it head their list of values, but it can be found as a hidden factor influencing most of a domestic worker’s life decisions. A third of the women answered the questions “What do you value most in your life?” with “my family”\(^5\). An additional ten percent noted that their family and their education are both equally valued and slightly more reported that education was what they valued above all else. Based on follow-up questions and responses, it appears as though women value education principally because they believe it is the only barrier between their current socioeconomic situation and a financially secure position for themselves and their families. It can be assumed, therefore, that by reporting education as their principal value, these women are actually declaring that they have their family’s future in mind.

\(^5\) “My family” typically referred to the members of a woman’s nuclear family in her natal village. When a woman had a husband and children of her own, she mentioned them first, followed by her parents and siblings.
Choosing domestic work

What makes a woman decide to move from their family's village in the countryside to the capital where they will live and work in a stranger's house? Most often it is not a choice, but a necessary decision. Born into exceptionally large farming families, women felt they were left with little option. Once they were old enough and physically capable of contributing labor, they did. Older male siblings usually took on agricultural duties on their parents' land or at least nearby. Younger siblings were able to assist their mothers with any additional household chores thus leaving older females without any local work. As a result, females of working age typically left home in search of work. With little to no formal education or job skills, domestic work was one of the few occupations open to them.

Entering Guatemala City's domestic sector

The average woman moved to Guatemala City when she was fifteen years old. Eighty percent of the women moved from their natal villages to the capital in search of work. The other twenty percent came as children, all ten years or younger, when their parents moved the family to the capital in search of work.

Most women took their first job as domestics when they were between the ages of fifteen and sixteen, but some started working as young as eight and ten. The women who entered the domestic sector at this young of an age were more or less forced into it. One woman's grandfather kidnapped her when she was eight years old. He left her with an older woman in Guatemala City, stating that he would return for her in a few days. A few days turned into six years. By that time she was working as a full time domestic servant and caregiver for the aging woman. She remained with the woman until she was sixteen, but never received any money for her years of labor.
Another woman who entered the domestic sector at a very young age claims her negative childhood experience led her to the occupation. When Christina was nine years old, her older female cousins kidnapped her and sold her into marriage. After her father found her and brought her back, he began to keep her locked in their home to avoid another incident. Eventually, Christina's parents began to look for a place to send her because "they wanted to get rid of her". When the decision was made to send her to a distant relative's home in Quetzaltenango, Christina took off for Guatemala City where she found refuge among members of the Catholic Church San Benito. San Benito ran a placement agency for domestic workers and eventually secured a position for her.

Many women used placement agencies to find their first jobs as domestics. Other women were recruited by their relative's employers. In these instances, landholders would look for female relatives of the *campesinos*\(^6\) employed on their land. Relying on personal channels such as this ensures a level of trust between employer and employee. Employers of domestic workers tend to distrust their employees and often make reference to past employees' thievery. My host family informed me that past problems with untrustworthy employees caused them to only employ women who have lived and/or worked on their finca.

Although the circumstances through which these women entered the domestic sector seem extraordinary, conversations with other workers demonstrate that forced entrance into the field is not uncommon. Even when a woman's home life is not so seemingly drastic, if she wants to survive and secure an education, she has little choice but to leave home in

\(^6\) A *campesino(a)* is an agricultural laborer who either works their own land or someone else's.
search of work. As we have seen, domestic labor is one of the very few opportunities open to young unskilled laborers.

Most women never worked as a paid laborer prior to securing their first job in the domestic sector. A number of women reported that they assisted their family members with household tasks or agricultural duties during their childhood. However, none were financially compensated for the labor they provided their families. Only two women were employed in the formal sector prior to switching to domestic work. Their previous occupations – campensina or as a maquiladora – were on a more or less lateral socioeconomic level with domestic work. Such occupations are considered lateral in the sense that the costs and benefits of any one job do not outweigh another. For instance, although a campensina may not receive as much pay as a domestic worker and be subject to discrimination or harassment by their employer, the occupation is covered by Guatemalan labor codes thus securing a minimum wage, established workday, and entitling workers to Social Security and other benefits. Moreover, despite the fact that factory workers are entitled to certain benefits, most importantly Social Security, studies of female factory workers in Latin America (e.g. Levenson-Estrada 1997 and Lobato 1997) demonstrate that such benefits do not necessarily lessen the costs of the occupation. Specifically, in Levenson-Estrada’s (1997) study of Guatemalan factory workers, she reports that women frequently suffer from low pay, 12 hour or longer workdays, unacceptable intense pace of work, unclean and unsafe working conditions, and verbal and/or physical abuse from supervisors. Thus, with each occupation (i.e. campensina, maquiladora, or domestic worker)

7 A maquiladora is a factory (i.e. maquila) worker.
comes a number of downfalls and in no one do the few benefits of engaging in the work outweigh the costs.

**Domestic work: The occupation**

Arguably, live-in domestic servants work more hours per week than nearly anyone else. Women work anywhere between fifty-nine and ninety-eight hours a week, averaging seventy-nine hours per week. During the week, the women work approximately thirteen hours every day. While Saturdays are considered “half-days”, the average woman works ten hours every Saturday. Sundays, however, are fairly consistently days off and only twenty percent of the women reported ever having worked on a Sunday. Of those who do work on Sundays, none of them work more than four hours. All who were required to work full shifts on Sundays have since quit the domestic sector.

**Work duties**

When asked to describe their work duties, most responded by listing nearly every household activity. Generally, a domestic worker’s tasks included house cleaning, washing and ironing clothing, caring for the employer’s children, cooking, and running errands. In many cases women were not solely responsible for cooking, as many female employers preferred to cook for their own families. However, not all domestic workers were this lucky.

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8 This is interesting because nearly all women responded to the question “How long do you work on Saturdays?” with “I only have to work a half-day”. Had I not followed the question with another asking how many hours are in a half-day, I would have assumed they meant approximately six or seven hours (half of a weekday shift).
While attending a Spanish language immersion school in Quetzaltenango, I had the opportunity to observe the work habits of a live-in domestic worker. When I arrived in the city for the first time, a student who also resided at my host’s house met me at the school to escort me to my new home. As we walked she offered her impressions of the family members as well as of Petrona, their fifteen-year-old domestic servant. The student described each of the family members and then stated, “And then there’s Petrona, their slave girl who sleeps on a mat on the kitchen floor”. Of course I interpreted this as a Westerner’s over-dramatization of an unfamiliar Latin American phenomenon. Surely my hosts did not mistreat their employee to the extent that she did not even have a room or bed of her own. As it turned out, Petrona does sleep on the kitchen floor and does work incredibly long and hard hours. Petrona is awake and already working by five each morning and literally does not rest until the entire family has retired for the evening – and this usually is not until nearly midnight. Petrona spends all day on her feet cleaning, cooking, or chasing after the two children of the house. Even during meals, Petrona stands in the kitchen quickly eating her food while at the same time cleaning up the dishes.

Despite Petrona’s heavy workload and spartan living conditions, she does like her job. It will become apparent that a number of factors influence a domestic worker’s decision to stay with a particular family. In Petrona’s case, she loves her employer’s children so dearly that her employer’s expectations seem reasonable and the work worthwhile. Petrona also has aging parents back in her natal village and her employer’s permit her to return to them for bi-monthly weekend visits. The number of vacation days Petrona is afforded is incomparable with other domestic situations.
Finally, although it is true that Petrona did not have a room or bed throughout my stay, she does not sleep on the kitchen floor year round. Her employer’s supplement the family income by housing students. During the rush season, they move their children into the master bedroom and move Petrona into the kitchen, thus freeing three rooms for students. Although it is a difficult situation for an outsider to understand, it is apparently a condition upon which employer and employee have agreed.

Salary

The women’s salaries range from Q300 to Q1000 per month, with an average monthly salary of Q550. When asked to assess fairness of salary, the sample split in half. The fifty percent of women who do believe their salary is fair think so for individualistic reasons. Some women have just entered the domestic sector and as it is their first job, they do not expect much more. Others believe the money they receive is more than sufficient because their employers ask for very little work in return, thus granting them an excessive amount of free time. Still others have employers who pay a comparatively high salary and these women know and appreciate it.

The women who do not believe that their salaries are fair all express that they do not have enough money to satisfy their most basic needs. Women frequently complained that they could not afford to pay for an education, send money to their families, or even purchase essential personal items. Many of these women also expressed that the pay they receive does not even come close to compensating them for the long hours they suffer. Although a number of women are displeased with the amount of money they make, many stated that they would stay with their present employers despite their low salary. Women who remain in
low-paying jobs claim they remain because good employers are hard to find and their current employers treat them fairly well.

