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**CHILDHOODS IN PLACE AND PLACELESS CHILDHOODS:
AN HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHY OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN YORKVILLE AND EAST
HARLEM, 1940 – 2000**

by

PAMELA J. WRIDT

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in
Psychology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of
New York-Graduate Center

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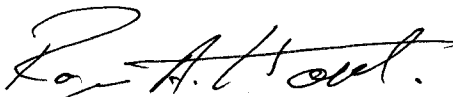
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APPROVAL PAGE

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THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

ABSTRACT**CHILDHOODS IN PLACE AND PLACELESS CHILDHOODS:
AN HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHY OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN YORKVILLE AND EAST
HARLEM, 1940 – 2000**

by

PAMELA J. WRIDT

Advisor: Professor Roger Hart

This dissertation provides an analysis of how young people's everyday lives outside of school in Yorkville and East Harlem have changed from the 1940s until present time, and what factors contribute to consistencies or differences in young people's use and experience of their local environment. This research seeks to contribute to the limited academic literature on the historical geography of childhood in urban communities. The focus of this investigation is upon the period of middle childhood (roughly the period of childhood between ages 11 and 13), a time when most young people are able to actively and autonomously explore their communities. The emphasis of the research is on changes in *children's geographies*, or how children use, think about, and make sense of place in their everyday life. I compare children's geographies over three different time periods: 1) the 1940s, working with seniors in their 60s and 70s; 2)

the 1970s, working with adults in their 30s; and 3) present time (2000s), working with young people aged 11-13. Topics explored in the research include young people's sense of place, their interactions with peers and adults in the community, their leisure time activities, their use of public space and their geographic territories.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation is dedicated to my father, Thomas Alfred Wridt (1942-2003), in loving memory of his spirit for community and for place, and for making me aware of how important these two interrelated concepts are in our everyday life and existence as human beings who are curious about, and want to change the world we live in.

An intellectual stranger whom I met at a bar in Vienna in December of 2003 told me that I possessed “an engine.” What he meant by this became clearer over pints of beer and good conversation that had no point but good conversation, the kind that can only be had by strangers. This stranger, whom I’ll name as Azwar, meant that I had a passion for “something” that got me out of bed everyday – it was something that he envied and had lost over the course of his life. This “something” he picked up on in the course of two hours was my passion for understanding people and their relationship to place. Ever since I can remember, and largely influence by my father, I have been curious about different cultures, lifestyles, environments and places. Why I have been interested in them has only become clearer in the course of writing this dissertation. That is, how are people connected to a place, what do they embody from it and what do they offer to a place that defines them? How do people answer the question, “where are you from?”

These are just a few of the many questions driving my dissertation and the people whom I’ve written about. Their answers are as complex as the world around us, but are as simple as talking to strangers such as Azwar – people need “an engine,” something to wake them out of bed every day and keep their curiosity about the world going. Who possesses “an engine” and who does not is in many ways what this dissertation is about.

Many people over the course of my lifetime and of this dissertation deserve credit in sparking this curiosity, in giving me this “engine” in life.

First and foremost I must mention my father, Thomas Alfred Wridt, in sparking my curiosity about the world. I can think of no other single individual who has had such an impact on my knowledge and experience of place. From an early age he exposed me to different cultures and peoples. One such early encounter I remember was with a French family when I was 10 years old. He had to welcome a family from France on business and chose to include me on the adventure. I remember meeting a 10 year old French girl, a relative of his business family, and what was most striking was our ability to communicate despite not knowing each other’s languages. Somehow, somehow we *talked* to each other, via gestures, nods, smiles and laughter. Despite our language barrier we connected on a human level, something that 10 year olds are adept at. This is just one of the many examples I experienced of different peoples and places, all of which are attributed to my father’s ability to arouse a sense of curiosity within me. This is his legacy – not only within me, but within others he met and knew in the course of his lifetime.

Of course other family members have had an enormous impact on my life and on this dissertation – my brothers Mike and Mark, Aunt Marie, Uncle Brad, grandpa Wridt to name a few. My mother, in particular, has been a source of never ending support – emotionally, financially and spiritually. Without her solid support I could have never gone on for a doctorate degree, nor finished it. She is a rock and I thank her deeply for it. I can think of no stronger woman than my mother. She raised three children on her own with little, if no financial support and educational background, and went from being a

“stay-at-home mom” to a “working mom” of three different jobs when my parents were divorced in the late 1970s, rising to a corporate success in the information technology field in the 1990s, largely self taught. I come from a long legacy of strong, intelligent individuals and she exemplifies this.

My grandmothers played an equal role in my development. Grandma Novak, my mother’s mom, encouraged me to be an educator and housed me in her apartment when I was a student teacher. She woke up every day and made me coffee and listened astutely to my concerns as a budding educator. She gave me advice about students and faculty I interacted with, and taught me to never compromise my feelings about what I felt was right and wrong. She always said, “You work so hard and you mean well, someone, someday will recognize that.” My other grandma, Grandma Wridt, is also a never ending support in my life. She is always full of wise words, but when told of her wisdom would only reply, “Is it wisdom or just logic?” She taught me how to enjoy life and to not take any moment for granted. Lucky for me, she taught herself computers and email when she was 85 years old which enabled me to communicate with her from far distances. She has the eyes of my father – stern and wise and yet calm. She is one of the few people who read drafts of my dissertation chapters and offered insightful comments that I respect and admire. Despite what she says, she is wise.

From a professional prospective, many people have influenced my work and my thinking over the course of my academic development. These include a long list of friends (too many to list, but you know who you are!) who generously gave their time to read my work, to offer critical advise and to engage in spontaneous, intellectually stimulating conversations. I wish to acknowledge the important role of Ivonne Torres,

for without her I would have conducted my dissertation research in a foreign location rather than in New York City. Ivonne is the driving force behind this dissertation. What you read embodies her spirit as much as mine. It was Ivonne that suggested I conduct my research in collaboration with the Isaacs Center, in part, because she was so fascinated by the history of her own community, but more importantly, because she recognized the potential of my research to inform her practices with young people at the community center. Ivonne spent countless hours providing social and intellectual support in the form of housing, community organizing, helping to locate interviewees, participating on panel discussions I organized, attending meetings with my professors and many, many other activities. This dissertation is for you too Ivonne. Thank you for your friendship, your social consciousness and for your intellect.

The Isaacs Center and its employees (which includes Ivonne) were characteristically supportive of my dissertation research. I say “characteristically” because the Isaacs Center’s employees and the programs they run are indicative of my dissertation research – doing something that has social relevance, impacting the lives of young and old in the community, opening doors to people who exhibit a caring attitude, impacting urban social policy, and so on. I wish to acknowledge my deepest gratitude to Wanda Wooten, the Executive Director for her tireless support of my research, and to many other employees of the Isaacs Center, including, Walter, Celeste, Lordes, Danny, Liz, Danielle, Crystal, Isabelle, Rickie, Marilyn, Laura, Flo, the women of the Community Action Network and participants of the Youth Management Team, all of whom opened their hearts and minds to me, gave me sound advice and participated in my research, made me laugh and considered me their friend (as I theirs).

My advisor, Roger Hart, as well as committee members Cindi Katz and Bill Kornblum, deserve recognition for their intellectual, emotional, professional and social support. I came to the CUNY-Graduate Center in 1999 not knowing what to expect and in them found a treasure chest of intellect. I am forever indebted to all of my committee members and outside readers Rickie Sanders and Gerald Handel for their willingness to provide mentorship on my dissertation, and for their diligence, guidance and wealth of knowledge in seeing me through the process.

I'd like to thank those individuals, associations and organizations that supported this research financially. These awards included: the Association of American Geographers Dissertation Research Fellowship, the Raimondo Institute for Urban Research and Public Policy Dissertation Fellowship, the Harold M. Proshansky Dissertation Fellowship of the City University of New York-Graduate Center, and the Kenneth B. and Mamie Phipps Clark Fellowship of the City University of New York-Graduate Center.

Finally and most importantly, I'd like to thank all of the people I met and interviewed for my dissertation research. It is the level of trust that I built with individuals in the community that enabled me to enter their lives and for them to enter into mine. With this trust comes the awesome responsibility of accurately representing their viewpoints, attitudes and experiences. I had such a good time getting to know you and spending time with you recounting your childhood memories and I hope you feel I accurately portrayed your feelings, experiences and ideas. I will never forget any of you. A big special shout out to True, the most priceless individual I met during my research. You are truly a special person, someone who will always hold a unique place in my heart.

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Introduction

Communicate across memories, because yesterday is gone.

☼ Keziah Jones, Black Orpheus

It's a pleasant spring day in early June, the kind that reminds you that summer is on the way. The sun kisses my cheek as it prepares to set behind the towering canyons of luxury apartment buildings that appear luminescent in the light. It's five o'clock in the evening and it's not too hot for me to sit outside on a bench in front of the Stanley M. Isaacs Neighborhood Center. I've arrived at the center earlier than I usually do when I teach computers to teens on Monday and Wednesday nights. Residents of the Isaacs Houses/Holmes Towers are invigorated by the weather, as I am, and have taken time to sit with their neighbors on copal blue steel benches that are scattered throughout the public housing development. I've come here to watch people and to be watched, to participate in a favorite pastime for New Yorkers.

Directly in front of me in the parking lot are three middle-aged men washing and waxing a tan Ford Explorer that is blaring their favorite Spanish tunes. A racially diverse group of teenage boys and girls are sitting on a circular cement wall that encases a 20-foot tall maple tree sprouting new leaves. Two boys share a set of headphones attached to a portable CD player and are bopping their heads in a methodical rhythm. Their seemingly choreographed groove is momentarily interrupted as their attention turns to a young teenage girl passing by. Pigeons coo around my feet, their pitter patter competing with the noise of large trucks that frequently make their way down First Avenue. I notice a Puerto Rican flag blowing from a window on the 24th floor of building 419. Watching it makes me aware of the light breeze and the fishy smell of the East River that it carries

with it across the Franklin D. Roosevelt Drive. I don't feel out of place. I could be the grand daughter of an elderly woman sitting next to me on the bench, who is speaking what sounds like Hungarian to a man in a wheel chair. It occurs to me that I've become attached to this place while working on my dissertation over the last three years.

I was first introduced to the community of the Isaacs Houses/Holmes Towers in 1999 (referred to by residents as "the Isaacs"), when I was hired to evaluate an after school program run by its community center, the Stanley M. Isaacs Neighborhood Center (known to participants and employees as "the Center"). I didn't know then that I would continue to return to this place in order to document the changing experiences of young people who grew up in and around this public housing development since the 1940s. This dissertation is focused on a community of over 6,000 people nestled in-between the contrasting neighborhoods of Yorkville and East Harlem on Manhattan's east side. It is a story about how young people and adults struggle over the meaning of public life, their sense of identity with place, and their participation in the creation of a community layered with economic and cultural uncertainties that are largely out of their control.

This dissertation is first and foremost an analysis of how young people's everyday lives outside of school have changed or stayed the same over time, and what factors contribute to these consistencies or differences. Remarkably, very little is known about young people's everyday lives out of school in urban communities such as Yorkville and East Harlem, particularly from an historical perspective. Enormous changes have occurred within the social, economic and cultural fabric of these neighborhoods over the last century, changes that are witnessed in other urban communities in the developed world, and which have an enormous impact on the experience of childhood.

For example, the process of gentrification has slowly transformed the community demographics and character of these neighborhoods, and has resulted in the displacement of working class populations by middle class and upper income families. The invention of television and other digital mediums of entertainment have lured many children (and adults) off the streets and into their homes for playtime and leisure activities, contributing to the diminished presence of children in public space. In addition, social and economic challenges such as the racial riots of the 1960s, increased drug trafficking and crime in the 1980s, and the globalization of goods and services in the 1990s have all created different contexts for living and learning in these communities. However, these changes are not well documented for their impact on the meaning and spatial behaviors of children or the meaning of childhood.

This research seeks to contribute to limited academic literature on the historical geography of childhood in urban communities (of notable exception is the work of (Gaster, 1991) and (Handel, 1984), whose work considers spatial/geographical aspects of changes in young people's use of their local environment). This dissertation focuses upon the period of late childhood (roughly the period of childhood between ages 11 and 13), a time when most young people are able to actively and autonomously explore their communities. The emphasis of the research is on changes in *children's geographies*, or how children use, think about, and make sense of place in their everyday life. I compare children's geographies over three different time periods: 1) the 1940s, working with seniors in their 60s and 70s; 2) the 1970s, working with adults in their 30s; and 3) present time (2000s), working with young people aged 11-13. Of paramount importance to this research are how children's geographies changed over time, and what these changes

mean for the well being of children and of society in general. The experience of young people is an informative indicator of our society's well being. For example, the extent to which young people can play autonomously or congregate in public spaces such as parks and the streets is a direct reflection of the importance to which we attach to these experiences as a society.

This dissertation is also about the changing nature and meaning of place. The neighborhoods of Yorkville and East Harlem are as much a subject of the research as are the young people who grew up there. Primarily, I am interested in how places in urban areas exhibit processes of development and/or disinvestment and what social mechanisms influence these changes. These changes are analyzed in conjunction with how young people develop a relationship to place and a public lifestyle that promotes a sense of belonging, identity and attachment to a particular community, and furthermore, how these relationships transfer into adulthood. According to the cultural geographer, Relph, the most pressing concern modern man faces in the 20th and 21st century is the destruction of a sense of place, what he and others consider a fundamental need of the human condition (Jacobs, 1992 [1961]; Mead, 1984; Relph, 1976). Relph refers to this process as *placelessness*, which he describes as “both an environment without significant places and the underlying attitude which does not acknowledge significance in places. At its most profound level it consists of a pervasive and perhaps irreversible alienation from places as the homes of men” (Relph, 1976, p. 143).

As early as 1976, in his book entitled *Place and Placelessness*, Relph considered placelessness a dominant force in the developed world, but more importantly, that placelessness had the potential to seriously alter the human psyche and condition. For

instance, through processes of gentrification and urban renewal, the character, symbolic and personal meaning of a landscape is dramatically altered, therefore threatening an individual's attachment to place because they become increasingly alienated from their home and from their sense of place in the world.

Even though there are signs in our everyday life that these changes are happening, it is important for us to learn what factors influence the resilience of communities and the maintenance of a sense of place to understand the importance of the local in the everyday psyche of individuals in a postmodern, globalizing world (Harvey, 1990). Residents, particularly adults, continually struggle to make meaning of their world, and oftentimes project their loss of a sense of place, e.g., the loss of a place important in their childhood, onto other social actors and institutions. In other words, as society changes and as those changes are reflected in the physical and social landscape of a particular community, individuals and groups need to blame someone or something for what they deem to be a profound loss of emotional attachment to place and to other people. As Tuan writes:

In general, we may say that whenever a person (young or old) feels that the world is changing too rapidly, his characteristic response is to evoke an idealized and stable past. On the other hand, when a person feels that he himself is directing the change and in control of affairs of importance to him, then nostalgia has no place in his life: action rather than mementos of the past will support his sense of identity (Tuan, 1977, p. 188).