In general, the domestic worker's salary does increase every six months to one year or with the addition of a new task. A quarter of the women currently employed as domestic servants (i.e. four of sixteen women) have received a raise from their current employer, and seventy-five percent of the women expect a raise sometime in the future. The women are often informed about future pay increases at the time of hire and therefore know when to expect it. Others, however, report that they have never been given a raise and do not expect that they ever will. Even after eight years with one family, Julia reports that she is still making the same amount of money. She will never complain because she is pleased to work for a family that permits her four-year-old son to live with them.

**Benefits**

Because domestic workers are not legally entitled to social security benefits, it is not surprising that none of the women's employers provide them. Vacation days, sick days, and occasional medical assistance are often the only employer benefits afforded to the women. However, stipulations about domestic workers are extremely vague in the Guatemalan labor code and many employers can get away with denying their employees any time off. Many domestic workers do not know their labor rights and remain easy targets for exploitation.

Three-quarters of the women do receive paid vacation days of some form. Guatemalan labor code requires employers to provide eight days paid vacation per year and seventy-five percent of employers comply with this. Interestingly, fifty-five percent of employers who do allot vacation time also provide an additional seven days of paid vacation each year. The remaining five percent of the women who receive vacation time are given a
cash bonus instead of days off. Of the remaining twenty percent of women, half stated that they are not provided with any time off and the other half simply did not know, as they had not yet been offered opportunities for time off.

In the case of illness, most women received some form of assistance from their employers. Three-quarters of the women were given the day off whenever they had been ill and half of them were even given medication by their employers. Half of the remaining women were forced to work despite illness and the other half had not been ill while working under their current employers and did not know how they would react. When asked if their employer would pay for emergency or hospitalization costs that resulted from an illness or accident in the workplace, a third of the women said yes, one third said no, and the remaining one third were unsure of their employer’s response.

Job satisfaction

It is difficult to assess whether or not the women in this sample actually enjoy domestic service. Half of the women reported that they like their job, a quarter said they did not at first but eventually learned to, and the final quarter strongly dislikes it. It is probably more accurate to interpret a positive response to the question, “Do you like your job?” as a sign of temporary job satisfaction. Women who express job satisfaction claim it is because they have good relations with their employers and have the opportunity for self-improvement. A few women claim satisfaction in the domestic sector when they compare it to previous work on a finca or in a maquila. In general, it appears as though women find satisfaction with their occupations because they view the work as a temporary position. Support for this claim is latent in the fact that all but one of the women who report job satisfaction are currently in school.
Other women, however, claim job satisfaction despite the fact that they do not foresee a future career change. I interviewed two women who I met through my host family, both of whom worked for a friend or relative. These women are not in school nor intend to pursue higher education. They envision their future to be no different than the present. They assume they will remain in their present occupation but are hesitant to speculate about the future. The women claim to be satisfied with their occupation and report good relations with their employers. However, despite their verbal affirmations about their occupation and employers, both women hinted at feeling trapped in a life without options. One woman even stated that although she did not believe her salary was fair, she knew she had nowhere else to go for not many employers will take in a woman and her child. The other woman’s overwhelming desire to avoid trouble with her employer made it difficult to assess whether or not she actually enjoys her job.

This woman, Ana Corita, was introduced to me by her employer, who was also one of my hosts. Ana Corita manages her employer’s home and some of his animals on his finca. She grew up on the finca, but has since lost most of her family. Ana Corita, now 57 years old, has worked on this land for her entire life, first as a campesina and for the last twelve years as a domestic worker. She told me that she never leaves the land because she “has nowhere to go and doesn’t know anyone.” Clearly, whether she likes it or not, the finca is her home and she does not want to say or do anything that might take it away from her. As a result, Ana Corita was noticeably nervous throughout our interview, avoiding eye contact, and asking repeatedly if it was truly okay with her employer for us to be chatting. She made numerous references to her employer, always praising him and the job he gave her. At the end of the interview she asked for my forgiveness, explaining that she has not spoken to
anyone in a really long time and hoped she answered my questions properly. Obviously there is no way of knowing for sure how satisfied Ana Corita is with her job. What is apparent, however, is that she does not want to lose her job and to ensure that she does not, Ana Corita avoids making any negative comments that could potentially get back to her employer.

The women who are displeased with their occupation cite discrimination and poor treatment as the key reasons for their unhappiness. Moreover, nearly all of the women who stated that they did not like the occupation at first but eventually learned to said they only began to like domestic work when they found a "good family" to work for. It is apparent that the primary factor in determining job satisfaction is the employer-employee relationship. Almost all of the women currently employed as domestic workers claim that they like their job and half of them cited good employers as their reason. Respectful and fair employers are highly valued and discussions with the domestic workers revealed that unfortunately such employers are hard to come by. Sadly, almost all domestic servants will have had at least one employer who subjected them to poor treatment and exploitation.

Of the fifteen women who have quit past domestic jobs, three-quarters cited a combination of low pay and mistreatment as their primary reason. A number of women gave examples of mistreatment by past employers. Often employers would not permit their employees to visit with or talk to their family members. One woman had a long history with employers who would not give her time off to visit her family. This particular woman, however, did not let her employers stop her from returning home. She thus quit each successive job, visited her natal village for a couple weeks each year, and then returned to the capital the next month in search of new work. Another woman worked for an employer who
would not permit phone calls from her father or allow her boyfriend to pick her up at the house.

Other women complained of ethnic discrimination. One woman claimed ethnic discrimination was the reason her employers would return to her clean house at night, “drop all their things on the floor”, and then expect her to clean it all up for a second time that day. Another woman reported that her female employer regularly beat her, stating that she was “civilizing her” and just trying to “teach her the correct and civilized customs of city dwellers”.

Although all the women currently employed as domestics claim to have good relationships with their employers and say they are spoken to with respect, many women complain of disrespectful children. Employer’s children often harass indigenous domestic workers and sadly, most of them get away with it. A number of women reported that their employer’s children make them the subject of ethnic slurs or jokes. One woman said she continues to be harassed by her employer’s children and that even after confronting her employers about it, they still make no effort to curb the children’s behavior.

Evidently, finding employers with whom you are compatible is difficult task for domestic workers. Therefore it makes sense that some women will remain in households where the employers’ children harass them, just as long as their employers do not. Building a trustworthy employer-employee relationship is also arduous. All of the employers I spoke with had stories about past domestic servants who stole their belongings. Whether or not it is true that domestic workers in general tend to steal from their employers is irrelevant. What is noteworthy is the fact that most employers buy into this stereotype and therefore treat all new domestic servants as potential criminals, keeping a watchful eye on them at all times.
Education

As previously mentioned, the level of education for the women in the sample ranges from zero to twelve years. However, three-quarters of the women are currently enrolled in classes and all but one of the women comprising the remaining thirty percent wish to return to school. Interestingly, the one woman who does not want to continue with her studies said, “I don’t want to because I am married to an older man who is too jealous to allow me to continue studying”.

The perceived importance of education became apparent after just a few interviews. If one were to count the number of times specific issues were raised by an interviewee’s own volition, education, along with the well being of one’s family, would head the list. The possibility of securing an education is clearly one of the primary motives driving women to move to the capital and assume jobs as domestic servants. Prior to working as domestics, more than half of the women did not have any formal education and those who were educated had not advanced past the sixth grade. Women in the study averaged five and a half years of formal education. Moreover, second to helping provide financially for one’s family, lack of education/ability to study while employed was the most commonly cited reason for becoming a domestic worker.

Securing an education has penetrated the dreams of these domestic workers ever since they were young girls. Two-thirds of the women mentioned that pursuit of an education was their principal childhood goal. Such aspirations have not changed. When asked to describe how they envision their life in five years, a third of the women mentioned that they would either be continuing with their studies or working in an occupation that requires twelve years
of study. This is especially significant because half of the interviewees did not wish to speculate about the future.

Domestic workers also hope that their future children focus on receiving an education. Of the sixteen women who were asked what job they would desire for their future daughters, slightly more than half hope their daughters become students or procure a career that requires a twelve-year degree. Among the sixteen women who were asked what occupation they would prefer for their future sons, seventy-five percent responded in a similar manner. Interestingly, the gender difference is due to the fact that twenty percent of the women commented that their only occupational desire for their daughter is that she never has to work as a domestic servant.

Support networks

Emotional support and consistent encouragement are essential factors influencing a woman’s satisfaction in her current occupation and her desire to attain a more advanced education. Fortunately, most of the women have friends, family, and/or employers who they can turn to for emotional encouragement. Half of the women reported that they receive support in one form or another from all of the people in their lives (i.e. family members, friends, and employers). In the eyes of the domestic worker, support can manifest itself in a variety of ways. However, whether it is through verbal encouragement or financial assistance, friends, family, and employers all focus their efforts on encouraging domestic workers to advance their educational status and create opportunities for a future career change.

Sixty-seven percent of women reported that their family members and friends support them in their efforts to improve their own current situation. All of them do so by
encouraging the domestic worker to increase her education and work towards a career change. Some commented that they demonstrate encouragement by serving as role models. Women who watched their family members or friends work hard, secure an education, and then make an occupational shift due to an advanced education call upon such memories when they themselves need a little push. Some however, are not so lucky and entirely lack support from their family members. A third of the group studied do not receive any words of encouragement from friends or family. Often employers compensate for their employee's lack of friend and family support. All who lack family and friends to back them in their academic goals and praise them in their achievements have employers who are, as one woman said, “cheering us on”.

Close to two-thirds of employers reportedly encourage their domestic employees. Half support their domestic servants by promoting continuing education. Other employers were perceived to be supporting employees by simply paying a salary, allotting a sufficient amount of free time, or treating them as a friend by respecting their employee's decisions and goals. All of these support methods were mentioned in conjunction with the advancement of one's education. For instance, one woman claimed that her employer supports her by providing her with a salary. She later explained that this money is used to finance her education. Another commented that her employers support her by relating to her in the same manner as her best friends do. Best friends, according to this woman, are those who “give the best advice, encourage education, and are concerned with what their friends are doing”.

It should not come as a surprise that the employers of most of the women in this sample encourage them to gain an education. Most of the women's employers are members of the congregation at San Cayetano and were responsible for the women's introduction to
the church. In fact, whether they directly intended to or not, by introducing their domestic employees to San Cayetano, these employers were setting their workers up with access to free basic education classes and a local domestic workers’ organization (i.e. Casa Maria).

**Changing aspirations**

As already noted, family security and education are the primary values and principal concerns of the women studied. Since their childhood, these women have sought opportunities to provide for their families while at the same time increasing their level of education. Domestic work is arguably one of the better avenues available to women for achieving this goal. Living where one works avoids the financial and physical expenses associated with the maintenance of another home. Any money leftover after necessities have been met can be sent back to one’s family or spent on school supplies and class registration. Despite the fact that during childhood all but two of the women never imagined that they would become domestic servants, by the time they were teenagers they had all recognized the impossibility of achieving their two primary goals (i.e. supporting their family and getting an education) without entering the occupation.

As already demonstrated, education is a recurrent theme in domestic workers’ past and present aspirations. As children they dreamt of attaining an advanced degree which would in turn furnish them with a financially secure job. Presently, young women who have been employed as domestic servants for less than ten years are working towards this goal. Five years from now these women expect to either be working in their career of choice or wrapping up their educational training to secure their desired career.

Although the aspirations of the majority of women fit the above description, nearly half of the women formally interviewed do not aspire to be educated. Many women have
given up on the possibility of education as a means to socioeconomic or occupational mobility. Some of these women have worked ten or more years in the domestic sector and do not foresee a future outside of it. Two women are single mothers and they count themselves lucky to have a job where they can provide food and shelter for their child. Others are single women without much family or friends and are thankful to have a job that can also double as a home. The other women who fit this category are the six women who are no longer employed in the domestic sector. Most of these women left their occupations to marry, and, like the aforementioned group, they do not think about their futures. These women claim not to know what the future holds. Yet when pressed, they claim it will probably be no different than the present. Both groups, however, hope that their children can afford an advanced education so that they will not have to settle for work in the domestic sector.

Whether or not a woman marries in the future is not given much thought. A quarter of the single women never want to marry, half are unsure if they wanted to get married, and only one quarter said they eventually want to marry. Even those who do want to marry desire to wait until after they have completed their education. Interestingly, three-quarters of the single women do want to have children in the future. This raises some interesting questions about the influence of Catholic dogma on the women’s beliefs, values, and opinions. Specifically, is the church’s stance on single motherhood changing and if so, in what way? Because the Catholic Church sponsors Casa Maria, one might expect these women to espouse a more conservative opinion about pregnancy outside of marriage. The women’s opinions on this issue are far more liberal than expected. One woman commented: "If I don’t get married, I’ll just find someone to have a child with. I don’t worry about
whether or not I will marry. I just accept life as it comes to me. But I do desire to be a mother”. Placed in the context of opinions and attitudes relating to marianismo, a woman’s desire to have children can be easily understood. Although the machismo-marianismo behavior dichotomy generates the typical mistreatment of wives, mothers, single or married, are always honored (Flora 1999).

**Domestic work and upward mobility**

Opinions about whether or not domestic work functions as a step toward upward mobility correspond with the number of years a woman has been employed in the domestic sector, her experiences with past and present employers, and her aspirations for the future. Because the majority of women are currently attending classes, education plays a huge role in their plans for the future. These women envision a future where their education has enabled them to attain a professional career. Correspondingly, these women perceive of their current occupational status (i.e. as domestic workers) as a stepping stone. Work as a domestic servant furnishes them with food, shelter, and enough extra time and money to finance an education. All of the women who have been employed for less than ten years (i.e. half of the sample) believe domestic work functions as a stepping stone. All of these women are currently in school and education appears to shape their opinion about the role that their current occupation plays in their future plans.

Once a woman has either left the domestic sector or been employed in it for more than ten years, her opinion about the occupation and her plans for the future change drastically. All of the women in this category (i.e. half of the sample) do not consider domestic work a step towards upward mobility. Moreover, none of them would recommend the occupation to their friends or family members. One woman did say she would partially
recommend the occupation because it did serve as a stepping stone and facilitated her access to an education that eventually enabled her to become a dental hygienist. However, she still harbors many reservations about the occupation and would only recommend it if she knew and approved of the potential employers.

**Casa María**

Casa María was founded on May 6, 1990, by a Catholic priest from San Cayetano and a female member of its congregation. A group of Catholic missionaries from Italy began San Cayetano and to this day the church continues to maintain close ties with Italy. During Guatemala’s civil war, the priest who founded Casa María was extremely active in fighting for indigenous rights. One of the many programs he began at San Cayetano was a food and money collection for CPR (“Communities of Resisting Peoples”) in the Mayan highlands. Elsa, the woman who runs Casa María, said that his revolutionary behavior caused government officials to force the priest to leave Guatemala. Since his departure, a deacon from Italy has assumed the position of Casa María’s primary sponsor.

According to Elsa, at its inception, Casa María was met by a great deal of resistance from both church and community members. Members of San Cayetano’s congregation were infuriated that their contributions were being used to support a house for indigenous women. Reportedly, community and congregation members sent a series of messages to the house declaring that Mayans do not have the same rights as ladinos and therefore should not be entitled to the programs offered through Casa María. Such comments eventually dissipated and presently Casa María receives a good deal of support from the surrounding community. The organization receives its funding from Italy, Germany, and the local community. San
Cayetano’s community provides Casa Maria with healthcare, food, bedclothes, and personal hygiene products.

In 1990, at the time of its establishment, eight domestic workers participated in Casa María. I met with two of these women and both of them refer to themselves as co-founders. It is of interest to note that the ladino personal at Casa María never listed these two indigenous members (or any of the eight) as co-founders. Casa María’s personnel recollected only ladino founders and described these women simply as the organization’s first members. This is particularly interesting because both groups maintained that the principal objective of Casa María is to overcome ethnic discrimination and build the self-esteem of indigenous domestic workers.

Maricela’s history with Casa María offers a good deal of insight into the opportunities that the organization provides for its members. Maricela is one of the founding members of Casa María. Coinciding with the construction of Casa María, Maricela was awarded a scholarship from the Italian Catholic sponsors of San Cayetano who support the education of domestic workers. Maricela’s sponsors were the same people that sponsored Casa María and she was accordingly introduced to the organization. Initially, Maricela did not get along well with the other members of Casa María. This dissention eventually caused her to leave. In 1996, Maricela returned to Casa María, taking up residency there as its full-time coordinator. Maricela reported that her primary concern as house organizer was to review prospective employers and assure that they would treat their employees well, provide a fair salary, and allot time off for weekend visits to Casa María.