While older adults tend to feel they have no control over changes in their environment, young people are not as psychologically entrenched into such a place-based pathology because they have not experienced extreme changes in their local environment and social structures. As a result, young people rely on their everyday actions, as opposed to memory, to guide their experience with place, and as such, nostalgia does not play a significant role in their environmental perceptions. Who is in control of creating

and destroying a sense of a person's identity with place? What makes a place unique and important to individuals? How do young people develop relationships in and with a place, and how do these emotional relationships with place transcend into adulthood affections or attachments? Place attachment, or knowing *where* you are from and *why* it is important to you (Altman & Low, 1992), is an important element to building a constituency that lives historically and geographically conscious of their surroundings (Chawla, 1992; Hart, 1997; Hart, 2000; Jacobs, 1992 [1961]). This is no doubt a fundamental building block to a larger geo-political consciousness. If, as Relph suggests, our fundamental relationship to place is eroding, does this also mean that our sense of the larger world in which we live, or our empathetic sensibilities and the importance we attach to those bodies of knowledge and emotions are also vanishing?

In order to explore these questions, this dissertation investigates how young people develop a sense of place and of community, and studies this phenomenon over time and space. This process requires an analysis of three interrelated factors: 1) how society constructs the experience of childhood in a particular place and time, 2) how these constructs are reflected in the quality and nature of childhood spaces over time, and 3) how young people's lived experiences in a place have changed over time. More specific questions addressed in this dissertation include the following:

1. How has the *meaning of childhood* changed over time and how have adult-child, child-child, child-community relations changed over time? What factors (social, political, economic) have contributed to changes in children's relations with the community, the social construction of childhood and children's imagery and sense of community and place?
2. How have the *distribution, quality and nature of childhood environments* changed over time and space? What factors (social, political, economic) have contributed to changes in childhood environments and what are the implications of these changes for children's well being and societal well being?

3. How has *children's territorial range, leisure time activities, use of the environment and experience of place* changed over time? What issues (such as gender, class, race, and physical hazards) are factors in children's territorial range and place use, and how have these factors and their significance changed over time? Have children challenged restrictions on their ability to explore space and experience place? How? Has this relationship changed over time and space?

In exploring these questions, it is important to be clear about certain terms and concepts that I will be using throughout the dissertation. The first is the concept of *childhood*. As we will see, childhood is a socially constructed concept and one that has been debated in the literature without resolution. In this dissertation, I use *childhood* to refer to a period in the lifecourse when an individual is 18 years or younger (although I generally believe that childhood now extends well beyond this age). It is sometimes important to distinguish between differences within the period of childhood, and as such, I use the terms *children* (younger ages of childhood) and *youth* (older ages of childhood) to make such distinctions. When I want to speak of the study population of this dissertation (ages 11-13), I generally employ the term *young people* to describe their experiences. Similarly, the term *children's geographies* is used in a general sense to refer to the range of environmental experiences an individual encounters during the entire period of childhood.

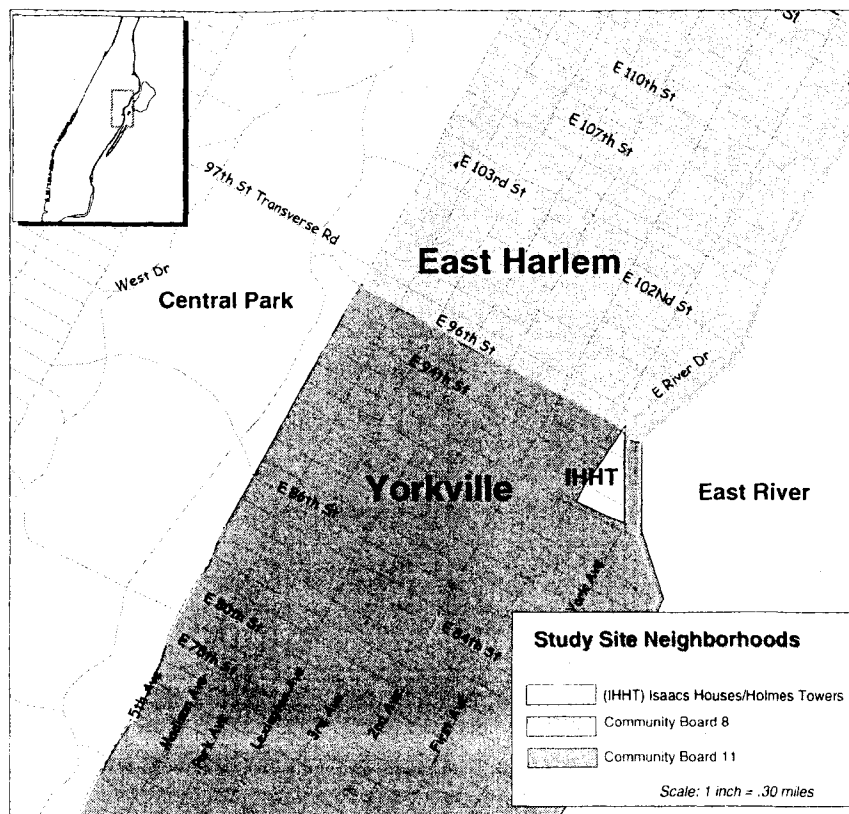
Because this dissertation is a community study, it is important to be clear of what I mean by the concepts of *community* and *neighborhood*. These terms have also been debated within the literature without much resolution in their overall meaning. Although I recognize that communities are not necessarily bound by place, I use the term *community* and *neighborhood* interchangeably to refer to my study population. Generally speaking, when I want to emphasize social characteristics of my study site I employ the

term *community*. When I want to discuss more explicitly the geographic territory or physical qualities of the place in question, I employ the term *neighborhood*.

Setting of the research

This dissertation draws upon a long established tradition of community studies in the field of sociology and anthropology, and of a large body of literature on children's geographies within the field of geography and environmental psychology (all of which are reviewed throughout this dissertation). This literature suggests that in order to understand changes in childhood over space and time, it is necessary to confine the research to a specific community, site or case study. A case study necessitates that the research occur within a bounded geographic and cultural context in order to examine, in depth, a particular process – in this instance, changes in childhood in relation to place. For the purposes of this case study, the geographic and cultural context of the community is recognized as the immediate environs (roughly 20 blocks) of the Isaacs public housing development (Figure 1). The Isaacs is situated in-between the contrasting neighborhoods of Yorkville and East Harlem in Manhattan of New York City. Located on 93rd Street and First Avenue, the Isaacs community is wedged in a hybrid environment of contrasting cultures, races, and classes that are represented by the neighborhoods of Yorkville and East Harlem, of which 96th Street is the geographic, cultural and symbolic border (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Research study site area



According to the New York City Department of City Planning, *Community District Profiles* (www.nyc.gov, 2004), Community District 8, or the area in which Yorkville residents live, 2.9 percent of the population receives public assistance (2001 data). In contrast, Community District 11, or the area comprising East Harlem, 36.3 percent of the population receives public assistance (2001 data). In District 8, 87 percent of the population is white, non-Hispanic, while in District 11, over 52 percent of the population is of Hispanic origin, and almost 36 percent of the population is African American (2000 data). In District 8, almost 90 percent of the population is over the age

of 18, while in District 11 roughly 30 percent of the population is under the age of 18 (2000 data).

As these community board statistics suggest, the border between Yorkville and East Harlem is one of the most economically distinct in all of New York City – the wealthiest and poorest of its residents live side by side, with differences in median household income of \$60,000+ and differences in median family income of \$100,000+ from one side of the street to the next (US Census, 2000). The socio-cultural worlds of each neighborhood are equally distinct. Today Yorkville is a predominantly white, middle to upper income community that has been gentrified in the last 20 years from its former status as a working class Irish, German, Italian, Hungarian and Austrian neighborhood (US Census, 1940-2000). By contrast, East Harlem once housed primarily poor Southern Italians, Russian Jews, African Americans and the Irish in the 1940s, but today is populated by working class Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, Dominicans, African Americans, Chinese, and Ecuadorians (US Census, 1940-2000). Gentrification, urban renewal and the creation of public housing in the 1950s and 1960s have significantly transformed the physical and social landscape of both communities over time.

Given the sweeping social, cultural and physical changes to the places of Yorkville and East Harlem, the unique location of the Isaacs clearly makes it an important community setting and case study to compare changes in childhood over time and space (see Chapter 2, *A tale of two neighborhoods*, for an in depth analysis of each neighborhood's history).

Childhood, place and time

The literature reviewed for this dissertation attempts to demonstrate how space and childhood are interconnected and co-produced in everyday life. Children's negotiations with adults and with society create a complex network of opportunities and constraints that affect children's access to qualitatively important spaces, places, and social experiences. Gender, culture, class and race are just a few of the many lenses through which children must negotiate society and space. Of particular importance to this dissertation are how children's geographies have changed over time and how these changes affect the quality of young people's leisure activities and places, their relations with each other and with adult society, and their sense of community. This discussion is clearly lacking in the existing literature, while the implications for children's well being and for societal well being are of paramount concern.

Scholars suggest that questions of children's *access* to places and the *quality* of these places are very important to their health, learning and social, emotional, spiritual and moral well being. For example, researchers have indicated the importance of a child's access to a safe, diverse play environment (Bunge & Bordessa, 1975; Hart, 1979; Lynch, 1973, 1979; Moore, 1990) and to public space (Bartlett et al., 1999) for developing social and cultural competence (Mead, 1984; Newson & Newson, 1968; Whiting & Child, 1953; Williams & Kornblum, 1994). A loss of exposure to a range of environments, particularly natural settings may have negative impacts on a child's stewardship of the natural environment (Nabhan & Trimble, 1994; Wals, 1994). Similarly, the loss of free contact with a culturally diverse social world in public space can influence a child's sense of membership in civil society (Katz, 1994). Young people

who experience a range of social settings are more able to interact and understand cultural codes or norms of a given society (Mead, 1984; Mitchell, 1991; Williams & Kornblum, 1994).

Unfortunately, we really do not know much about the impacts of changes of society on children, and yet, at the same time, this is a topic that many individuals and the popular press speculate about continually. While we do not know much about how changes in childhood affect society, this topic is discussed less often in everyday discourse. Scholars have hypothesized about changes in children's geographies, but there is a clear lack of systematic research to verify these speculations. For example, in the literature reviewed here, researchers have suggested that childhood is retreating indoors due to an increase in technological forms of entertainment such as the television and computer (Katz, 1998; Medrich et al., 1982; Valentine & Holloway, 2001). Some have suggested that children's access to public space has diminished over time, given that there is a general trend of disinvestment in public space (Gaster, 1991; Katz, 1998). There is speculation that childhood itself is eroding, as children are subject to increasing levels of information through television and mass media and other demands that place pressure on their leisure time (Postman, 1994). If children are becoming more spatially restricted in their activities, how does this affect their relations with peers and with adults? If children are spending more time indoors, how does this affect their sense of community? Clearly there is much more to learn about children's geographies, how they have changed or remained consistent over time, and what these experiences mean for the well being of children and of society in general.

The social construction of childhood

Childhood is a socially constructed concept, one that has taken on many forms throughout time and space and has had serious implications in the education, participation, development and rights of children. Philip Ariès was the first to suggest that the concept of childhood was a 'modern invention' because it did not exist during the Middle Ages, a period when children were considered to be more like 'miniature adults' (Ariès, 1962). The contemporary concept of childhood, he argues, did not appear until the 17th century, when young people were first expected to attend school in order to become literate, and parents of privileged groups were expected to help better the lives of their children. Subsequently, the concept of childhood referred to by Ariès, can be considered one outcome of modernity, when transformations in technology and the means of production created new conditions of living and learning (Harvey, 1990). As we enter the 21st century and are living in the era of what some have termed "postmodernity" (Harvey, 1990), perhaps we may be returning to a period in which childhood no longer seems to be a well defined social category (Postman, 1994).

Recognition that childhood is a socially constructed phenomenon has been changing theory and research in academia. Embedded within the texts that study children's lives are tacit conceptions of what childhood is and means. For example, within developmental psychology, children have historically been considered less capable cognitively than adults and in a 'state of becoming' more adult-like in their behaviors and social relations (Corsaro, 1997; James et al., 1998; James & Prout, 1995; Jenks, 1996; Valentine, 1996). This conception of childhood is grounded in theories of the universality of childhood experience, of a 'natural child', and has led to the biological classification of children based on age, behavior, cognitive abilities, and a linear process

of development. Such perspectives on childhood are often critiqued by sociologists and geographers because of their naturalizing and placeless discourse (Aitken, 1994; Holloway & Valentine, 2000; James et al., 1998), but they fail to recognize that new theory in developmental psychology has been replacing this thinking gradually over the past two decades, recognizing the contextual and cultural nature of development (Cole, 2001).

Within the discipline of sociology, critics lament that socialization theories imply that the child's role is to internalize social rules and shared knowledge, and if the child fails, he/she can be construed as socially deviant and a threat to the moral order of society (Corsaro, 1997; James et al., 1998; James & Prout, 1995; Jenks, 1996; Valentine, 1996). Children are considered either 'angels,' in need of protection, and 'innocent'; and/or 'devils,' representing 'evil,' or individuals with a soul in need of salvation. Such critiques advanced by Valentine (1996) and others, are based largely on the work of Durkheim and Parsons and are grounded in the concept of 'the moral child,' of conformity and preservation of the status quo, social relations and values, and emphasize what children 'lack' in their state of becoming 'moral' or an adult (Jenks, 1996). In other words, the child is viewed as a socialization failure if they do not develop the capacity to achieve socially determined outcomes, even if there are convergent expectations (Elkin & Handel, 1960 [1989]).

Such critiques ignore the *symbolic interactionist* approach to socialization theory advanced primarily by George Herbert Mead and Charles Horton Cooley in the early 1900s, in which the process of socialization is considered to be a dynamic interaction between the individual (I) and the social (me) (Cooley, 1902; Mead, 1934). In the

development of the self, a child is constantly incorporating the attitudes and behaviors of others (me) (such as through language and role playing) and makes them his/her own (I) (summarized in Handel, 1988). While the child's initial ideas of him/her self represent what others tell him/her about who he/she is, eventually the child is able to think reflexively and imagine what others think of him/her, what Cooley refers to as the *looking-glass self*. In such an approach, significant others such as family members and peers represent important role models in a child's development and regulation of the self (with some debate about the relative importance of peers and family members in the socialization process) (Hess & Handel, 1959; Adler & Adler, 1998; Corsaro & Rizzo, 1990; Handel, 1990). In relation to our viewpoints about childhood, in this approach, the child is viewed as actively constructing the self (their representation of the identity and being they choose to communicate to others) in relation to the other (Elkin & Handel, 1989).