Except for two women, the entire sample is comprised of Casa María’s participants. Length of involvement in Casa María ranges from less than one year to eight years (i.e. since
its founding. The San Cayetano parish is the primary means by which women are introduced to Casa María. San Cayetano is the neighborhood church of Zone 7 residents. Most of the women in this sample are employed in houses in Zone 7. Therefore, it is not surprising that most of Casa María’s participants are also members of San Cayetano’s congregation. Half of the women reported that their employers introduced them to Casa María via San Cayetano. Other women were introduced to Casa María by relatives who also work (or worked) as domestic servants. However, employers or other members of San Cayetano’s congregation were also often responsible for introducing these women to the organization as well.

**Casa María’s activities**

Casa María’s motto, “Somos personas y tenemos derecho a vivir dignamente” (We are people and have the right to live with dignity), articulates the principal goal of Casa María: to promote occupational mobility and ethnic pride among domestic workers. Each Sunday Casa María schedules a special activity or lecture that is devoted to promoting pride and encouraging occupational advancement. Sunday activities follow a theme schedule. The first Sunday activity of every month is devoted to religious material. The second and third Sundays feature guest lecturers on issues of human development. Fourth Sundays are spent making handcrafts. When a month includes a fifth Sunday, it is considered a “free day”; no events are scheduled, and the women can just “hang out”.

**Religious activities.** Elsa mentioned that participation drops significantly during religious weekend activities because not all of the women are Catholic. However, women of any denomination are welcome to participate in religious theme activities and often these activities do not cater exclusively to a Catholic audience.
The first Sunday I visited Casa Maria was a religious theme weekend. The activity planned was a viewing of “The Mission”, a film based on the Argentine mission established by Spanish Jesuits who hoped to convert the indigenous population. The Jesuits did gain significant popularity and were successful in converting a large amount of the indigenous population. However, when Portugal gained control of the territory, the Portuguese invaded and slaughtered both the missionaries and the indigenous population. After the film, Elsa discussed its relevance to the domestic worker’s situation. Elsa commented that as primarily indigenous women, it is especially important that domestic workers are aware of past and present human rights violations. She explained that it is essential that the women keep talking about such atrocities and never just simply accept them. Elsa then tied her speech to a related current event in Guatemala. On April 26, 1998, Catholic Priest Juan Jose Geradi Conedera was assassinated in Zone 1 of Guatemala City, allegedly for writing a book about human rights violations in Guatemala.

**Lectures.** Casa María recruits guest lecturers to speak on topics of human development every second and third Sunday of each month. Examples of the topics explored include morality, sexual awareness, education, and the legal rights of domestic workers. The lectures are held in the large and spacious indoor patio, the only room large enough to allow the women to sit around a circle. Chairs are set up in a large circle and everyone, including the guest speaker, sits. Prior to the featured lecture, Casa María’s personnel make any relevant announcements about upcoming events and then lead the group in a succession of songs of either religious or revolutionary tone.

I observed two lectures by the same guest speaker. Ana, the guest speaker, is a woman from “Despertar” (Awakening), a women’s group that is also sponsored by San
Cayetano. Despertar meets weekly and provides the female members of San Cayetano with an outlet to discuss problems they have suffered as a result of machismo. The group hopes to eradicate the dominant view that a woman should be a *mujer abnegada* (self-sacrificing woman). The notion that women should be dutiful and self-sacrificing continues to persist and is passed down from one generation to the next. Despertar parallels Casa Maria in its fight to end the oppression of women. Thus, by bringing in speakers from Despertar, Casa Maria is simply soliciting help from an allied group.

Ana’s first lecture covered education. First, Ana named and briefly discussed two types of education that she believed most of the women had received over the course of their lifetime. These included education that is provided in the home by one’s parents and education and foreign customs that one obtains after they move to the capital. Ana asked the women to think about these forms of education as well as of what kind of education they would want for themselves. Then the women were assigned to small groups to discuss these three categories of education. The women were asked to answer the questions: 1) “What have you learned from your parents?” 2) “What formal customs have you learned from the outside world (i.e. outside of your village of origin)?” and 3) “What type of education would you like for yourself?”

The group concentrated their discussion of education in the home as a means by which children learn culturally prescribed gender roles from their parents. They commented that through observation of their own families, children learn that fathers are generally the authoritative figure in a household and wives should always defer to their husbands. The women spoke of how children generally mimic the behavior of their same sex parent and if a
child’s father mistreats his or her mother, s/he often comes to believe that such is the way a woman should be treated.

Answering the second question proved slightly more difficult for the women in the group. They continuously brought up the fact that people in the capital have different customs from those who reside in the countryside. However, the women never articulated these differences. The group was noticeably distressed by their loss of traditional indigenous customs since their move to the city. Despite the attempt by many Mayan women to express the benefits they have received since giving up traditional customs, their tone was one of defeat. Unfortunately, these women learned that they are considered inferior and recognize that ladino customs are afforded far more respect than Mayan. Ironically, in addition to agreeing that traditional customs have been replaced by newer, urban customs, the women all agreed that since moving to the capital they have learned to respect all groups of people. Although these women have been taught by ladinos to respect the customs and views of all people, they have also learned that what their “teachers” preach and what they practice are rarely the same.

The type of education women desire is that which will enable them to climb the socioeconomic ladder. The women yearn for an education in order to benefit themselves as well as their natal families or future children. The group expressed a desire to perfect their communication skills. They appreciate the opportunity to learn different languages and want people to correct them when they make errors. Furthermore, the women want to increase the self-esteem of subordinate groups and hope that they can use their future education to help exploited groups.
Ana’s second lecture was on relationships and dating. Ana began her speech by telling the women that dating is a very important and potentially wonderful stage in their lives. Her initial gay and teasing comments about the women’s desire to have boyfriends quickly changed to a negative and disapproving diatribe. Ana’s talk did not so much focus on dispersing advice about dating, sexual awareness, and choosing partners, but rather quickly transformed into a tirade about the violent tendencies of men and the undignified actions of dating women. Although it was important that the women hear about the possibility of violence in a relationship and learn what to do if they ever find themselves in an abusive relationship, the sum effect of the speech was to leave the women with the feeling that they would be condemned for dating.

Ana asked the women to think seriously about getting married in the future because it is very likely that they will be subject to either verbal or physical abuse by their husbands. She asked the women to recall their childhood experiences and recognize that violence in the home does prevail. Ana argued that whether or not one realizes it, they copy the behavior of their same sex parent. Ana invoked the pervasive attitudes of machismo and marianismo to explain why men are abusive and women generally accept that abuse. Ana said that since males generally abuse the weakest and most dependent member of the household, women must strive for their own occupational stability if they want to avoid abuse. Ana’s argument is that if there are two breadwinners in the household, there will be less violence. She enforced her message by referring to Casa Maria’s motto (i.e. “We are people and have the right to live with dignity”) and then declaring that the women are beautiful and dignified and “have the right to live without violence”.
Ana ended her lecture by listing the characteristics of a violent man. The characteristics of a violent man included such expected qualities as jealousy, controlling others, possessiveness, and a short temper. Ana also included a few unexpected characteristics in her list. For example, Ana stated that violent men are those who attempt to touch a woman’s body while engaged in kissing. Ana told the women never to let a man touch them or they risk losing their dignity. This was particularly striking to me because a number of the women who participate in Casa María (and many of the women present at the lecture) are single mothers. Ana’s comments seemed to suggest that unlike the single and celibate women of the group, these women are not respectable and dignified.

Ana’s final comment was a reminder that the women deserve to live with dignity and abusive men are not respecting their dignity. She advised the women to seek help from churches, organizations such as Casa María, or human rights offices if they ever find themselves in an abusive relationship.

**Miscellaneous activities.** Although Casa María does have a theme schedule that they generally adhere to, occasionally the organizers are unable to find a guest lecturer or have difficulties developing a project related to the Sunday theme. As a result, many scheduled Sundays are transformed into “free days”. However, even when Elsa cannot develop a project related to the week’s theme, she does attempt to involve the women in some form of activity. For instance, one week Elsa went to a video store and rented a couple of movies for anyone who cared to view them. Another week she organized a spur of the moment meeting about an upcoming visit from Casa María’s sponsoring deacon from Italy. The deacon’s visit was especially important to the ladino organizers, if not to the domestic workers themselves. In preparation for his arrival, Elsa asked the women to think about what special gift they
could give him. She suggested a performance or a craft prepared by the group. This meeting really did not get very far and the topic was quickly deserted.

Casa Maria's personnel apparently never abandoned the notion that the domestic workers should present the deacon with a gift. Two weeks later, on a lecture theme Sunday, Casa Maria was bustling with female ladino organizers. That day some male church officials from San Cayetano were to pay a visit and check on the progress of the deacon's gift. The behavior of Casa Maria's personnel towards the women present was strikingly different than I had observed over the previous weeks. Their attitude was one of extreme paternalism. This day the staff ordered all of the women to make cards for the deacon. The women were told that if they were unwilling to participate, they would have to leave. Because most of the women generally have no other place to go, they were all essentially forced to engage in this activity. Thus, all of the women from age 14 to their late 50s filed into an upstairs classroom and sat down with construction paper, crayons, scissors, and glue. All of the doors to the interior quarters of the house were locked, thus forcing any late arrivals upstairs to join the activity. I could sense the women's hostility and felt extremely uncomfortable in my position. I was not expected to participate in the card-making by either the organizers or the domestic workers, as I did not nor ever would know the deacon. But by not engaging in the activity I had to deal with the feeling that I too was essentially forcing these women to participate. I watched a thirty-eight year old whom I interviewed earlier that day protest, only to be patted on the head by Elsa as if she were comforting a small child. This act of extreme paternalism was personally upsetting and rather than jeopardizing my objective appearance, I chose to leave for the day.
Reasons for participation in Casa María

The domestic workers who frequent Casa María do so for a variety of reasons. Primarily, women enjoy visiting the organization because it is often their only chance to socialize with their peers. The assumption that women go to Casa María primarily because it enables them to get together with their friends is largely based on my weekend observations. Although most women do participate in Casa María’s activities and/or classes, they tend to arrive at the house hours before the scheduled start time of such activities. Especially on Sundays, when most domestic workers are given the entire day off, Casa María’s many couches are overflowing with women joking, gossiping, and simply having a good time with their friends. When I asked women why they enjoyed coming to Casa María, two-thirds mentioned that it is their only opportunity to visit with their friends. Of these women, a large percentage also mentioned that they enjoyed the lectures, activities, and advice that Casa María provides for them.

In addition to the women who claim they participate in Casa María for friends, activities, lectures, and advice, a quarter stated they enjoy Casa María solely because of the advice and orientation they receive from the staff and guest speakers. On occasion I saw women arrive very early in the day and sit down to speak semi-privately with Elsa. I assume their early arrival was intentional, knowing that at such an hour Elsa would be available to meet with and listen to any of the women’s problems. One particular woman who arrived early one day came in and sat down with Elsa, my interpreter, and myself. Although the woman did not seem to mind our presence, she was clearly there to speak to Elsa. Apparently this woman recently quit working for an excessively abusive employer with whom Elsa was familiar. The woman spoke at length of the abuse she suffered during her
stay with this employer and Elsa listened with a sympathetic ear. Although the woman had already found a better job with a fair employer, she still needed to confide in a friend to discuss her hardships. Casa Maria’s personnel, especially Elsa (i.e. the house organizer), provide the service of an unbiased ear.

**Sheer boredom and exasperation.** Some women do not even consider the opportunities Casa María provides for its members among the reasons for their attendance. Eleven percent of the women said they visited Casa María out of sheer boredom. In fact, when I asked one woman why she liked Casa María she responded, “I don’t like it. I just come here when I’m bored”. She further commented that Casa María could benefit from an in-house psychologist or “people who can really teach” because she gets “bored and desperate listening to the same thing over and over again”. This is an important point about Casa María’s activities and has led me to question the scope of their outreach programs and lecture variability.

**General knowledge and opinion of Guatemalan domestic workers’ organizations**

There are five organizations for domestic workers in Guatemala City: CENTRACAP, Casa María, Casa San Benito, Casa San José, and Conrrado de la Cruz y María Auxiliadora. The Catholic Church sponsors all but CENTRACAP. Most of the women in this sample do not know of any domestic workers’ organizations outside of Casa María. Five women mentioned knowledge of Casa San Benito and Conrrado de la Cruz y María Auxiliadora. Many of these women were actually introduced to Casa María through their participation in one of these aforementioned organizations. Occasionally, two or more organizations plan day excursions together, such as the one I went on to Lake Amatitlán. Such is the manner by which women are introduced to other organizations and their members.
It is of interest to note that although CENTRACAP, the only secular domestic workers’ organization in Guatemala City, maintains close ties with all of the other organizations in the city, none of the women I spoke to were aware of its existence. This is particular noteworthy because I attended a CENTRACAP meeting with Elsa, thus demonstrating her connection to the organization yet her blatant neglect to educate Casa Maria’s members of its cause. Representatives from all of the domestic workers’ organizations in the city were present at this meeting, yet apparently CENTRACAP’s existence was still not common knowledge among the domestic sector. During the meeting, CENTRACAP’s personnel discussed their desperate need to raise domestic workers’ awareness of their programs. The personnel called for cooperation from other organizations in their quest to enlighten the Guatemala’s domestic workers of their cause. But despite CENTRACAP’s connection to the religious organizations, my interviews suggest that the personnel from Catholic organizations are not transmitting their knowledge of CENTRACAP’s programs to the members of their respective organizations.

Because most domestic workers are unaware of the range of services organizations such as CENTRACAP can provide for them, they have limited opinions about what they believe domestic workers’ organizations should do for them. For the most part, the women in this sample answered my question about what they believe the primary objective of such an organization should be with one of the services provided by Casa Maria. Accordingly, most women responded similarly to the questions, “Why do you enjoy participating in Casa Maria?” and “What do you think should be the primary objective of domestic workers’ organizations?”
Twenty-five percent of the women stated that domestic workers’ organizations should make it their primary objective to provide technical training or basic education classes. Although I had not thought to ask, it would be interesting to discover whether the women believe educational training should be provided free of charge at these organizations. Presently, Casa Maria charges the women for technical training classes in sewing and typing. Basic education classes, however, are offered for free at San Cayetano.

Twenty-five percent of the women believe that the primary objective of domestic workers’ organizations should be to offer advice and help orient its members. This response appears to be tied to the previous response (i.e. to provide educational training), as women would often discuss access to education in conjunction with their future aspirations (which is arguably synonymous with the orientation of their lives).

Fifteen percent of the women think that the primary objective of domestic workers’ organizations should be to provide out-of-work women with a place to stay while they search for new jobs. Ten percent of the women stated organizations should focus primarily on finding women fair employment. Again, both of these services are available through Casa Maria.

Fifteen percent of the sample responded that they did not know what organizations should do for their members. Ana Corita, the woman who is employed as a domestic on a finca, said that since I know how to read and write, I should decide what should be done. What is especially interesting is that even though the women are members of a domestic workers’ organization (i.e. Casa María), they are unable (or unwilling) to place their finger on what the primary goal of such an organization is or should be. Most striking, however, was the remaining ten percent of the sample.
The final ten percent of the sample represents the two women who are not involved with any domestic workers' organizations. These women's answers were markedly different from the rest of the sample, but also strikingly distinct from one another. One woman stated that she believed domestic workers' organizations should focus on training the women to be good employees. She further clarified this comment by stating that domestic workers should be trained to behave in a manner that their employers will deem appropriate so as to avoid future physical punishment. The woman who argued for this training was the same woman whose employer of eight years physically abused her, claiming to be "civilizing her". The second woman's response was also astonishing, though in a very different way.