Some scholars have asserted that childhood is a structural form (a category or structure that is interconnected with other structures of society like class and race), and that children should be considered active agents who are capable of subverting, transforming or reproducing their identity within this structure (Corsaro, 1997; James & Prout, 1995). Agency in this sense refers not to the intentions an individual has in changing things, but their capability of creating change, which is obviously tied to relations of power within society, and in this case of children's lives, what some term an 'adult hegemony' (Holloway & Valentine, 2000; Valentine, 1996). Considering children as active agents is a way to redress adult assumptions about childhood and to give voice to children in matters that concern them (Hart, 1997). This perspective of childhood can

be witnessed in debates about children's rights as exemplified in the United Nation's *Convention on the Rights of Child*, which stresses the agency of children, by considering their participation in matters that concern them as a basic right of their existence (Bartlett et al., 1999; Boyden & Ennew, 1997; Hart, 1997; Matthews et al., 1997; Percy-Smith, 2000). One outcome of this discourse has been a shift in ideology towards childhood, one that complicates adult-child relations and challenges adult hegemony. In other words, because young people are considered to be capable agents, in practice the power or agency of the adult is balanced by the viewpoints of young people in the decision making process.

Scholars of diverse fields such as feminist studies, sociology and geography have also complicated debates about the meaning of childhood, by suggesting that conceptions of childhood cannot be divorced from other variables such as class, gender, ethnicity or nationality (Chisholm et al., 1990; Hart, 1979; Katz, 1993; Valentine, 1996). Similarly, scholars argue that age – like class, gender and race – is an important lens through which individuals experience social reality and place (Corsaro, 1997; James et al., 1998). The importance of social variables (class, gender, and race) in children's socialization is not a new concept. For example, there are important ground-breaking contributions by numerous researchers in the early- and mid-20th century on how class and race impacts parenting norms and children's development of the self (Bronfenbrenner, 1958; Davis & Dollard, 1940; Schulz, 1969; Warner et al., 1944). These arguments are grounded in assumptions of *otherness* and a questioning of the validity of meta-narratives (although one could argue that children are not *other* in the sense that other-other relationships between adults and children are not quite the same as that of black-white, because adults

have a responsibility to socialize children, and because children ultimately become adults). Sometimes referred to as a 'cultural turn,' these theories focused on identity and difference, to move toward a non-essentialist conception of childhood (Holloway & Valentine, 2000). Research has stressed children's agency in the (re) production of culture, resulting in multiple childhood micro-cultures that represent different variations in social relations according to age, gender, race, and class (Chisholm et al., 1990; Percy-Smith, 2000; Qvortrup et al., 1994; Skelton & Valentine, 1998).

While it is important to recognize that the diverse constructions of childhood have changed with time and with larger socio-economic and political changes within society, it is equally important to stress that *all* of these constructs are still witnessed in the everyday interactions of children and adults. These social constructs are more fluid and overlapping than they are destructive and subsuming of one another. While institutions may appear to represent a prevailing conception of childhood and of children as witnessed in their policies and practices, I would argue these constructs are not easily or consistently enacted in the practice of everyday life. It is more likely that adult-child interactions represent diverse constructs of childhood depending upon the situation and context at a particular moment and place in time. This notion is not well discussed in the literature.

Related to this observation is the apparent universalization of the 'adult' in the discourse about the social construction of childhood. It is ironic that in discussing childhood as 'other' that theorists would fail to recognize the complexity of adult identities. As a general observation, 'adults' are used as a surrogate for 'society' in the literature about the social construction of childhood, rather than as a set of diverse groups

or individuals who may not represent the dominant views of society. This adult-child binary distinction impedes a discussion of other avenues for the social construction of childhood, such as those witnessed among children and the elderly and children and their peers.

For the purposes of this dissertation, it is important to recognize that conceptions of childhood manifest themselves in many forms, including policies about environmental design and a myriad of spatial relations and practices embodied in a particular landscape. How children perceive, experience and imagine space is directly related to the production and control of space and societal conceptions of childhood. This process can be witnessed in children's geographies and is the guiding theoretical framework for this dissertation.

Spatializing childhood

Social structures cannot be analyzed without consideration of spatial structures and vice versa (Gregory, 1994; Harvey, 1990; Lefebvre, 1991; Soja, 1989, 1996). Therefore, the production of childhood environments and children's experience and image of space must be analyzed in relation to societal expectations and constructs of childhood. As Soja suggests,

Once it becomes accepted that the organization of space is a social product – that it arises from purposeful social practice – then there is no longer a question of its being a separate structure with rules of construction and transformation that are independent from the wider social framework (Soja, 1989).

Based on this assumption, this dissertation will explore the theoretical links between child-society relations, time and the production of space. The interaction of these variables shapes children's experience and image of space, or their personal geographies.

The correlation between social relations and the production of space is largely attributed to the work of Henri Lefebvre. In his seminal book, *The Production of Space* (1991), Lefebvre's argues that physical and mental space cannot be separate entities, but rather can only be discussed in relational or dialectic terms – or that of a socially produced space. Lefebvre asserts that space is a product of the dominant social relations of a particular society, and subsequently, the means of production and reproduction. He outlines three dimensions of space that can be viewed as interconnected, non-static, and dialectic – spatial practice (built environment), representations of space (landscape meaning), and spaces of representation (lived spaces) (Table 1). According to Harvey, “he regards the dialectical relations between them as the fulcrum of a dramatic tension through which the history of spatial practices can be read” (Harvey, 1990, p. 219).

Therefore, Lefebvre's thesis is designed to analyze the historical evolution of space in accordance with larger socio-economic transformations in society, while at the same time recognizing the important potential of everyday social practices in influencing the production of space. Soja argues that Lefebvre's work really reflects a “trialectical” understanding of “space-time-being,” what he terms Firstspace (real space), Secondspace (imagined space), and Thirdspace (real-and-imagined space) (Table 1). Soja's “trialectics of spatiality” provides an epistemological critique of the binary ordering of difference and of space, by not privileging “real” space over “imagined” space, but to open the door to “other spaces” that reflect both the real and the imagined simultaneously.

Table 1: Children's geographies as socio-spatial-historical process

Lefebvre's Production of Space	Soja's Trialectics of Spatiality	Children's Geographies
Spatial Practice (Perceived Space, Built Environment) – represents those aspects of the physical and material space that foster the reproduction of social relations. Includes any practice that promotes the flow of goods, money, people, power, labor, information, etc., such as the use of land/zoning, infrastructures and the administrative division of space.	Firstspace (Real Space) – The objectivity of the built environment, a formal science of space, or as an empirical text that can be read. Human spatiality is viewed as an outcome or product.	Spaces of Childhood – What is the quality, distribution and nature of childhood spaces? How do childhood spaces relate to the needs of adults rather than the needs of children and vice versa? What other spaces are important to children's lives even if they were not built with children in mind?
Representations of Space (Conceived Space, Landscape Meaning) – represents the constellation of codes, signs and knowledge that allow such material practices to be known in lay terms and is controlled by the domain of professionals and institutions and those who have knowledge to assert power over the production of space. Includes social and psychological dimensions of 'reading' space, e.g., personal space, mental maps, and symbolic space.	Secondspace (Imagined Space) – The subjective experience of space, human spatial cognition, symbolic space, of a socially constructed meaning of space.	Representations of Childhood (Social Constructions of Childhood) – How are representations of children and youth inscribed on the landscape? How do planners make decisions about childhood environment? How do children and youth experience and make sense of space?
Spaces of Representation (Lived Space, Spaces of Resistance) – represents memories and images of lived space by the space of inhabitants or users. Includes mental images of utopian and imaginary spaces that could bring new meaning to spatial practices, e.g., spaces of fear, spaces of ritual, utopian landscapes, mythologies of space, spaces of desire.	Thirdspace (Real-and-Imagined Space) – A creative combination of a Firstspace perspective that is focused on the "real" material world and a Secondspace perspective that interprets this reality through "imagined" representations of spatiality. Includes "counterspaces," spaces of resistance to the dominant order.	Children's Lived Spaces – How do young people subvert those representations by imagining and producing new spaces to suit their needs? How are these forms of resistance interpreted by society (children as devils, agents, angels)? How do young people negotiate the social, physical and psychological factors that shape their spatial practices?

Adopted from (Harvey, 1990; Lefebvre, 1991; Soja, 1996)

Both Lefebvre and Soja consider how space becomes imbued with meaning and representative of social relations, while at the same time providing an avenue for new meanings of space to be created and realized in material form. It is in the lived space or

Thirdspace that individuals can contest and transform dominant social relations, one in which space is a medium, catalyst and agent of change.

There is an implied preference in all of Lefebvre's (and my) spatial trialectics and thirdings that derives not from ontological privilege or priority but from that political choice that is so central to Lefebvre's spatial imagination. It is a political choice, the impetus of an explicit political project, that gives special attention and particular contemporary relevance to the spaces of representation, to lived spaces as a strategic location from which to encompass, understand, and potentially transform all spaces simultaneously (Soja, 1996, p. 68).

As Soja also suggests,

We must be insistently aware of how space can be made to hide consequences from us, how relations of power and discipline are inscribed into the apparently innocent spatiality of social life, how human geographies become filled with politics and ideology (Soja 1989, p. 6).

This is particularly important when analyzing childhood environments, which often mask child-adult power relations, or what some term, "adult spatial hegemony" (Holloway & Valentine, 2000).

The production of space outline by Lefebvre and Soja provides a framework for understanding the evolution of childhood environments, and children's negotiations of space and of society (Table 1). According to this theoretical framework, one could begin to speculate how the production of space is related to the quality and nature of childhood environments (spaces of childhood), how social constructions of children and youth are inscribed on the landscape (representations of childhood), and how young people subvert those representations by imagining and producing new spaces to suit their needs (children's lived spaces) (Table 1).

One could ask questions about the proportion of the built environment devoted to the needs of adults, rather than children, to help maintain the relations of production and

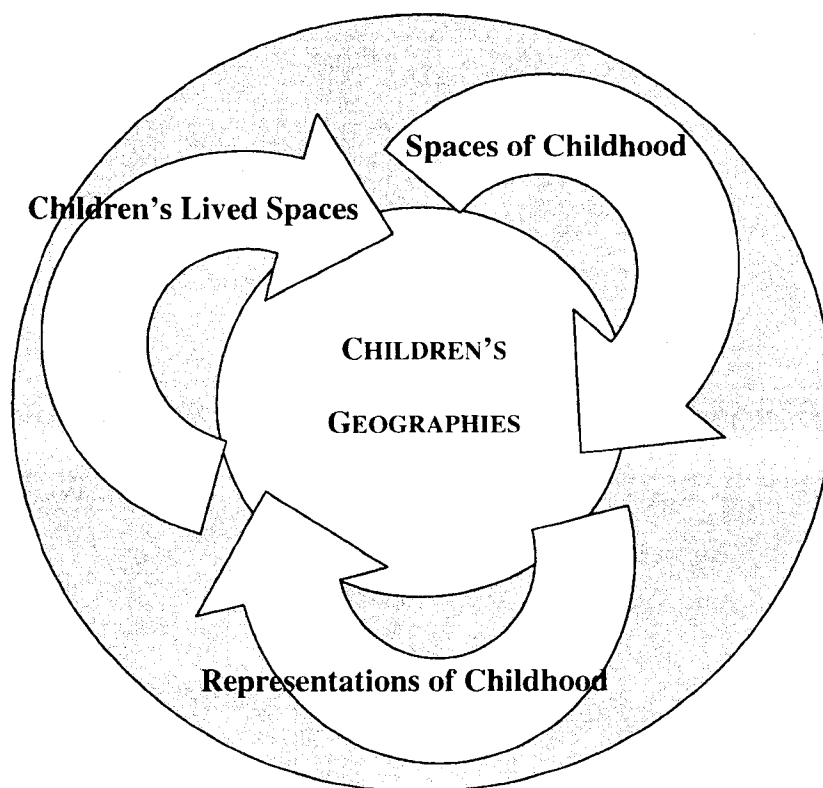
reproduction. For example, the prominence of the automobile threatens everyone's ability, particularly children's ability, to roam freely and play in their communities, even though they may have greater access to places for play outside their communities (Bunge & Bordessa, 1975; Cunningham et al., 1996; Gaster, 1991). Furthermore, planners often do not take into consideration the diverse needs of children for play, leisure, recreation and social life (Bartlett et al., 1999). Children are often confined to designated and specific spaces of reproduction (e.g., schools, playgrounds) that do not come in conflict with the adult world or their spaces of production (e.g., the office) (Katz, 1993).

Children's desires and imagery of place are usually not consulted in the creation of new spaces (Hart, 2000; Iltus, 1992; Lynch, 1979) (nor are adults for that matter, but in theory they have a venue for political participation, while children often do not). Therefore, children often create their own spaces or imaginary places to live out their desires in everyday life, often appropriating space for purposes not intended in its original design (e.g., skateboarding in a parking lot) (Harloff et al., 1998; Moore, 1990; Wridt, 1999).

These are only a few examples of how children's experience of space reflects wider social relations and constructs of childhood. Lefebvre's and Soja's analysis of the production of space provides an abstract framework to understand the relationship between the social construction of childhood, the production of space, and children's geographies. To understand how children experience, conceive and imagine space – to understand their personal geographies – one must take into consideration the material dimensions of space, representations of children and youth, and children's lived experiences in space (Figure 2). Implied in this framework is the ability to analyze the historical evolution of children's geographies in relation to changes in society, an

important theoretical goal of this dissertation. A more empirical discussion of children's geographies is offered in the next section, which looks at literature on child-environment transactions in everyday life.

Figure 2: A theoretical model of children's geographies



Conceptual models of children's environmental transactions

In order to understand the process in which children's geographies are produced in everyday practice, it is necessary to piece together empirical research that analyzes children's environmental transactions. The term 'environmental transaction' refers to the notion that child and the environment (both the social and physical qualities of space) are interdependent "units that embrace each other and are part of one another, and act simultaneously with or against each other, transforming each other into new states" (Harloff et al., 1998). This dispels any notion that a child is simply a passive recipient of environmental information, but rather considers both the child and environment as active agents in their simultaneous development.

For the purposes of this dissertation, children's environmental transactions are characterized by three interconnected elements that are summarized in the writings of Moore and Young (1978) and Harloff et al. (1998).

1. **Children's Place Behavior** – Describes where children encounter, experience and engage with particular characteristics of the landscape. Scholars who study children's place behaviors typically research the qualitative characteristics of a child's spatial world, i.e., the quality of places frequented by children and how/if those places meet their intellectual and emotional needs.
2. **Children's Territorial Range** – Represents the child's spatial realm of experiential breadth and diversity, and the spatial extent and variety of outdoor places inhabited. Territorial range is concerned with measuring the number, variety, occupancy time and the spatial distribution of place-behavior.

3. **Network of Opportunities and Constraints** – Describes how adult/society-child/youth relations enable or restrict children's transactions with the environment. Many scholars recognize that children must negotiate their place behaviors with adults, and these negotiations are subject to the societal expectations of childhood based on age, gender, and class. Harloff et al. (1998) refer to this interconnected system of opportunities and constraints as a "network of child's life world."