Although all of the women responded to the question, "Do you receive social security?" with a disappointed "No, we are not entitled", only two women ever brought this issue up again during their interviews. One woman was Maricela, the ex-house organizer for Casa Maria. Maricela mentioned lack of social security benefits in conjunction with her future aspirations. Maricela wants to return to school to pursue one of two goals, though she has not yet chosen which goal. One of her dreams is to become a special education teacher. The other is to become a lawyer and fight for indigenous rights and the rights of domestic workers. The latter is where she mentioned the legal struggle for social security and other benefits to which domestic workers are not entitled. To return to the issue at hand, the second woman to mention the fact that domestic workers are not entitled to social security benefits was the other woman who is not connected to an organization. This is the only woman who believes the primary goal of domestic workers' organizations should be to secure social security and other benefits that are currently unavailable to domestic workers.
Summary

The variables thus presented are all factors in the creation of a domestic worker's worldview. What emerges from the presentation of the data is the observation that not all domestic workers share the same worldview. The significant degree of variation within the variables that combine to form worldview leads one to the conclusion that there are at least three worldviews represented by this sample. The following chapter describes the three groups and their respective worldviews, as well as how the group's worldview relates to and affects a woman's future aspirations.
CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this thesis was to evaluate how the worldview of domestic workers in Guatemala City relates to and affects their aspirations. The worldview of a culture or group of people is often only accessible through a discussion of the various factors that interact and combine to form it. In the case of Guatemalan domestic workers, these variables include: life history, number of years employed as a domestic, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, education, job satisfaction, belief in social and occupational mobility, participation in domestic workers’ organization, and belief that such organizations are capable of effecting change. When one speaks of a group’s worldview, they are attempting to describe how the individuals within that group envision the world at large and their place in it. My concern is to delineate how the worldview of a female Guatemalan domestic worker relates to and affects her future aspirations. Therefore, we can restrict our discussion of worldview to the woman’s understanding of her role as a domestic worker in Guatemala City, how the occupation relates to her past, and how it will influence or determine her future.

Analysis of the data suggests that a domestic worker’s fate is essentially predetermined. Insight into a domestic worker’s worldview leads one to the conclusion that social and occupational mobility for a female domestic worker is contingent upon her experience in the domestic sector. Moreover, length of time employed in the domestic sector, involvement in domestic workers’ organizations, and access to basic education and technical training prove to be profound influences on a woman’s aspirations for her future.

The sample of domestic workers can be divided into three groups, each representing a specific worldview. The different experiences and opportunities available to women both
prior to and during their lives as domestic workers shape their particular view of the world and their place within it. The three worldviews represented in this study are those of: 1) women employed in the domestic sector for six or less years, who are involved in a domestic workers’ organization, and who have access to education and technical training; 2) women who have either retired from the domestic sector or been employed in it for ten or more years, who are involved in a domestic workers’ organization, and who have access to education and technical training; and 3) women at any stage in their career as a domestic, who are not involved in a domestic workers’ organization, and who do not have access to education and technical training. Although it is true that the women of each group share a worldview that is different from that of the other groups, all three groups are similar in a number of regards. It is therefore appropriate to discuss the characteristics shared by women in all groups before examining how aspects of variation produce different worldviews.

The sample

In accordance with Smith’s (1989) description of domestic workers in Latin American cities, the women in this study are mostly young, unmarried, indigenous women from provincial areas of the countryside who have little formal education and little urban job skills. In fact, all of the women were born outside of Guatemala City, and the majority of them moved to the city as teenagers in search of domestic work. In general, the women entered Guatemala City’s domestic sector because it was the best option available to them. The women all come from exceptionally large families who often cannot financially afford to provide for their children after an age of dependency. As a general rule, children who are old enough to begin working do. But why do women migrate to cities in search of work? Rollins (1989:39) reminds us that Latin American urbanization is characterized by the fact
that more women migrate to cities than men. This makes sense when we consider the fact that there are very few job opportunities in the countryside. Often the only work available in the countryside is agricultural labor and although women do engage in this line of work, they do so in much smaller numbers than men. Thus, women leave their natal villages in search of work far more often than do men.

Women often leave home with two goals in mind. First, they want to alleviate the financial strain they place on their parents. By migrating to the city and taking up work as a live-in domestic servant, these women are able to provide for themselves as well as send additional money back to their family. Second, leaving home to work as a domestic servant is often the first step towards accessing an advanced formal education. As Smith (1989) notes, most domestic workers have little or no formal education or job skills. Correspondingly, more than half of the women in this study did not have any formal education prior to becoming domestics and of those who were educated, none had progressed past the sixth grade. Assuming a position as a domestic servant, however, can and often does facilitate access to basic education. As we have seen, living where one works avoids the financial and physical expenses associated with maintaining another home.

Once a woman enters the domestic sector, it is more than likely that she will remain for quite a few years and work for at least two different employers. Three-quarters of the women in this sample have quit past jobs as domestics in search of better employers and an improved salary. Just as Castro's (1989) research indicates, “good treatment” by employers is an important consideration for domestic workers when evaluating their occupation. As a result, many women give up certain niceties, including a higher-salaried job, in exchange for a fair and kind employer.
Just as domestic workers search out “good employers”, employers rely on particular strategies to ascertain that they will hire a trustworthy and hard-working employee. In accordance with Gogna’s (1989) findings, it appears that many employers rely on personal channels to recruit new employees. The use of personal contacts serves as a means for social control whereby the intermediary is also affected by the domestic worker’s actions. The employer feels secure that their new employee will avoid any conflict that could jeopardize their friend or relative’s position.

The use of personal contacts to obtain domestic employees has often been interpreted as a method to enforce subordination of the domestic worker to the employer. Castro (1989) observed that employers often also introduce their new employees to lay-religious training centers that are committed to maintaining the institution of domestic service. Castro (1989) notes that these centers promote an ethic of servitude by manipulating the ideological framework of the domestic workers. The encouragement of these centers demonstrates that a significant number of employers have an interest in curbing the socioeconomic advancement of their employees. However, this statement can not be applied to the employers of Casa Maria’s participants. The majority of the women’s employers are members of San Cayetano’s congregation and were responsible for the women’s introduction to the church. By introducing the women to the church, these employers were also providing them with access to a free education and a domestic worker’s organization that is allegedly committed to the socioeconomic advancement of domestic workers.

**Worldview and aspirations**

An individual’s worldview is shaped by their life experiences. Therefore, a study that proposes to encapsulate a domestic worker’s worldview must encompass numerous aspects
of the domestic worker's life, both past and present. Although it is true that no two domestic 
workers share an identical past, it is possible to classify them into broad representative 
groups based on similar experiences and reflecting a shared worldview. Analysis of the data 
reveals three categories of women, each representing a specific worldview that influences 
their aspirations for the future. As already noted, the three variables that distinguish each 
group and their corresponding worldview are: length of time employed in the domestic 
sector, degree of involvement in domestic workers' organizations, and access to education 
and technical training.

**Group one**

This group is comprised of women who have been working as domestic servants for 
six or less years, are active participants in Casa María, and attend basic education and/or 
technical training classes. The ten women in this group are all unmarried, without children, 
and under the age of 25. The average woman entered the domestic sector with a second 
grade education and has since advanced to the sixth grade. All of them are currently taking 
basic education classes and a large percentage are also taking either typing or sewing classes 
through Casa María.

In general, these women all had positive experiences in the domestic sector. All 
report a good employer-employee relationship whereby they are spoken to with respect, and 
afforded appropriate pay, benefits, and free time. Moreover, all but two of their employers 
verbally encourage them to continue with their education and focus their energy on a future 
career change. It is important to note that although some employers do not verbally 
encourage their employees they also do not take measures to prevent the women from 
pursuing an education.
The women’s principal values are reflected in their childhood dreams. As young girls, most of the women hoped that they would eventually find work where they would make enough money to assist their family as well as attain an education. For the most part, their dreams have come true. All of the women are currently in school and plan to continue with their studies until they are awarded an advanced degree which will enable them to leave the domestic sector. Although a typical response to the question, “How do you envision your life in five years?” is that “The future does not belong to us” but rather is “in God’s hands”, the majority of the women in this group do not hesitate to speculate about their future. Three women did give the aforementioned response, but the remaining seven reported that they believed they would either still be studying or will have completed their studies and have begun work in the profession for which they are studying.

As previously noted, these women are quite content with their current occupation – probably because they view it as a stepping stone. All of them believe domestic work does function as a step toward upward mobility, citing themselves as proof. Because work as a domestic has provided them with both avenues and money to pursue an education, they believe it is one of the best opportunities available to women who wish to attain a professional career. All of the women would recommend domestic work to their friends and family as a positive step towards socioeconomic advancement.

They are all actively involved in Casa Maria’s programs. The majority of them visit the organization on a weekly or even bi-weekly basis. They participate in sewing or typing classes during the week and the scheduled Sunday activities. Although Casa María’s activities are the major attraction for most women, some claim they visit Casa Maria simply because it is their only opportunity to get together with their friends and peers. Nevertheless,
it appears as though their participation in Casa Maria influences their worldview and future aspirations. Through Casa Maria or their sponsoring church San Cayetano, these women have all been introduced to and commenced basic education and/or technical training courses at little to no expense. Casa Maria’s personnel and guest speakers encourage the women to pursue an advanced education and send the message that education is their way out of the domestic sector. For relatively young, single women such as these, the organization’s advice is sound and the goals are achievable. Thus, with the support of friends, family, employers, and organizational members, the women of this group focus their energy on their future, treating their current occupation and socioeconomic situation as a temporary state.

**Group two**

This group is comprised of women who have either retired from the domestic sector or worked in it for over ten years, are involved in Casa Maria or a similar organization, and have access to education and technical training. There are ten women in this group, six of whom are retired from the domestic sector. The women range in age from 16 to 48. Four of them have children, two of whom had their children after leaving the domestic sector and getting married. The other two women with children are still employed as domestics. Almost all of the women in this group entered the domestic sector with no formal education, but the average woman has since progressed to the sixth grade. All but one woman⁹ are involved in activities and basic education and/or technical education classes offered through domestic workers’ organizations. Although both the women who have retired from the domestic sector and those who still remain within it share similar worldviews and future

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⁹ This woman is currently looking into taking a sewing course.
aspirations, it is likely that their path to this common reality differs. Therefore, it is appropriate to present an overview of the past experiences of each subgroup prior to the discussion of the group worldview.

**Retired domestic workers.** The six women who have since retired from the domestic sector do not share identical past or present realities. They are between 16 and 48 years old and were employed as domestic workers for anywhere between one and fourteen years. Although their stories vary, they all reflect an unpleasant experience in the domestic sector. The three younger women in this category left their final jobs as domestic servants because members of their employer’s household subject them to ethnic discrimination and harassment. One woman is currently employed in a hospital while the other two are seeking employment in factories. Two other women left their final jobs as domestic workers because their employers mistreated them. Both found other work – one in a factory and the other in a cafeteria – for a few years, until they met and married their current spouse. Importantly, all five of these women made essentially lateral occupational shifts upon leaving the domestic sector.

Maricela, the final woman in this subgroup, is sort of the poster-girl for current domestic workers. She is the woman who was essentially forced into the occupation at ten years old when she did not speak a word of Spanish. Maricela made a connection with San Cayetano and Casa María, who awarded her an academic scholarship. What could not be covered with the scholarship, Maricela made up for by working as a domestic. She completed an advanced education that enabled her to find work as a dental hygienist. Currently, Maricela is looking into opportunities to pursue a degree in law or special education.
**Long-term domestic employees.** These four women have been employed as domestics between 11 and 15 years. They all are between the ages of 27 and 29 which means they all entered the domestic sector before their eighteenth birthday. They have all worked for their current employer for at least seven years. Three of the women make less than Q400 a month, while one woman earns Q900. The women who make under Q400 have minimal education (i.e. two have completed the third grade, while the other is currently in the first). They have come to believe that their limited education disqualifies them from higher-salaried job and have become comfortable with the notion that they will remain in their present occupation well into their distant futures. These three women all spoke of how they did not like the occupation at first but have since come to accept it.

Josefa, the woman who earns Q900 a month, is different from the other members of this subgroup in a number of ways. Josefa, a single mother with a seventh grade education has plans for her future. Although her daughter does not live with her, she is the major motivation behind Josefa’s plans. Josefa is utilizing the opportunities the domestic sector can provide for women who wish to advance their education and work towards an occupational shift. By the year 2000, Josefa believes she will have completed the educational requirements to begin a career in nursing.

**General group two conclusions.** For the most part, these women all had negative experiences in the domestic sector. Many of them were subject to ethnic discrimination and harassment by their previous employers. Others maintain that even though they were not mistreated, they would never recommend that a friend or family member enter the domestic sector for fear that she would not have the same luck.
Similar to group one, these women all participate in or are seeking avenues to participate in domestic workers’ organizational activities and education or technical training classes. Moreover, these women also shared the childhood goal of attaining an advanced education and assisting their families financially. However, unlike the women of group one, advancing their education is not among their present principal concerns. In fact, the majority of these women do not entertain the possibility that advancing their education might change the course of their future. Rather, they take each day as it comes and refrain from speculation about their future, living by the notion that “One can live or die tomorrow”.

There are some women (i.e. Maricela and Josefa) who have used or are utilizing the domestic sector as a means towards socioeconomic advancement. This path is one in which the woman takes advantage of the fact that she does not have her own overhead expenses and can therefore spend some of the money she makes on the basic education or technical training classes offered through domestic workers’ organizations. Women who choose this route do express aspirations for the future and these aspirations typically correspond to those of group one women.

The major distinction between group one and group two is that the women in the latter group do not believe domestic work can function as a step toward upward mobility and would not recommend the occupation to friends or family members. I assume most of the women make this claim with reference to their own experiences in the domestic sector. Only Maricela granted that it could serve as a stepping stone, citing her own story as evidence. However, she still remains skeptical about the occupation and would only recommend it if she knew and approved of the potential employers.
Group three

The third group is comprised of those women who were informally interviewed outside of Guatemala City. These domestic workers are uneducated and unfamiliar with domestic workers' organizations. They are relevant to this discussion because analysis of their worldview reveals the important contribution access to education and domestic workers' organizations makes to the development of future aspirations. The women of this group were extremely shy and nervous, avoiding eye contact throughout all our conversations. They hesitated to answer my questions directly and expressed an inordinate degree of concern that their employers would become enraged by our interaction. They are all relatively isolated, with few local friends and family members.

The women of this group have settled into their positions as domestic workers and do not anticipate leaving their first and only employer, or even the occupation. They appear to watch their step when in the presence of their employer, always fearful that their actions may cause them to lose their job. Their employer's family has become their family and they cannot imagine their lives any different than the present. They accept whatever salary their employer provides for them and work as many hours as their employer demands. They would never ask for a salary increase because they are generally thankful for having an income at all. Although the women in this group do not believe they can predict their lives in five years, they do not expect it to be much different than the present. It could be argued that they do not have any goals for the future— at least insofar as a westerner would imagine. They do not think of pursuing an education nor making an occupational shift.

The women of group three differ from those in group one and two primarily because they prefer not to assess their lives. They would rather not speculate on how the present
might influence the future and could not offer an opinion on whether or not domestic work can function as a step toward upward mobility. For the most part questions eliciting evaluations about the domestic sector were responded to with “I don’t know” or “I’m not educated but you are so you would know”. Although group two women were hesitant about future speculation, they did feel comfortable assessing their occupation.

Assessing Casa María’s influence on the formation of worldview

It is apparent that Casa María’s personnel and guest lecturers play a significant role in shaping the goals of the domestic workers who frequent the organization. However, one must question just how aware these women are of their position and if they appropriately manage this power. My experiences with lectures provide evidence for the lecturer’s influential role. Although I was present for four lecture Sundays, only two lectures were actually held. Moreover, the same woman gave both lectures. In retrospect I realize that much of the conclusions the women came to in the small group I observed during the education lecture/group discussion were near matches to the speaker’s statements during the second lecture. This leads one to question the independence of conclusions or whether Casa María’s speakers are influencing the women’s responses. If it is true that Casa Maria’s lectures continuously repeat themselves, then it is very likely that the women in the small group were merely responding in the manner that past lectures deemed appropriate.

Comments offered during personal interviews also hint at the possibility that Casa María’s personnel and lecturers influence the women’s thoughts. For instance, many women spoke against the notion of ever having a boyfriend and were skeptical about ever marrying. Many of them made faces when I asked if they were in a relationship. One woman even said, “No, I don’t like that idea”. It seems peculiar that women in their late teens and early
twenties are so turned off by the possibility of dating. It becomes less peculiar when we recall the lecture on dating and relationships whereby in an effort to warn the women of inappropriate behavior, Ana nearly condemned the dating institution.

It is clear that the goal of Casa Maria’s activities and lectures is to prepare the women for their futures. The future Casa Maria envisions for these women does not include domestic labor. Instead, Casa Maria’s activities and discussions focus on transmitting the knowledge and skills that will enable the women to leave the domestic sector. Therefore, Casa Maria’s activities promote educational achievement and encourage women to remain single and without children so as to avoid risking their shot at an education and escape from the domestic sector.

Because it is a future-oriented organization and the domestic sector should not play a part in the future, Casa Maria makes little attempt to effect change within the domestic sector. For instance, I did not observe any discussion about domestic workers’ legal rights and responsibilities. I had expected that during interviews more women would express concern over the lack of legal rights afforded them. Once again I question if Casa Maria influences domestic workers such that they subjugate their own thoughts and goals to those of the organization. It is possible that education is not valued as highly as their interview responses suggest.