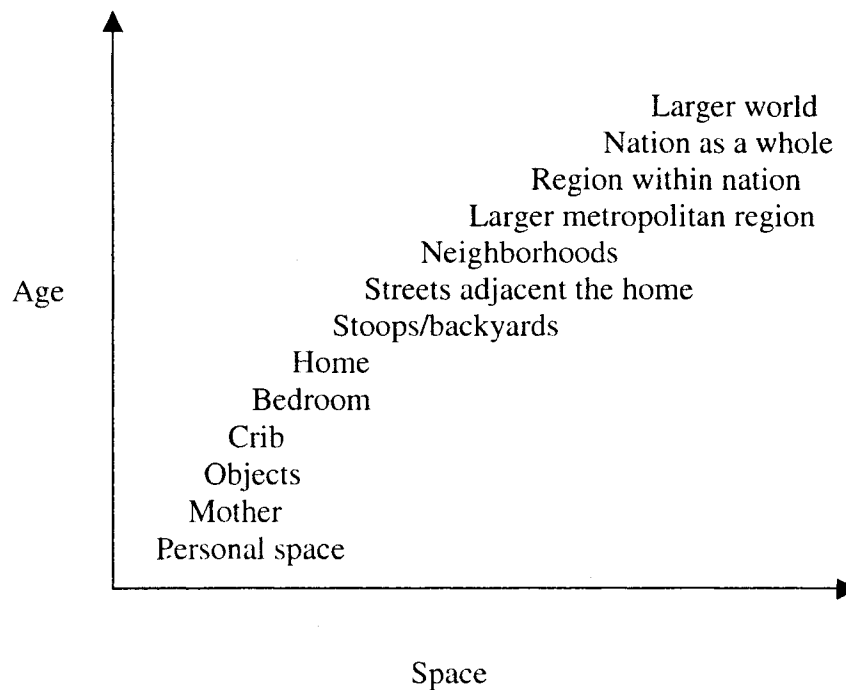
Literature from a wide range of disciplines, including psychology, anthropology, geography, planning and sociology, reflects upon the physical and social environment in which young people develop (see for example reviews by Aitken, 1994; Bronfenbrenner & Crouter, 1983; Lynch, 1973; Matthews, 1992; Moore & Young, 1978). From this large body of literature one can find evidence that links children's environmental transactions with particular conceptions of childhood discussed previously. I review the different models that have been used next.

Expanding horizons model

Psychologists from many different sub-fields have conceptualized young people's environments (for a review see Spencer et al., 1989); for a discussion and critique see (Harloff et al., 1998). In general, these models rely upon a spatially incremental approach to child-environment transactions, largely because they are built from developmental psychology and are discussed within the context of understanding children's expanding intellectual capacities and personal development. As with traditional developmental psychology theory in general, these models of child-environment transactions are based on assumptions of childhood as 'universal' or 'natural.'

This body of research suggests that childhood environments expand geographically with age and locomotive ability, referred to here as the *expanding horizons model of child-environment transactions*. An overview of the research suggests a developmental pattern of children's environmental experiences and their cognitive awareness (see Figure 3). Such a model proposes that children autonomously navigate particular environments on their own as they grow up. These environments begin with the child's own personal space as children age and expand to their mother, the crib, the home, stoops/stairwells/backyards/ courtyards, the street immediately adjacent the child's home, the immediate neighborhood a child can traverse on foot, the neighborhood in

Figure 3: Expanding horizons model of child-environment transactions



Based on reviews and critiques by (Harloff et al., 1998; Spencer et al., 1989)

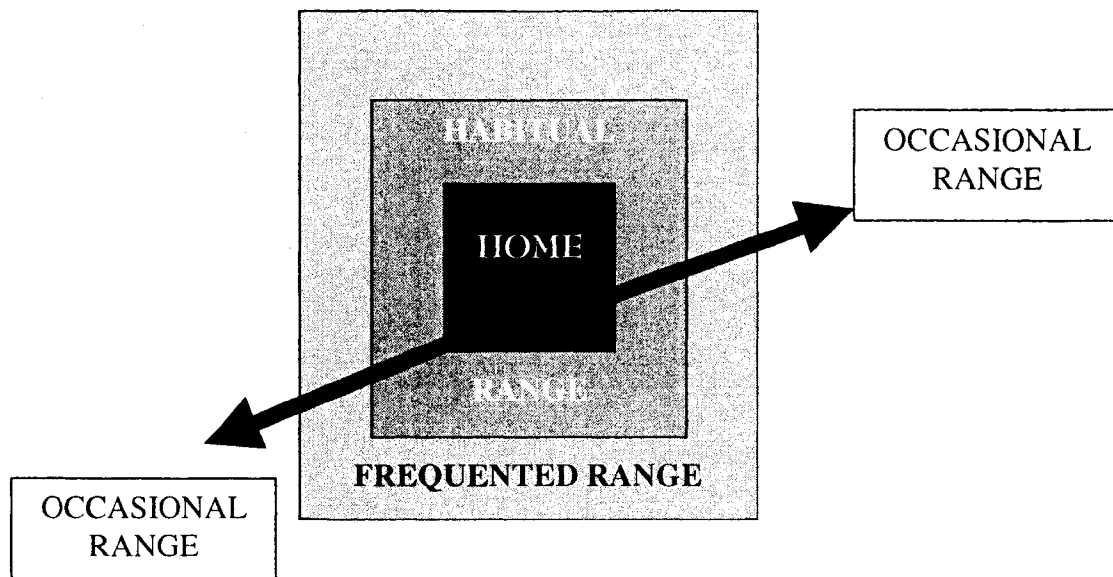
which a child can traverse using public transportation, and the larger metropolitan area. By extension, although not explicitly discussed in the literature, these environments would then expand to other areas in the child's geographic region, the nation as a whole, and finally, the larger world in which the developing person lives.

It is significant to stress that these models rely upon a child's autonomous interaction with their expanding world. This model does not take into consideration the complexity of children's travel with caretakers, other adults, or social networks. Therefore, this model does not consider the full range of a child's exposure to environments, but rather, those environments that young people can discover on their own. This model presupposes an urban location and is not general enough to be applicable to a suburban or rural environment.

Space-time model

A number of researchers concerned with children's territorial range have recognized that child-environment transactions are more contextual, situational and complex than that allowed by the expanding horizons model (see for example Bjorklid, 1982; Hart, 1979; Matthews et al., 1997; Moore, 1990). A variation of the expanding horizons model of child-environment transactions is one that fluctuates temporally. In other words, children experience a series of expanding environments across diurnal, weekly, or seasonal time frames. These environments are centered on the child's home, places where the child habitually ranges, places they range frequently, and places they range occasionally. One might refer to this as the *space-time model of child-environment transactions* (Figure 4).

Figure 4: A space-time model of child-environment transactions

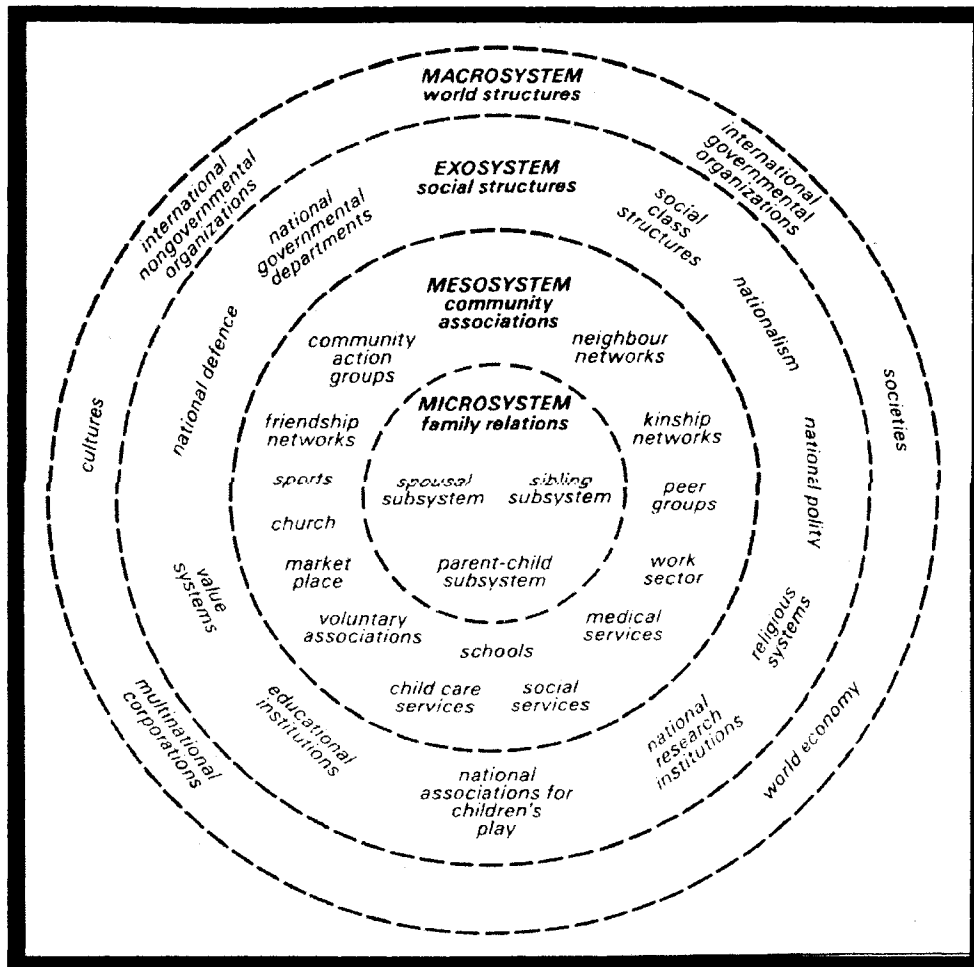


Adapted from: (Moore, 1990; Matthews, 1992)

Socio-cultural model

Social psychologists and sociologists typically explain children's environmental transactions within the context of a series of interconnected micro to macro social structures (see for example Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Crouter, 1983). These models are concerned with the child as a social being, and those social factors that influence 'moral' and social development. One might refer to this as the *socio-cultural model of child-environment transactions*. In this model the physical environment is taken as a given and the social environment is the focus of investigation. This model is primarily based on the notion that a child's social behavior and development are inextricably linked to a continuum of local-global social structures (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Socio-cultural model of child-environment transactions



Source: Moore, R. C. (1990). *Childhood's Domain: Play and Place in Child Development*. Berkley, California: MIG Communications. Also based on the work by Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The Ecology of Human Development*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) categorizes these structures into four interdependent systems that exert substantial force upon a young person's social ecology. Although this model primarily discusses the social systems of child development, these systems can also be considered from a spatial perspective. For example, what Bronfenbrenner (1979) terms the microsystem are the more immediate social structures such as the family, which are most influential in the home setting. The mesosystem contains community level

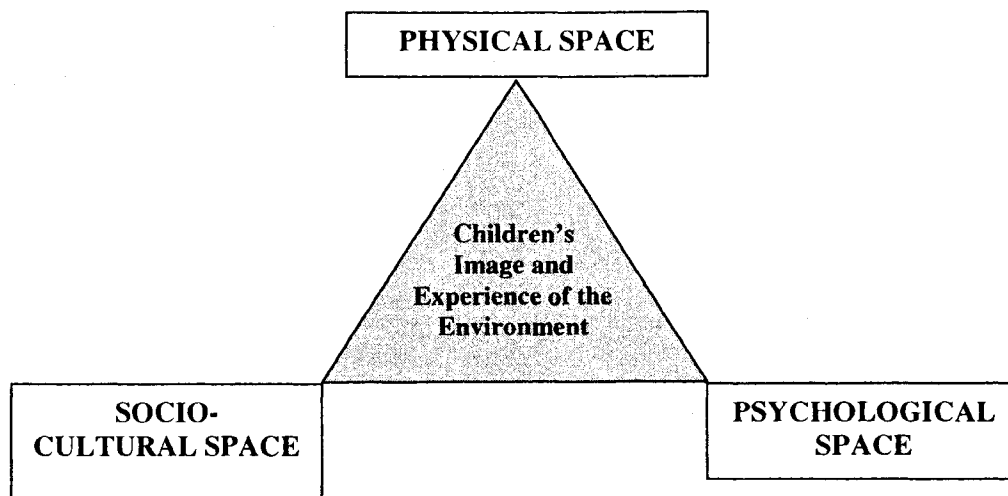
social structures such as school and church that are typically found within the neighborhood setting. The exosystem and macrosystem include larger external social structures such as religious systems, class structures, and the world economy. These are considered global systems that have a significant impact on the social and physical landscape of a local community.

Ecological model

Aware that space and society are interconnected, some researchers have developed a more ecological approach to understanding child-environment transactions, one that takes into consideration the diverse social realities of children (e.g., Moore & Young, 1978). These models are an attempt at synthesis between the two previous models described above. The ecological models imply there is a complex system of opportunities and constraints governing the child's spatial and social reality. These opportunities and constraints are the context in which everyday negotiations between adults, children and the physical, social and psychological environment are (re)produced. This model recognizes children's (modest) agency in determining their negotiations with society and with space (Figure 6).

This model reflects what Moore and Young (1978) refer to as a *behavior-environment ecological framework* in which one can observe children's use and experience of the environment. According to this model, the *physiological-psychological environment* of the body and mind; the *sociological environment* of interpersonal relations and cultural values (including factors such as class, race, gender, etc); and the *physiographic landscape* of spaces, objects, persons, natural and built

Figure 6: Ecological model of child-environment transactions



Source: (Moore & Young, 1978)

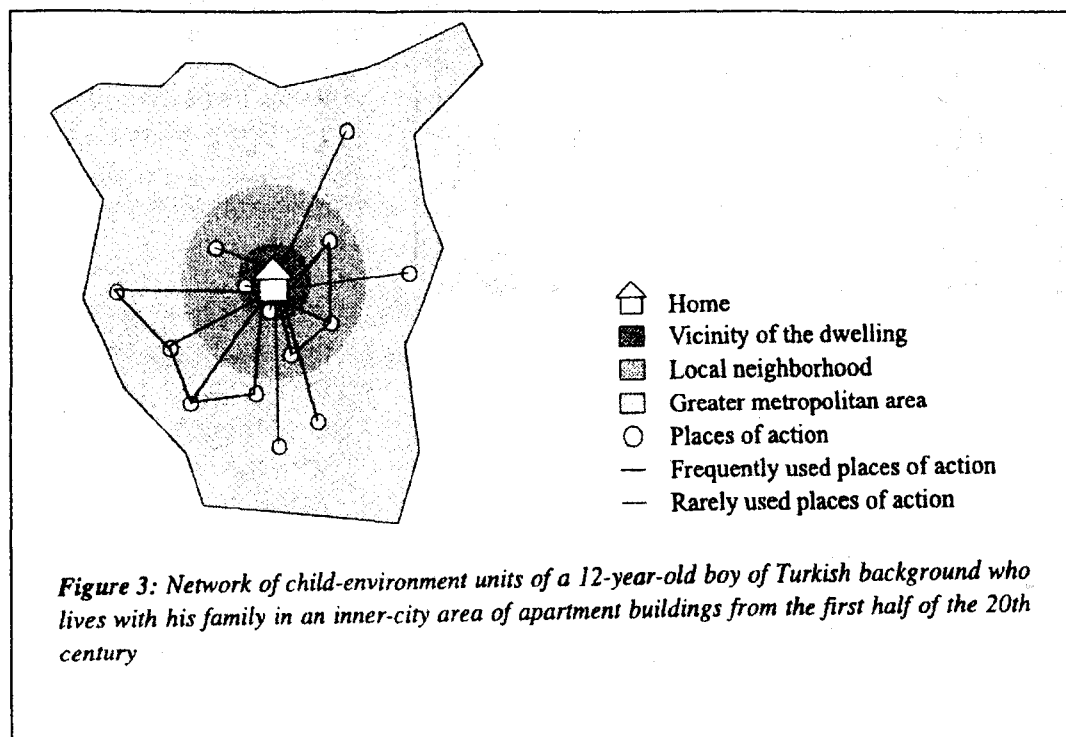
elements are interconnected and influence children's environmental behavior, and ultimately, their image, schema, or cognition of environments.

Lifeworld model

Some scholars have turned to the individual lifeworld as the unit of analysis in children's experiences of place and space. These models give heightened attention to identity and difference, to move toward a non-essentialist assumption of childhood. The spatiality of the lifeworld is sensitive to variables such as a child's age, culture, class, race, time, and location of residence.

Harloff et al. (1998) provide examples of what a *child-environment network* in a particular kind of place (city), in a particular period of time (early 20th century), with attention to the child's individual background looks like (Turkish boy) (Figure 7). This example of a child-environment network is used for illustrative purposes to stress that

Figure 7: Lifeworld model of child-environment transactions



Source: (Harloff et al., 1998, p. 34)

optimal social and spatial conditions vary by age, gender, residential location, time, caretaker conventions, and other factors. Harloff et al. (1998) stress that these networks are not static, but rather are continually changing based on the particular context of a child's life and his or her interactions within the social and physical environment.

This child-environment network model, while based on the individual as the unit of analysis, does take into consideration the complex relations between time, space, history and 'being in the world.' Because this dissertation explores the environmental biographies of individuals, the child network model of child-environment transactions offers the most relevant conceptual model for understanding children's spatial ecologies

in Yorkville and East Harlem, (although some features of the other models were valuable in designing the research).

Structure of the dissertation

- Chapter 1, entitled *Community research and collaboration*, provides an overview of the methodological and epistemological approach adopted in this dissertation research.
- Chapter 2, entitled *A tale of two neighborhoods*, provides an analysis of how the communities of Yorkville and East Harlem have changed over time, and how they are/were socially constructed by the media and by society more generally. This information is essential to understanding subsequent chapters in the dissertation which analyze the relationship between urban change and the experience of childhood in Yorkville and East Harlem.
- Chapter 3, entitled *Everyday geographies*, provides an overview of the relationship between childhood, space and time. In particular, I examine how children's out of school lives have changed both spatially and temporally and I speculate why these changes have occurred.
- Chapter 4, entitled *Social worlds*, demonstrates how young people construct their identities in relationship to place. I examine the biographies of a number of individuals from different time periods to demonstrate young people's first experiences with "the other" – which constitutes the experience of other places, races, genders and cultural backgrounds – and how these experiences translated into relationships with their peers in the community.

- Chapter 5, entitled *Block politics*, examines how a particular space within the community – that of the block – is an important setting in which young people develop a sense of solidarity or attachment to a place.
- Chapter 6, entitled *Playin' and hangin'*, examines the changing nature of play in New York City by providing specific examples of young people's outdoor play activities in Yorkville and East Harlem.
- Chapter 7, entitled *Childhood then and now*, is a summative and analytic chapter that links the findings of this research to developing theory and research on the geography of children.

Chapter 1

Community research and collaboration

Since childhood is one of the few absolutely universal experiences it is not surprising that people have an inward picture, even though it may never be articulated, of an ideal childhood. We may use it to reshape our own memories, we may try to recreate it for our own children, or we may judge them according to the degree to which they inhabit it too. Behind all of our purposive activities, our domestic world, is this ideal landscape we acquired in childhood. It sifts through our selective and self-censored memory as a myth and idyll of the way things ought to be, the lost paradise to be regained. Nowhere is this myth-making by the memory more evident than in our reconstruction of the physical environments we explored as children. (Ward, 1990, p. 2)

We tend to think we are all experts when it comes to our opinions about childhood, because, as Ward points out, it is “one of the few universal experiences” of humanity. Trying to research people’s memories of their childhood – or in the case of young people today, their present day experiences – requires entering into an individual’s psyche, taking a swim in self-perceptions and listening to people’s stories in a way to discern fiction from fact, memory from fantasy, desire from reality. It necessitates sensitive ears and good listening skills. It involves divulging your own childhood memories to other people so together you can reconstruct a coherent narrative about yourself and about their life. And, it involves learning from existing materials – newspapers, magazines, photographs, websites, books and films – about how personal accounts of everyday life relate to other constructions of reality portrayed by individuals and institutions during a particular time period.

In this chapter I outline some of the methods I used to gain access to a diverse group of individuals who grew up on the border of Yorkville and East Harlem from the 1940s until 2000s. In particular, I discuss how I gained their trust, how I helped them articulate their childhood experiences, and how I chose to represent their lives. In doing

so, I take into consideration relations of objectivity, subjectivity and intersubjectivity (such as how to deal with autobiographical narratives and memory), power differences between the researcher and the researched (for example, hierarchies based on race, gender, class, profession and age), positionality and representation (such as how I presented myself and the research to participants and what role they had in the research process) (Wolf, 1995).

The primary focus of this dissertation was to compare children's geographies over three different time periods (1940s, 1970s, and 2000s) in relation to urban and societal change. The overall orientation of the research was participatory and ethnographic. It was participatory in that the goals of the research were developed and shared with the Isaacs Center and the community, and the findings were made maximally accessible to all. Some of the participants also became co-researchers in certain points of the research, but the data collection orientation is best described as ethnographic or participant observation, that is, an in-depth account based on close description of a single community. A variety of qualitative techniques were adopted in this research, with the overall goal of gathering multiple texts, narratives, and images to gain a range of perspectives and insights about the topics of this dissertation. The methods I used included: 1) unstructured-ethnographic interviews with community members and participant observation, 2) environmental autobiographies, 3) archival research, and 4) the development of participatory projects to involve the community in the research process (these included a community forum and a website about the history of childhood in Yorkville and East Harlem). Each method is described next.

Accessing and participating in community life

The stories presented in this dissertation represent over three years (2000-2003) of ethnographic fieldwork, participant observation and my collaboration with residents living in or immediately adjacent to a “the Isaacs.” As with any study, how a researcher gains access and establishes rapport with the participants of the study is crucial to its ultimate success. My previous experience working in community was as an evaluator for a curriculum development project in one of the Isaacs Center’s after school programs in 1999. Through this work, I developed relations and established rapport with the Director and Assistant Director for Youth Services, the Executive Director, youth counselors, children, after school program coordinators, receptionists, security officers, parents and other community leaders. I became impressed by the Isaacs Center and the community it served and began talking about my research interests, which were received with a warm reception and plea that I conduct my research in collaboration with the Center.

I began seriously considering this collaboration by attending community events such as teen dances, youth award ceremonies, staff meetings, and community festivals. This experience enabled me to build the trust of the community and to have developed a considerable knowledge base of the community prior to conducting my dissertation research. It was obvious to me that this community was ripe with potential as a research site for a number of reasons (for example, I was pleasantly surprised to learn that many of the young people, adults and seniors living in the Isaacs resided in Yorkville most of their lifetime), and immediately I began drafting ideas for my dissertation in meetings with the Director of Youth Services and my professors.

Because of my previous experience with the community, I had easy access to a *gatekeeper*, “the individual who the researcher must visit before entering a group or cultural site, and from whom the researcher must receive approval” (Creswell, 1998, p. 247). This gatekeeper, whom I’ll name as “Ivy,” was the Director of Youth Services, a woman who some touted was “the president of the community” because she grew up and had lived and/or worked in the community all her life. Everywhere Ivy goes in the community and everyone she encounters in her everyday life, she knows intimately or has some personal connection to them, either because she grew up with a particular individual, or because she helped them in some capacity over the course of their lifetime. Ivy has unyielding respect in the community, as witnessed in the many informal and formal meetings I watched her negotiate. Her level of respect within the community was crucial to the successful completion of this dissertation.

Ethnographers often find it necessary to establish a “cover” for their research, that is, an identity useful to their research goals but different from the truth (Fine, 1992). I had no need for such a cover and this helped greatly by enabling Ivy to introduce me openly and honestly. Ivy presented me to the community. She opened doors. Ivy called people she knew and described my dissertation in two sentences or less that made sense to whomever she was speaking with. Ivy located many of my interviewees. Ivy brought me into the Center and introduced me to its employees. In short, Ivy gave me legitimacy in the community. Because of Ivy, my identity within the community was never questioned (something I worried about from time to time but reconciled through communication with others I engaged with in the community). She always presented me

accurately as a researcher and educator. This is because Ivy trusted me, believed in my work and felt that the community would benefit from its participation in my dissertation.

Choosing to work with the Isaacs Center was also based on the Center's stated commitment to social change. The Stanley M. Isaacs Neighborhood Center has a long history of success in serving its participants, something that was helpful in mobilizing the community to raise awareness about the changing meaning of childhood. According to their web site (www.isaacscenter.org, 2002):

The Stanley M. Isaacs Neighborhood Center reaches across generations and ethnic groups to serve more than 6,000 inner-city youngsters, adults, senior citizens and families. Our mission is to assist our neighbors in need to participate in the life of their community by improving their physical, educational, cultural and social well being.

Founded in 1964 in the settlement house tradition of helping people help themselves, our services include Meals on Wheels, adult day services, a senior center of over 2,000 members, after school and evening programs for children and teens, youth employment services, adult education classes, cultural and educational events and workshops, and parent education. We have a track record of program innovations that have served as models for others in the fields of older adult services, adult education and youth services.

The Isaacs Center is located in the Isaacs/Holmes public housing development on the boundary of the East Harlem and Yorkville communities. Our programs serve our immediate community and our youth employment and adult education programs reach citywide. Our Meals on Wheels program delivers meals from 42nd Street to 106th Street on Manhattan's East side.

The Isaacs Center agreed to participate in the development and implementation of this dissertation, and supported me by helping to recruit participants, by providing materials (such as cameras, and markers), by providing human resources (such as a web technician), and by providing physical space in which to conduct interviews.

In working with the Isaacs Center, there were a number of approaches I adopted to meet people in the community and to learn firsthand what issues, questions and ideas were on the minds of its residents. I was apparently on a quest to become a “ghetto celeb.” I had never heard this term before when it was mentioned during one of my interviews with Reggie, a 31-year-old longtime resident of the Isaacs. Reggie used to hang out with “ghetto celebs” when he was a child in the 1970s and 1980s. According to him, “ghetto celebs” are people that everyone knows in the neighborhood. They tend to travel around quite a bit and are often accepting of, and accepted by, a diverse allotment of characters living in “the ghetto”¹ –the mothers whose eyes patrol the block from their windows, the owner of a local bodega, and young kids playing tag. “Ghetto celebs” gain fame through everyday life, by hanging out in different projects, on different streets and corners, or by doing something memorable in the neighborhood (such as doing bold things on the street or playing a good game of basketball).

Given this definition, I should confess that I never *really truly* became, nor could I *ever be* a “ghetto celeb.” After all, I am not from New York City. I am a white, female in her 30s who grew up in a working class divorced family in rural Wisconsin. Perhaps I was coming close to, as Reggie suggested one day, an “Isaacs’ celeb” – someone who many people know in that particular project. A “ghetto celeb” would mean that I was known in more than one project, covering a larger geographic territory. Instead, I came

¹ The term ghetto is used by my research participants to describe a geographic territory comprised of public housing developments, crowded living quarters, and typically low-income African American and Latino populations. For the purposes of this study, ‘the ghetto’ is what people tend to think of when they talk of East Harlem or Spanish Harlem. While the Isaacs are not technically located within East Harlem, the social indicators used to describe ‘the ghetto’ by my participants are often associated with this community. In many cases, this meaning of the term ‘ghetto’ is antiquated and is more often used by older generations and those who have experienced the harsh realities of the street. Children of today tend to use the term ‘ghetto’ to describe (often in a joking manner) someone’s behavior – if they act a certain way, wear certain clothes, etc.

to know and to be known by a group of individuals who spent most of their time outdoors at the Isaacs, or who were affiliated with the Isaacs Center. Even today, when I walk around in the neighborhood, it's not uncommon for me to see many different people I know. I often hear someone calling my name before noticing them, "Hi Pamela!" "Where have you been lately Pamela?" Oftentimes I receive friendly hugs or kisses on the cheek to welcome me to the community, followed by lengthy conversations about a range of topics – how so-in-so's child is doing, how their own health is going, and did I hear about so-in-so's daughter winning an award, and "hey Pamela, check out this new skateboarding jump I just learned!"

How I got to this stage in my relationship with individuals was a long journey in my role as an "empathetic insider," a term Relph uses to describe someone who is involved emotionally and behaviorally with a place and community, while retaining awareness of not being a full member of the culture in order to analyze it (Relph, 1976). Over the course of three years, I assumed numerous identities within the community to discover what was lurking behind the thick coats of paint on the old tenements of Yorkville and East Harlem, ultimately revealing its history, its geography and its peoples. These identities are multifaceted and proved to be both challenging and rewarding.

For example, for six months I lived with two female employees of the Isaacs Center. Out of the graciousness of their hearts, they allowed me to reside in a spare bedroom in their apartment for very little money while I conducted interviews (they didn't want me to pay any rent but I insisted). In the process of living with these two remarkable women, I gained firsthand knowledge of the community because both had worked with young people in Yorkville and East Harlem for many years, and one woman

had grown up in the community and agreed to be interviewed for my dissertation.

Because both women were Puerto Rican in heritage, I gained first hand knowledge of their culture and language that was applicable to other young people and adults I was interviewing.

Furthermore, any time I had a question about slang words used by young people in the neighborhood, or if there was any other item that was confusing, I could go to both my roommates and inquire what a word or cultural behavior might mean or be interpreted as. On the other hand, I found myself consciously not taking notes of our conversations because we became friends. As friends you disclose information about yourself and of others based upon reciprocity of trust. While such information no doubt added to my knowledge of the community, I consciously chose not to take field notes about our private conversations as friends. In short, although I was technically “in the field,” I chose not to be there sometimes as a researcher, but only as a friend.

The most important venue in which I met present day young people and other residents of the community came about with an unexpected opportunity to teach computers to teens at the Isaacs Center. For 1 ½ years I was hired as the computer teacher for the “Teen Computer Club,” a drop-in program for teens who wanted to learn about and/or use computers from 6:00-8:30PM on Monday and Wednesday nights. As the computer teacher I became intimately acquainted with the lives of over 30 young people who resided in the Isaacs and its surrounding residential areas. I decided to develop projects with them about their experiences in the neighborhood in hopes of integrating my research interests with a meaningful learning program. After one week of getting to know the young people who attended the program, I revealed my work as a

researcher in the community and asked whether there was any interest in their participation.