Furthermore, I wonder if the future-orientation of the organization causes its organizers to glaze over current pressing concerns for domestic workers. Even if a woman’s work as a domestic is temporary, her experiences in the occupation are still significant. Thus, a woman’s negative experience with an employer can still be shared with others in
hopes that they can avoid a similar situation, a point that Casa Maria’s personnel may sometimes overlook.

Although I found Elsa to be a capable counselor, I often wondered if she considered her confidants concerns past the surface conversation. For instance, recall the conversation between Elsa and a woman who recently quit a job in which she worked for an exceedingly abusive employer. As previously noted, one of the services Casa Maria provides is job placement for domestic workers. Casa Maria maintains a list of employers seeking domestic workers and when a woman comes to the organization in search of a job, they try to place them. Maricela, one of the founding members and an ex-house organizer, told me that one of the organizer’s jobs is to interview potential employers and assure that they will pay and treat their future employees fairly. Because Elsa mentioned that other women had complained about the aforementioned abusive employer, I could not help but to wonder if Casa Maria had placed a succession of women with this employer. It is of course possible that by simple chance all of these women met the employer through a independent contact. To my regret, although the question plagued me throughout Elsa’s conversation with the woman, I neglected to later ask her about it.

**Feminist analysis of a domestic worker’s worldview: Concluding comments**

To take a feminist approach to the construction of a domestic worker’s worldview entails recognizing all factors that influence the socioeconomic status associated with their position as young, indigenous, working-class women. The overarching factor determining both worldview and socioeconomic status is that domestic labor is universally socially devalued. Domestic labor is almost always considered a woman’s role, extending from a belief that women are characteristically nurturing and therefore better equipped for
household responsibilities (Ortner 1996). Based on the notion that household work is naturally feminine and therefore the rightful duty of women, domestic labor is not valued as real work. As a result, women who perform this “non-work” are socially stigmatized. But the domestic worker’s subordinate status cannot simply be explained in terms of gender discrimination. As members of the working class, domestic workers are further subject to class exploitation by employers of their own gender. Moreover, ethnicity is another factor determining the subordinate status afforded to domestic workers.

As we begin to assess worldview, it is necessary to address the fact that although domestic work is universally devalued, it is arguably less so in Latin America. In Latin America, where attitudes, behaviors, and values are influenced by the marianismo-machismo dichotomy, a woman’s role as mother of the house is the primary means by which she is socially and politically empowered. Latin American feminists argue that by accepting the marianismo-machismo behavior and attitude dichotomy, they can manipulate the prevailing stereotypes for the benefit of their own gender (Stevens 1997: 132). Nader (1986: 388) describes how some Latin American women manipulate their roles as women to gain access to the political arena where they then become active in social issues typically associated with their gender. It is thus appropriate to question whether women enter the domestic sector as a way of manipulating gender stereotypes for their own advantage. It is possible that the women know that by acting out socially acceptable gender roles, they may gain the favor of larger institutions, such as the Catholic Church, that are capable of facilitating access to education and technical training. This assumption can be applied to the majority of women in this study, who for the most part lacked any formal education prior to their entrance into the domestic sector.
In general, Guatemala City’s domestic workers are young, uneducated, indigenous women. They have moved to the capital from a variety of small villages in rural Guatemala. Lacking education or job skills, these women have little choice but to take up residence as a domestic employee. Entrance into the domestic sector is a lonely matter, for these women have few, if any, friends or family members in the nearby vicinity. They often take their first job offer, believing that without an education or work experience, they have no choice. Generally speaking, this is true. The inability to evaluate potential employers puts the domestic worker in an extremely vulnerable position. As this is the case, it comes as no surprise to learn that most of the women in this study report negative experiences with their first employers. Women were frequently disparaged on account of their ethnic identity or lack of education. But the majority of women in this sample have since moved on and presently work for employers deserved of their respect, for they demonstrate a far greater degree of respect for their employees.

That a number of women in this study state they presently work for fair employers and are actively involved in advancing their educational level and number of job skills is key to the formulation of their worldview and our comprehension of it. Analysis of my data on the domestic workers of San Cayetano’s parish reveals that the women in this study represent one of two worldviews. Interestingly, each worldview is derived from a common experience. That is, all of them entered the domestic sector as young, poorly educated women without much job experience. They left their natal villages and moved to the city in hopes of an education and the ability to financially assist their family members. Currently, they all participate in or are seeking avenues to participate in domestic workers’ organizational activities and general education classes. Importantly, they all deeply value fair treatment by
employers. A positive employer-employee relationship is so meaningful that it is often the primary means by which a domestic worker evaluates her occupation.

Whether a woman has a positive or negative experience in the domestic sector is essentially what shapes her worldview. Women who speak positively of their employment experience tend to think of their present lifestyle in terms of its impact on their future. Conversely, women who reflect negatively on their life as a domestic servant avoid speculation about their future. As a generalization, the factors that appear to influence a woman's evaluation of her work experience (and by extension, her worldview) are: length of time employed in the domestic sector, employer-employee relationship, access to basic education and technical training classes, and participation in domestic worker's organization.

All women who report a relatively positive existence in the domestic sector regard the experience as a transitory phase. For them, domestic work is an avenue through which they are afforded the time and money essential to access education and career training. They have all worked as domestics for less than six years and do not anticipate that they will remain in the occupation for much longer. They are all currently enrolled in basic education and/or technical training courses that they consider preparation for the future. The future they envision is far removed from the domestic sector and all are encouraged to strive for a professional career by their friends, relatives, employers, and affiliates from Casa Maria.

Conversely, women who report negative experiences in the domestic sector do not consider the occupation a transitory phase or a means to socioeconomic advancement. These women have either retired from the domestic sector or worked in it for over ten years. Although they too have access to basic education and/or technical training courses and domestic workers' organizations, they do not consider their participation in such activities as
preparation for their future. As a general rule, they avoid speculation about the course of their future. What is especially interesting is that although the majority of these women are members of Casa Maria, an organization allegedly devoted to the socioeconomic advancement and occupational mobility of domestic workers, they typically question the feasibility of such a future. It could be argued that the negative experiences they encountered over the course of their domestic career have significantly altered their initial evaluations of the occupation and aspirations for the occupation’s impact on their future. It is possible that they began their domestic careers with opinions and aspirations similar to the former group of women. Furthermore, both groups of women participate in a future-oriented domestic workers’ organization (i.e. Casa Maria) but only one group shares a future-oriented worldview. Did the second group simply reach a point where they no longer believed such a future was attainable or is there something missing from our analysis of Casa Maria’s goals?

In the previous discussion, where Casa Maria was contrasted with typical lay-religious domestic workers’ organizations, an emphasis was placed on differences between the two. The differences are significant in that unlike the lay-religious organizations reviewed in the literature, Casa Maria does appear to promote the socioeconomic advancement of its members. However, after considering the types of classes and activities offered through Casa Maria, one must question whether the organization is that far off from traditional lay-religious institutions which focus on transmitting an ethic of servitude patterned on a traditional sex/gender ideology. Outside of general education classes, the only technical training provided is in sewing or typing – two tasks commonly considered “women’s work”. Moreover, the general manner in which the ladino personnel speak to the
women is replete with paternalistic tones. This begs the question of Casa Maria’s true objectives.

Although Casa Maria’s participants are encouraged to leave the domestic sector, one must question if they are essentially being trained to accept gender inequality and the associated stereotypical gender roles upon departure. Interview responses suggest this may be the case. All of the women currently pursuing an education are training for traditionally feminine occupations such as teaching, tailoring, and secretarial work. Only Maricela expressed an interest in a non-traditional career, stating that she often aspires to be a lawyer. Further comments by Maricela suggest that this is where her heart is; however even she believes such is not her destiny and she will instead pursue her other career choice – a teaching career in special education.

As a final consideration, we are left to ponder whether Casa Maria is in fact just another instrument by which elite women maintain their privileged status in society. Safa (1976) believed the existence of the patron-client relationship that marks the domestic sector, whereby one woman is placed in a subordinate relationship to another, makes it nearly impossible for the subjugated group to develop the class-consciousness necessary to effectively alter its position. It could be argued that although Casa Maria’s primarily ladino personnel are encouraging domestic workers to seek employment outside of the domestic sector, they are merely promoting the replacement of domestic labor with similarly devalued “women’s work”, thus ensuring their elite status as ladino women working in non-traditional professional careers.
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