My biggest challenge, not only with the young people I interviewed, but with all my interviewees, was how to deal with individuals who wanted to participate but did not meet my criteria for selection. For instance, it was important in my research to have an equal proportion of males and females and to balance racial and ethnic backgrounds from each generation, in addition to focusing upon specific age categories and locations of residence. However, the teens who attended “Teen Computer Club” ranged in ages from 11-21. Some of the 16, 17, and 19 year olds wanted to participate and I had to turn them down. Complicating this relationship was the issue of money. While there is no general rule about how to handle payments to research participants, in the case of this research, I was offering participants \$20 per session (roughly two hours per session) for a total of \$60-80 (3-4 sessions each).

While \$10/hour was a moderate rate for an adult, for young people in the community it was a gold mine. This complicated my relationship with young people from teen night, and with those who chose to participate. Some participants, including the young people, did not want the money; they felt guilty for taking it and preferred to give back to the community through their voluntary participation in the research. I never fully reconciled my feelings about money – was it good, bad, necessary or a nuisance? In general, I relied upon my intuition in dealing with people’s emotions about their sense of inclusion or exclusion and the value of their time and dealt with each case individually. I did make every effort to include individuals who wanted to participate, even if they did not meet my criteria. In the case of the Teen Computer Club, I trained the young people

in web development skills so some could serve on a team to produce a website for this dissertation. In addition, I worked with groups of young people who attended other Isaacs Center programs in a volunteer capacity to involve the community in my research in some capacity.

My work with the Teen Computer Club gave me an identity as an Isaacs Center employee. I received an email address, keys to the computer lab, attended staff meetings and met many parents of the young people I interviewed. Relationships flourished. On a number of occasions I went for dinner informally with adults my age, had coffee in the homes of seniors, went for beers at a local bar with Isaacs's employees, attended birthday parties, began email dialogues with some young people, and generally just hung out with individuals by sitting on benches around the housing complex. I began re-telling my findings to people and to ask them questions about my observations in the community. I wanted to make sure I was getting things "right."

For instance, during teen night, I would often confide in the young people who attended the program that I was naïve about certain topics because I was "white." I would use my own ignorance (sometimes real, sometimes made up) about my race, my gender, my age, or my location of residence as a child from a rural environment, to open dialogues about difficult issues and to interrogate my perceptions and theirs about stereotypes of the "other." Young people respected my frank approach about reality and responded by introducing me to other people in the community, including their parents, grandparents and friends. On a number of occasions, young people were my voice in the community and gave me legitimacy with their friends and family, some of whom agreed to participate in the project because their son/daughter suggested it.

Most of my interviewees were found through snowball sampling and through my participation with the Isaacs Center. I became concerned that by only interviewing the select group of individuals that were affiliated with the Center I was obtaining some unknown bias in my data. Certainly I was only reaching those who were inclined to some positive community engagement, but perhaps there were other dimensions of bias unknown to me. Therefore, I posted flyers throughout the community describing my research to attract outsiders. This proved fruitful for I managed to interview some participants who were indeed “outliers.” Nonetheless, I consciously chose not to interview individuals who were of middle to upper incomes. While this was sound logic for completing a dissertation, it points to a weak link in my research. For instance, because I did not interview anyone residing in a luxury apartment who contributed to the gentrification process in Yorkville, I can only speculate what their lives are like based on secondary sources. Hopefully this inadequacy will someday be remedied with a follow up study.

In the interest of full disclosure, I should admit up front that I feel very connected with and have feelings for the people that I grew to know and work with over the past three years. I am a “passionate scholar” who seeks “to break down the hierarchical and potentially exploitative relationship between the researcher and the researched by cultivating friendships, sharing, and closeness that would lead to a richer picture” of young people’s lives (Wolf, 1995, p. 4). Such relationships encourage the researcher to place him/herself within the research, reflection and writing process.

In fact I developed a close bond with everyone I interviewed about their childhood experiences and I consider many of the people I interviewed to now be my

dear friends. Nonetheless, I do not feel that these feelings prohibited me from also pulling back and reflecting impartially on their lives. In fact, on the contrary, I believe that it is the level of intimacy I share with these individuals that allows me to have an even deeper understanding of their lives (what Harding (1987) calls “strong objectivity”). It is the level of trust that I built with individuals in the community that enabled me to enter their lives and for them to enter into mine. With this trust comes the awesome responsibility of accurately representing their viewpoints, attitudes and experiences.

In retrospect, it seems obvious to me that these connections are a natural outgrowth of sharing personal information about and reflecting about one’s own childhood. In the course of my interviews with individuals I reflected many times upon my own childhood and shared these experiences in turn with my interviewees. While this was not a conscious methodological technique, it did serve to open windows of opportunity for discussion about difficult topics such as race, class, gender, family relationships and gentrification.

Building relationships with people also presents challenges, especially for a young, single (some might say attractive) white woman. My gender, more so than my age or race, was front and center in most of my interactions with individuals in the community. There are lines that have to be drawn sometimes, boundaries that cannot be crossed. For example, on several occasions I received telephone calls from some of the gentlemen I interviewed asking me to go for coffee. It was my opinion that these invitations were perhaps something more than a friendly chat about the research, and therefore I declined. I became conscious of what clothing I wore to interviews and of my body politics. Similarly, walking into East Harlem proved challenging but not impossible

because of my gender and race. I was clearly “lost” to some of the locals in East Harlem, but not all, while in Yorkville, I was able to “blend in” with the scene to a greater extent.

In general, I chose to represent myself for who I was – a white, single, 30 year old female who grew up in Wisconsin, who worked with the Isaacs Center and who had lived in New York City for five years, including in Harlem and the Bronx. This is perhaps a different approach than used by some female researchers, who often lie about their marital status, religious identity and class background in order to conform to norms of a particular community (Wolf, 1995). On the contrary, I found that my true identity allowed me to teeter on a blurred and moving boundary of insider-outsider. For example, even though I was “white” and from Wisconsin, I had lived in Harlem and the Bronx, and therefore I could converse in slang from the streets, I knew hip hop artists and songs favored by young people, and my growing knowledge of the community allowed me to bond with individuals about a range of topics. Such knowledge was enough to convince people that I was interested in their way of life and that I genuinely cared about them. But, on no occasion did anyone ever consider me a “native.” Why should they? I was not.

Environmental autobiographies

Other than ethnographic fieldwork, the primary method I relied upon for my dissertation research was what I term *environmental autobiographies*. An environmental autobiography is an individual’s account of their childhood environmental experiences, (for example, where they used to play and have fun, how they spent their leisure time, where they met friends in the neighborhood, where they encountered conflict in the neighborhood). In order to obtain these accounts, I developed a multi-method, semi-

structured interview protocol using a number of strategies to trigger environmental memories such as mapping, photography, neighborhood walks, and visualization exercises. Sociologists, environmental psychologists and geographers have employed similar techniques to elicit placed-based memories from individuals in a way that differs from most psychological research, which tends to focus upon eliciting memories of discrete objects or events within the placeless setting of a laboratory (Chawla, 1994; Gaster, 1991; Tuan, 1977).

According to research on *autobiographical memory*, memories can constitute images, concepts, phenomenological experiences, emotions and linguistic or symbolic codes (Schrauf & Rubin, 2000). The extent to which individuals can recount a particular event, process, or experience depends upon a researcher's technique to elicit these memories, and many other factors such as an individual's own emotional relations to a particular period, and their style as storytellers. Studies have suggested that word cues, landmark events (first experiences, flashbulb memories of real world events, etc.), music, role play, and calendar or seasonal rhythms (such as the beginning of school year, weekend, or summertime) are all useful in triggering autobiographical memory (Arntz & Weertman, 1999; Conway & Pleydell-Pearce, 2000; Kurbat et al., 1998; Rubin & Schulkind, 1997b; Schulkind et al., 1999; Shum, 1998).

Research has shown that memories of childhood and young adulthood are among the clearest and most easily recalled, (although selective) particularly from the ages of 10 to 30 (Jansar & Parkin, 1996; Paul, 1998; Rubin et al., 1998; Rubin & Schulkind, 1997a). While there are no differences in the ability of seniors, adults and children to recall memories of childhood (Bluck et al., 1999), some studies suggest that females tend to

recall more childhood memories than males, particularly if those memories were associated with emotions (Davis, 1999). Researchers have interpreted these findings to suggest that autobiographical memory is a social construction. Similarly, as Creswell points out, “biographical writing is, in part, autobiographical of the author [researcher] as well as the individual being studied...we create the persons we write about, just as they create themselves when they engage in storytelling practices” (Creswell, 1998).

Because my research deals more explicitly with memories of *place*, the purpose of the *environmental autobiographies* was to enable my interviewees multiple mediums – visual, auditory/olfactory, tactile – in which to express their memories and/or current understandings of their childhood (roughly from the ages of 11-13) in ways that made them confront the spatiality of their experiences. These including the following techniques, which were designed to be appropriate for people with a broad range of literacy skills. They were also designed to enable the interviewee to feel comfortable during the interview process (see Appendix for greater detail). Note that these techniques were used over three different sessions, lasting one to three hours each.

1. ***visualization exercise*** (adults and seniors only) – interviewees were asked to close their eyes while I read a script asking them to recall visually their childhood environments (e.g., their room, their home, their street, their school) (see Appendix).
2. ***mental mapping*** – interviewees were asked to draw a picture or map of what their neighborhood looked like when they were between the ages of 11-13; identifying important places of their childhood in the neighborhood, places where they liked to be with friends, family, other adults (Figures 8 and 9). Interviewees were asked to

verbalize what they were drawing, and their comments were used to begin the interview process.

3. ***semi-structured interviews*** – using the visualization and mental mapping exercise as a launching point, I asked a range of questions about the interviewee’s childhood memories and/or contemporary experiences. These topics included: 1) their sense of place and community (such as who lived in their community, how and where they met friends), 2) their leisure time activities (for example, how often they watch television, read, play outdoors), and 3) their personal geographies (such as where they used to play and hang out, how far they traveled from home) (see Appendix for sample interview questions).
4. ***mapping of childhood territories*** – to elaborate on their personal geographies, interviewees were asked to place color coded stickers on a large (small-scale) map (1 inch = 150 feet/~50 meters) of the neighborhood produced by the MTA. They were asked to label: places where they liked to be alone, places where they played and hung out alone, or with friends and family, places where they played and participated in recreational activities, and places where they ran into conflict. Additionally, interviewees were asked to draw a boundary, if possible, to demarcate the farthest they could travel as a child, and the routes they took to travel from one place to the next. The labeling and drawing process was used to probe deeper into the characteristics of their interactions in place and with people of different backgrounds (e.g., age, race, gender, parents, and friends).
5. ***neighborhood walk*** – interviewees were asked to take me on a walk of their childhood environments. I used information from previous interviews to probe

Figure 8: Sample mental map of Carlos, age 11

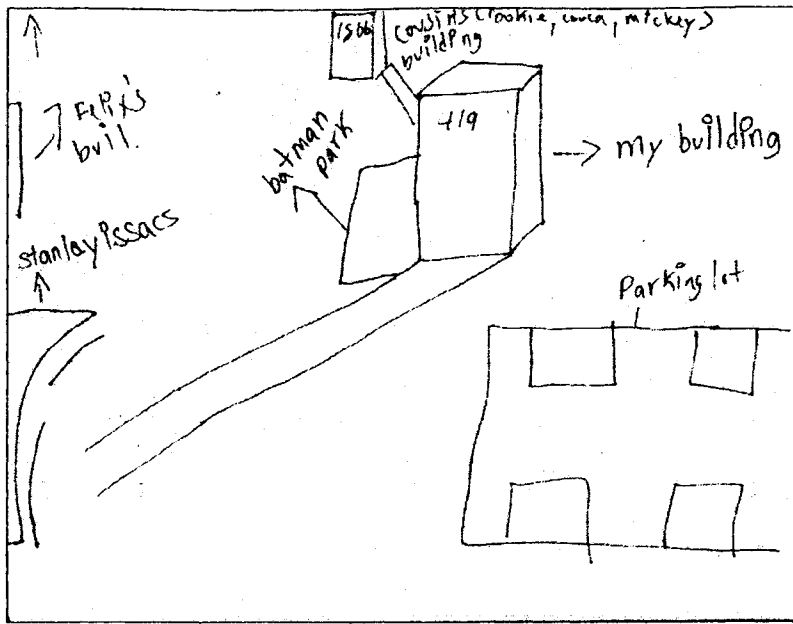
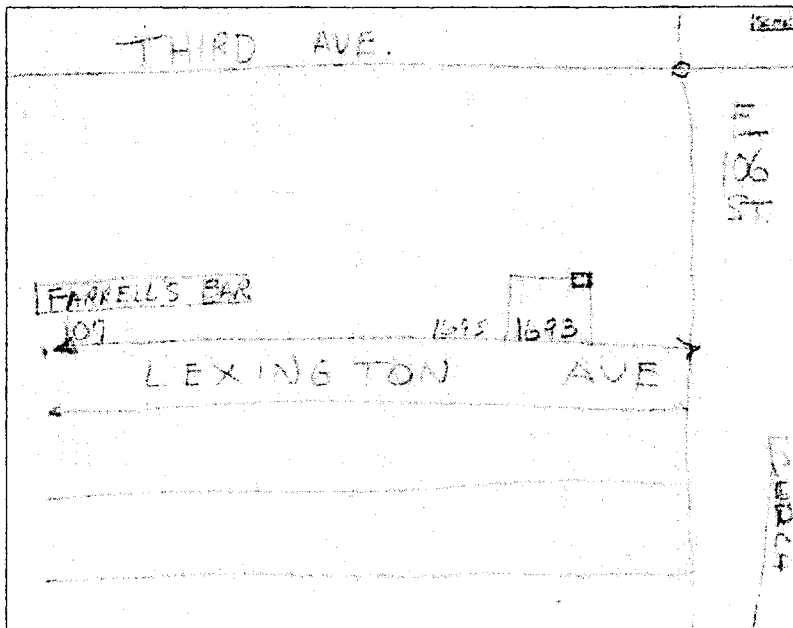


Figure 9: Sample mental map of Tony, age 71



deeper into aspects of their childhood memories and experiences while *in* specific places, or to confirm and/or challenge their discourse.

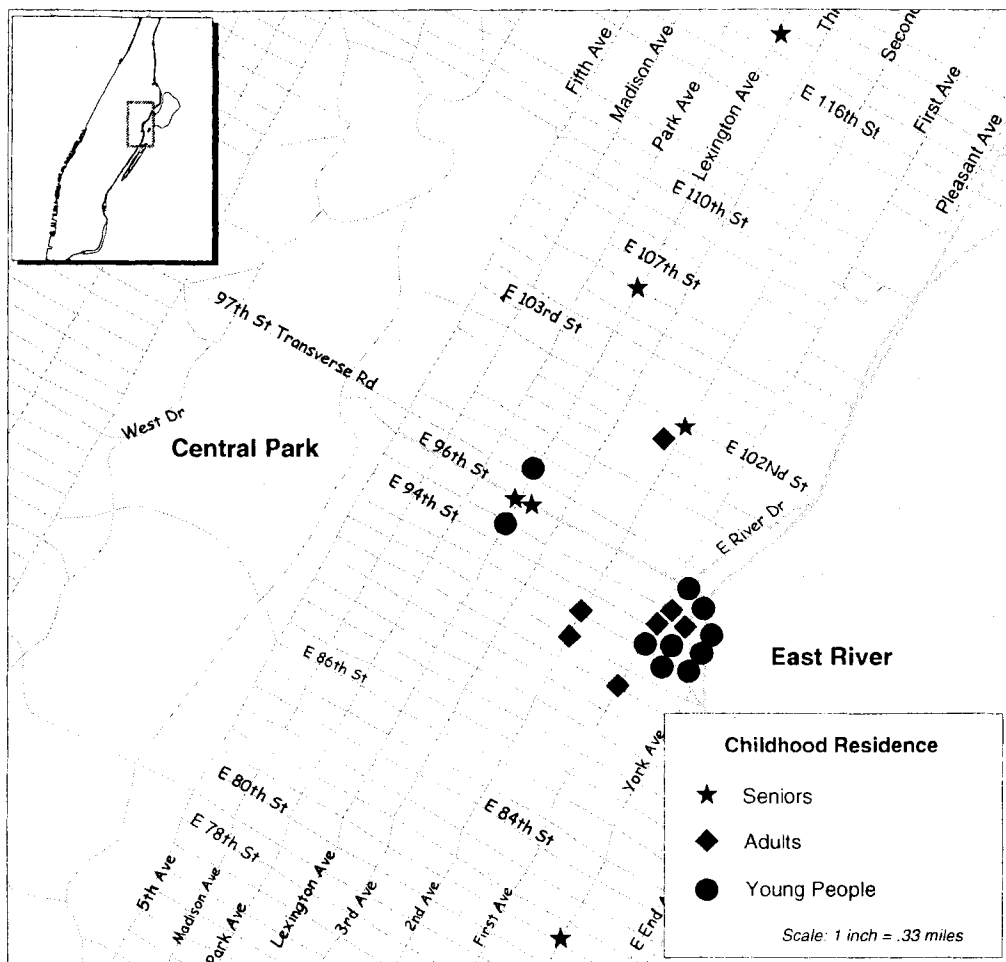
6. ***photographic elicitation*** – interviewees (adults and seniors) were asked to bring photographs of their childhood and to discuss their memories of the place, people and events exhibited in the photographs. Young people were provided with disposable cameras and asked to take pictures of important childhood places and peoples to accomplish the same task. These pictures are used throughout this dissertation where appropriate and are an important component to the community website.

Adopting multiple approaches to elicit environmental memories enabled me to discover contradictions in my interviewees' discourse and to challenge or reaffirm their personally remembered and/or socially constructed childhood experiences, an issue that is problematic for any study dealing with memory (Handel, 1984, 2000).

Research participants for the focused research

My intention was to select ten participants from each cohort who grew up in and around a 20 block radius of the Isaacs when they were between the ages of 11 and 13 (86th Street to 116th Street, from Fifth Avenue to the FDR Drive), to have an equal gender and racial balance, to hold class constant (working-lower class), and to find people who had lived in the neighborhoods of Yorkville and East Harlem for most of their life. I made two concessions in terms of geographic location (two seniors were located outside my proposed territory, but not significantly) (Figure 10). As mentioned previously, I met my interviewees through multiple social networks over the course of two years – as a computer teacher, by attending the center's programs for seniors and adults, through word of mouth, by posting flyers in the neighborhood describing my research, and

Figure 10: Childhood residence of research participants, by decade



through my volunteer work in the community. I conducted environmental autobiographies with 6 seniors in their 60s and early 70s (representing childhood experiences during the 1940s and 1950s), 7 adults in their 30s (representing childhood experience during the 1970s and 1980s) and 10 young people aged 11-13 (representing contemporary childhood experiences in the 1990s and 2000s) (Table 2).

As stated previously, my original intention was to interview 10 in each sub-population but I interviewed more young people than adults or seniors (n=10 young people, n=7 adults, n= 6 seniors). It proved difficult to locate sufficient numbers of older

Table 2: Summary of research participants

Pseudo name	Age	Gender	Race/ethnicity/nationality	Childhood residence & tenure in neighborhood
David	13	Male	Asian (Chinese)	Isaacs, 8 years
Carlos	11	Male	Hispanic (Puerto Rican, Colombian)	Isaacs, 11 years
Andy	13	Male	White (Hungarian)	Isaacs, 10 years
Javier	12	Male	Hispanic (Puerto Rican)	Isaacs, 12 years
Terrance	13	Male	Black (African American)	Isaacs, 13 years
Shaquena	13	Female	Black-White (African American, Cyprus)	Isaacs, 13 years
Noel	13	Female	White (Italian, Hungarian, Czech)	Isaacs, 13 years
Zaina	12	Female	Black (African American)	Isaacs, 12 years
Melita	12	Female	Hispanic (Mexican)	97 th Street/Lexington Ave., 11 years
Alecia	13	Female	Hispanic (Dominican, Puerto Rican)	95 th Street/Lexington Ave., 4 years
Raul	33	Male	Hispanic (Panama)	91 st Street/First Ave., 32 years
Reggie	31	Male	Black-White (Brazilian, French Canadian)	Isaacs, 24 years
Jay	38	Male	Black (African American)	Isaacs, 38 years
Gustavo	34	Male	Hispanic (Puerto Rican)	92 nd Street/Second Ave., 34 years
Jennifer	30	Female	White (Italian, German)	93 rd Street/Second Ave., 30 years
Ivy	37	Female	Hispanic (Puerto Rican)	Isaacs, 30 years
Selina	33	Female	Black (African American)	102 nd Street/Second Ave., 20 years
Tony	71	Male	White (Italian)	106 th Street/Lexington Ave., 71 years
Tommy	69	Male	Black (Virgin Islands, St. Croix)	118 th Street/Lexington Ave., 69 years
Hillary	71	Female	White (Italian, French)	102 nd Street/Second Ave., 71 years
Marie	68	Female	White (Irish, German)	80 th Street/York Ave., 68 years
Victoria	60	Female	White (Italian, Spanish)	96 th Street/Lexington Ave. 60 years
Debbie	59	Female	White (Italian, Spanish)	96 th Street/Lexington Ave. 59 years

individuals who met my criteria for selection (their age, location of residence during their childhood and in some instances their ability to meet with me for extensive periods of time – some of which was related to their health). To add some symmetry, I therefore supplemented my interviews with intensive field work with adults and seniors. I also conducted two focus groups with five seniors over the telephone as part of the

community center's program to reach out to immobile seniors. This data richly supplemented the individual stories I collected from adults and seniors. There were also valuable stories reported by individuals in secondary sources such as the Works Progress Administration's (WPA) guide to Spanish Harlem and Yorkville that echoed my interviewee's experiences (The Federal Writers' Project of the Works Progress Administration, 1939).

Archival research

Archival research was conducted to document changes in the demographics and land use in the community, and to investigate theories about those social, political and economic factors that have contributed to changes in childhood over time and space.

Documents included:

- US census data from the 1940s to 2000s
- New York City Planning Department maps, aerial photographs, data and reports (*Community District Needs Statements*)
- historical records of Yorkville and East Harlem such as newspapers, videos, photographs, books and websites
- documentation from the Isaacs Center about their institution, the community and the neighborhood

This information was sorted by topic, neighborhood and time period and is integrated throughout the dissertation, but is primarily used in the next chapter, *A tale of two neighborhoods*, to describe the historic, geographic and social-cultural evolution of Yorkville and East Harlem.

Community forum

In order to present my initial findings to the community and to verify the validity of my analysis, I organized a community forum in collaboration with the Isaacs Center in April 2003. This event was designed to simultaneously serve the community in a number of ways: to facilitate a dialogue among the diverse populations residing along the border of Yorkville and East Harlem in order to dispel myths and stereotypes about different groups (age, ethnicity, class); contribute to building of a sense of community; and to help the community build awareness about the present day social and environmental needs of young people. This community forum, entitled *Changing Communities, Changing Childhoods*, brought together an intergenerational group of participants from programs offered by the Isaacs Center to share experiences about growing up along the border of Yorkville and East Harlem from the 1940s until present time. By sharing their childhood experiences, young people, adults and the community at large were able to learn about the history of childhood and of Yorkville and East Harlem.

Self-selected participants (volunteers) from the Youth Management Team (YMT) (young people aged 14-19) and Community Action Neighbors (CAN) (adults in their 60s) – two programs of the Isaacs Center – shared their childhood experiences in a panel discussion that was open to the community. Distinguished guests from the community, including politicians, police officers, tenant presidents, community planning board members, and co-op board members from adjacent luxury apartment buildings (among others) attended the panel discussion and contributed to the dialogue during an open forum following presentations by YMT and CAN.

I developed a series of workshops with YMT and CAN to prepare participants to discuss issues that concerned them in an informed way. Topics of the panel discussion depended upon the interests and concerns of participants, but included issues about access to public space and public safety, relations between young people and adults, the quality of parks and recreational facilities, and issues of race, class and other social factors that impacted their sense of community. In our workshops, both YMT and CAN were encouraged to develop a project to express their ideas and memories of childhood. This project took the form of a series of maps and photographs that were assembled to create a visual exhibit of the historical geography of childhood in the community.

My advisor, Roger Hart, and I facilitated the panel discussion by sharing my research about the history of childhood in Yorkville, and more broadly, the changing meaning of childhood in our society. Staff from the Isaacs Center shared information about this history of the public housing development and their programs. Participants of the forum were asked to develop speculations about changes in the meaning and experience of childhood (e.g., social and economic changes, historical events, policies). From a research perspective, the community forum verified the validity of my initial interpretations of the data, while at the same time engaged participants in a theory building process. A video tape of this event was produced as a resource for the community.

Community website

The research approach was fundamentally participatory. The goals of the research were shared directly with all, and most of all, the findings were made maximally available via a project website. Participants of the research and other community

members from the Youth Management Team volunteered to help create a web site to showcase the data generated through environmental autobiographies (participant biographies, maps, narratives). The development of this web site fostered an intergenerational dialogue among community members about the changing nature and meaning of childhood. At the same time, the web site enables other communities across the nation and world to consider their own childhood experiences, and to raise awareness about the spatial implications of changing nature of childhood for the well being of children and of society in general.²

Data analysis

The multi-method approach adopted in this dissertation enabled me to compare, contrast and triangulate the social, spatial and environmental experience of middle childhood in one community over time. Over 70 hours of audio-taped and transcribed interview data, visual artifacts (e.g., maps and photographs representing the interviewees' childhoods), detailed ethnographic field notes and archival research revealed a variety of themes about the historical experience of childhood in this community that reflect how young people develop a sense of place and identity in relation to larger historical, economic and cultural changes in our society.

The data was analyzed using established content-analysis procedures (Creswell, 1998). An indicator of the credibility of the data is related to the consistency of information provided in the data among the different texts, narratives, images and data collected during the research process. Different sources of information were compared to

² At the time of writing this dissertation, a URL was not yet established for the website. Readers can find a link on the Isaacs Center's website at www.isaacscenter.org.

discover consistent themes or topics, either embedded or explicit and to triangulate the events and points of views expressed by the participants. Wherever possible, I shared my interpretations of the data with participants to verify the validity of my analysis. Analysis of the data occurred throughout the entire research process, and followed general procedures recommended by Creswell (1998), which included:

1. A general review of all the information that was gathered (e.g., observational field notes, interview transcripts, maps, notes about photographs or videotapes), to gain an overall sense of the data. This step is considered an initial “sorting-out process” to develop initial themes of the data, and to take notes about questions or insights that arise.
2. Obtaining feedback on the initial themes found in the data, by presenting the data back to the participants to verify the validity of the data, and of the researcher’s interpretations. This was accomplished primarily in informal conversations with individuals from the community, in the community forum, and during the process of creating the community website.
3. Reducing the data, by generating conceptual diagrams, tables, maps or other graphics that can demonstrate ideas by theme, case or subject.

I relied upon a qualitative data analysis software program, *Atlas.ti*, to manage the interview data and to code selected passages according to themes. Initially I developed 91 codes (see Appendix), which were ultimately consolidated into 6 super-codes to reflect the chapters in this dissertation (1) neighborhood history and geography, (2) personal geographies and leisure time activities, (3) place, identity and friendship formation, (4) block politics, (5) use of outdoor space, parks, playgrounds, and (6)

perceptions of childhood then and now in relation to neighborhood change. While each cohort was important to the research, the focus of my dissertation is on contemporary childhood; that is, the historical accounts of childhood are used to help explain the contemporary environmental and social conditions of children's geographies.

One of the most challenging hurdles I faced when writing this dissertation was how to represent the stories of individuals and the findings of the research in a way that could be appealing to both a lay and academic audience. I feel that the essence of academia lies in our ability to integrate practical concerns with analytic power. It is important for me to reach multiple audiences because I want my work to make a difference in the lives of people I work with, and in developing theory about children's geographies and urban studies. I struggled to find an appropriate model, a voice, a structure to the narrative. Ultimately I decided on rhetorical structure that is referred to by Creswell as a "literary/jointly told tale" in which the author writes like a journalist, borrowing techniques from fiction writers while producing stories that are jointly authored by both the ethnographer and the informants (Creswell, 1998, p. 182).

In this model the researcher inserts his/her identity into the narrative, along with those of the research participants. It offers a literary voice balanced with academic logic and analysis, what is known in some fields as literary journalism. Every effort was made to blend description and analysis, although I am certain that I privileged descriptive voice in many places over my analytic voice. I did this in part, because the voices of my interviewees were so rich and I wanted them to speak for themselves, but also because my inclination is to publish my dissertation as a book for a lay audience. In any case, I

hope to capture the reader, whoever he/she is, and make them think about their own childhood, so they can enter into the text as a participant.

Chapter 2

A tale of two neighborhoods

“There go the projects,” Ricardo replied, as he ushered his arms into the air in disgust and cynicism. Ricardo, a very articulate and intelligent 15 year old Italian-American resident of the Isaacs, was reacting to news that a Marriott Hotel and 32-story apartment building were going to be constructed across the street from the Isaacs beginning in 2003. The hotel and apartment building complex will replace the East Side Car Wash and Mobile Station, a longtime fixture on the Yorkville landscape. “This neighborhood, well, it’s very expensive,” Ricardo continued his assessment of the situation in his community. “It’s way too expensive for the people who grow up in these projects, because as you look around, all the luxury buildings are here and that brings all the luxury stores, so there’s not much to do for people like me.” Ricardo is rightly concerned about the fate of the Isaacs, for the Marriott is yet another development that serves to erode and/or alter his personal sense of place, experience and relationship with the community.

Since the early 1960s, Yorkville has witnessed relentless gentrification, as developers and private investors destroyed many tenements block by block, displacing working class families and replacing walk-up tenements with 30 to 50 storey luxury buildings housing upwardly mobile professionals. As the construction of the Marriott highlights, gentrification continues to this day and is reaching into and past 96th Street, the border territory of Yorkville and East Harlem where the Isaacs housing development is located. While Yorkville has witnessed relentless investment, East Harlem has

historically been neglected by developers and by the state. As a result, the evolution of both neighborhoods has been one of extreme polar opposites in social class, racial and cultural groups and commercial and residential development. For instance, the border today between Yorkville and East Harlem represents one of the most economically distinct divisions in all of New York City – the wealthiest and poorest of its residents live side by side, with differences in median household income of \$60,000+ and differences in median family income of \$100,000+ from one side of the street to the next (US Census, 2000).

This chapter is about how places like Yorkville and East Harlem are socially constructed as distinct places in New York City, and how they are lived realities. I begin by describing how the urban and socio-cultural development of Yorkville and East Harlem have changed over time using historical archives such as newspapers, census data, magazines and books written about each community. I then examine how Yorkville and East Harlem have been socially constructed in the media and by society more generally. This information provides a foundation upon which to analyze the historical relationship between urban development and social change for its impact on the everyday lives of young people in other chapters of this dissertation.

Yorkville: from East Side Frankfurt to the Upper East Side

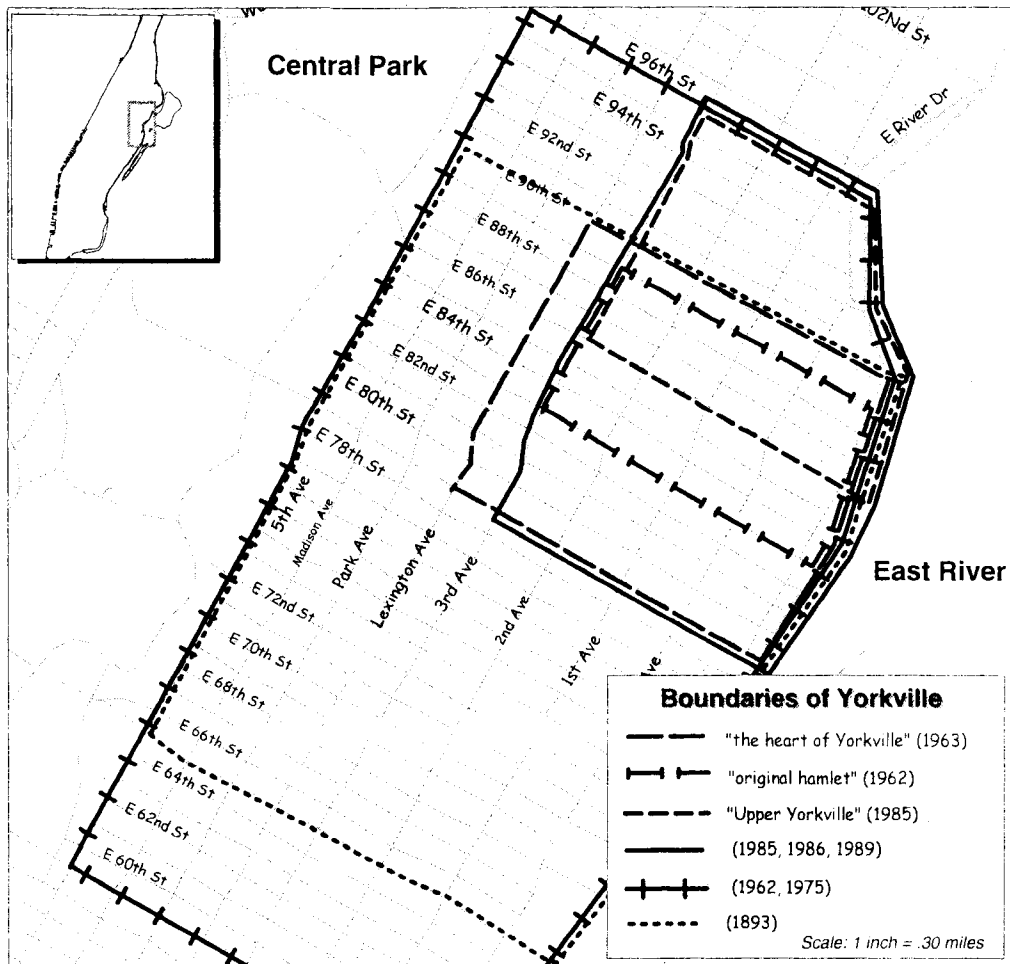
While city planning agencies label the neighborhood in which the Isaacs and most of my interviewees' homes as young people are/were situated as "Yorkville," most young people living there today do not typically refer to their neighborhood by this name. In fact, most young people consider their neighborhood to be the block they live on, in this case, the Isaacs housing development complex (see Chapter 5, *Block politics*). Today

young people are more inclined to label the larger community in which they live as “the Upper East Side.” But, the seniors and many of the adults who grew up in Yorkville feel a strong sense of attachment to and identification with this place name. Even today, they are more inclined to identify their neighborhood as “Yorkville” rather than the “Upper East Side” (although they are aware of this name as well).

The fact that residents of a particular community name places in different ways is not unusual. Geographers have demonstrated how place names are symbolic of larger historical, social, and cultural processes which shape an individual’s perception and sense of place, as well as expressions of a person’s unique history of a place (Meinig, 1979; Monmonier, 1991; Relph, 1976; Tuan, 1974). The degree to which seniors and young people identify with “Yorkville” or “the Upper East Side” is one outcome of the (re)naming of the neighborhood by developers and the destruction of place through the gentrification process more generally. It is also indicative of an individual’s relationship to a place and the naming of that place by others during a particular time period in their life.

“Yorkville” has always been differently circumscribed by different groups. According to the *New York Times* from 1893 to 1989, I was able to identify six different boundaries to describe the location of Yorkville (Figure 11). In each case, the boundaries were determined by what Relph terms, “objective outsiders,” or “opinion-makers,” those planners and other individuals in the media who adopt a dispassionate attitude towards places in order to consider them in terms of where objects and activities are located, or to sell a particular place identity to the public (Relph, 1976). For example, the boundary for

Figure 11: Boundaries of Yorkville



Source: *New York Times*, dates refer to the year in which a particular boundary and/or place name was identified in an article about Yorkville

“Upper Yorkville” was used by developers in the 1980s to push the gentrification of Yorkville northward into a territory most never considered to be Yorkville. Similarly, describing a section of the neighborhood as “the Heart of Yorkville” is meant to conjure up an image or sense of place to remind individuals of the “true” residents of Yorkville, those Germans and other Europeans who settled in the community and who claimed the territory as their home for many years.

According to most accounts of the history of Yorkville, there were three primary waves of immigration (both from within New York City and from Germany) that created a distinct German enclave. The first wave occurred in the 1840s, when wealthy industrialists like Jacob Ruppert established a brewery business in Yorkville, luring workers of German ancestry by providing housing and stable employment opportunities. Such establishments served as commercial anchors for other subsidiary businesses to develop and provided a purpose for other German families to move to the community. According to the *New York Times*, by 1893, there were more Germans in New York City than in any German city except Berlin.

The second wave of German immigration came about through tragedy in 1904, when a recreation boat caught fire on the East River and burned, killing over 1,400 German residents living on the Lower East Side. Unable to remain in a neighborhood that held memories of loved ones who passed away, many families chose to move to Yorkville to reestablish roots. The new arrivals worked primarily in the beer industry, or for the Steinway piano company in Queens, taking a newly established ferry route across the East River from Yorkville to Astoria. As the German population boomed, so did commercial development along 86th Street, dubbed by some as the “German Broadway,” making it the cultural, social and economic hub for the German community, lined with Brauhauses (bars), German delis, specialty shops and restaurants.

The third wave of German immigration to Yorkville occurred after World War I, when post-war inflation made it difficult for many families to survive in their homeland. Most families had ties to relatives living in Yorkville, therefore making the neighborhood a logical choice for settlement. Germany is not a monolithic culture and this was true of

the German immigrants residing in Yorkville. Divisions within the population were most evident during World War I and in particular in World War II when Yorkville became a battleground for pro- and anti-Nazi political groups. The two most popular groups were the *German Workers Club*, a socialist organization that supported American values while retaining a distinct German heritage, and Fritz Kuhn's *German American Bund*, which supported Hitler and his political campaign of world domination and the eradication of Jews. Each group had its own German language newspaper, such as *Staats-Zeitung*, and both held rallies and parades to promote their political agenda. For example, in 1937 over 2,000 pro-Nazi Yorkvillites paraded on 86th Street in uniform carrying Nazi flags to protest the Jewish boycott of German goods.

While Germans comprised the majority of the population in Yorkville, other European groups such as the Czechs, Hungarians, Austrians, Italians, Irish and others also made this community their home. As one *New York Times* article reported in the 1930s, "It is Munich, Nürnberg, Limerick, Dublin, Prague, Budapest and Athens jammed shoulder to shoulder to make a new foreign capital that is today better fed, happier, and much more at peace than its broken and uneasy counterparts." Much like the Germans, many of the other European immigrants resided initially along the Lower East Side, thereafter making their way north to Yorkville, creating distinct mini-enclaves within the predominantly German neighborhood. For example, the Czechs settled on Second and First Avenues in the lower 70s, creating "Little Bohemia," with food specialty shops and other establishments catering to the culinary and linguistic needs of their people.

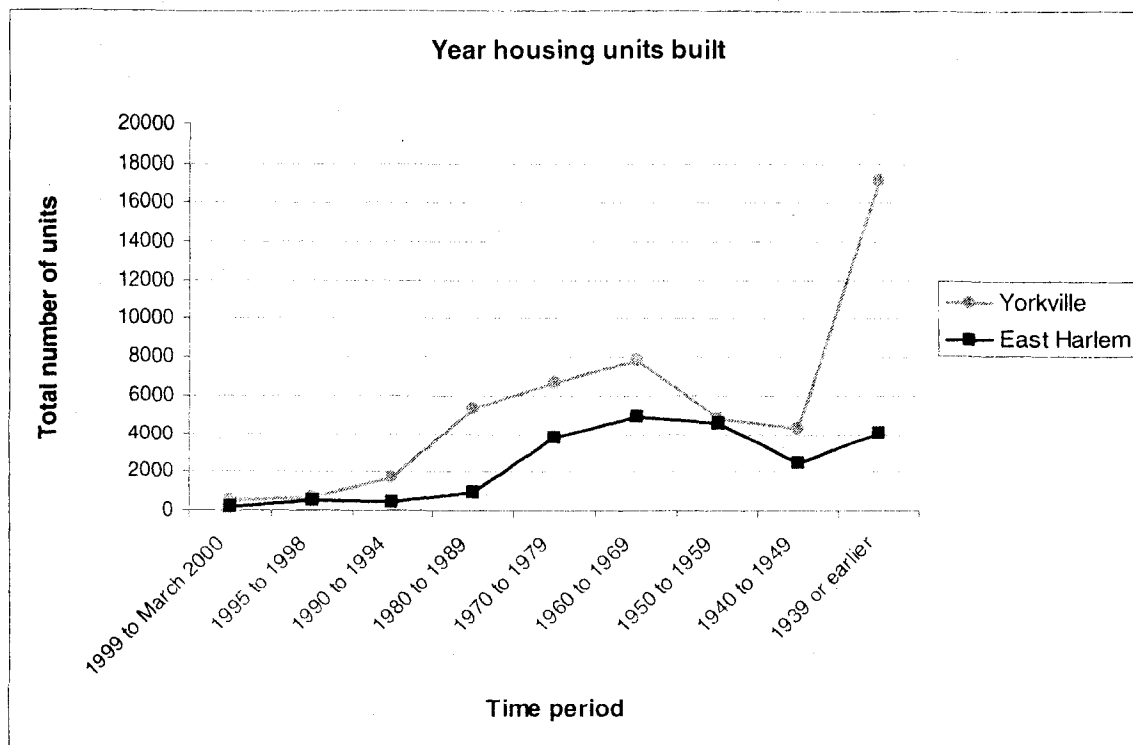
Residents of Yorkville historically resided in 4 to 6 story tenement buildings, constructed prior to 1939 when many began to be replaced as result of a post-war

building boom (Figure 12). Yorkville's isolation from the Upper East Side began to change in the 1950s when the Third Avenue El (elevated train) was dismantled and property values increased. Since then, gentrification and urban renewal significantly transformed the physical and social landscape of Yorkville. The gentrification process in Yorkville was similar to other neighborhoods of New York City, such as the Lower East Side, where the rent gap and the potential for investment in property to renovate were high (Smith, 1996).

Yorkville's gentrification process, while it also involved the expulsion of working class families from tenements that had potential for renovation, was also about the complete destruction of blocks of tenements that were replaced by high-rise co-ops and condominiums (Figure 13). Beginning fiercely in the 1960s and continuing at a brisk pace into the 1990s there was a massive shift in the number and type of residential buildings located in Yorkville. From 1980 to 1990 there was a 12% loss in housing comprising 10-19 units (i.e., tenement buildings) and a 15% increase in housing comprising 50 units or more (i.e., luxury apartments) (City of New York, 1992).

In general, the block by block destruction of tenements began in the southern areas of Yorkville because of its proximity to downtown Manhattan (concentrated around 86th Street), and along the eastern and western edges of the neighborhood for its respective aesthetic qualities (the East River and Central Park) (Figure 14). As the destruction and renovation process moved further north and along some of the major avenues, residents began to fight zoning laws in an attempt to restrict development to the avenues rather than along streets. Today the modern, luminescent glass façades of the

Figure 12: Year housing units built, by time and neighborhood



Source: US Census, 1940-2000

Figure 13: The destruction of tenements on 96th Street, c. 1970



Source: Photograph contributed by the family of Debbie

Figure 14: Construction of a luxury apartment and the destruction of a river view for some residents of the Isaacs, c. 1980



Source: Photograph provided by the family of Jay

Figure 15: Yorkville's contemporary gentrified landscape, c. 2000



Source: Photograph contributed by Alecia

luxury apartments stand in sharp contrast to the duller, rough aged brick of the remaining tenements (Figure 15). A number of anchor commercial and residential developments firmly established the process of gentrification in Yorkville. These anchors, which included Gimbels Department Store on 86th Street in the 1960s, and the Ruppert Towers on 90th Street in the 1970s, facilitated the development of other residential and commercial establishments from south to north along the major avenues. Both Gimbels and the Ruppert Towers were constructed in places that had never had a large department store or a high-rise apartment building. The community was hostile towards Gimbels, which some residents feared would create a “black belt” because of its “bargain basement” prices, revealing racist dynamics of neighborhood preservation. Similarly, residents tried to block the construction of the Ruppert Towers, given that most apartments would not be affordable to the seniors and families who resided in Yorkville for many years.

Residents often mobilized themselves to combat the forces of gentrification, forming anti-gentrification committees such as the “Yorkville Save Our Homes Committee” and developing strategies to retain their apartments. Apartments leases were passed on from generation to generation when possible, and children who moved away and earned enough money to provide remittances to their families to pay for increases in rent. In addition, families often doubled up or allowed additional relatives and friends spaces in their apartments to share the cost of rent increases. But such efforts were largely ineffective in relation to the scale of neighborhood changes. It is estimated that 15,000 families were driven from their homes in Yorkville from 1951 to 1960 (Jacobs, 1992 [1961], p. 137).

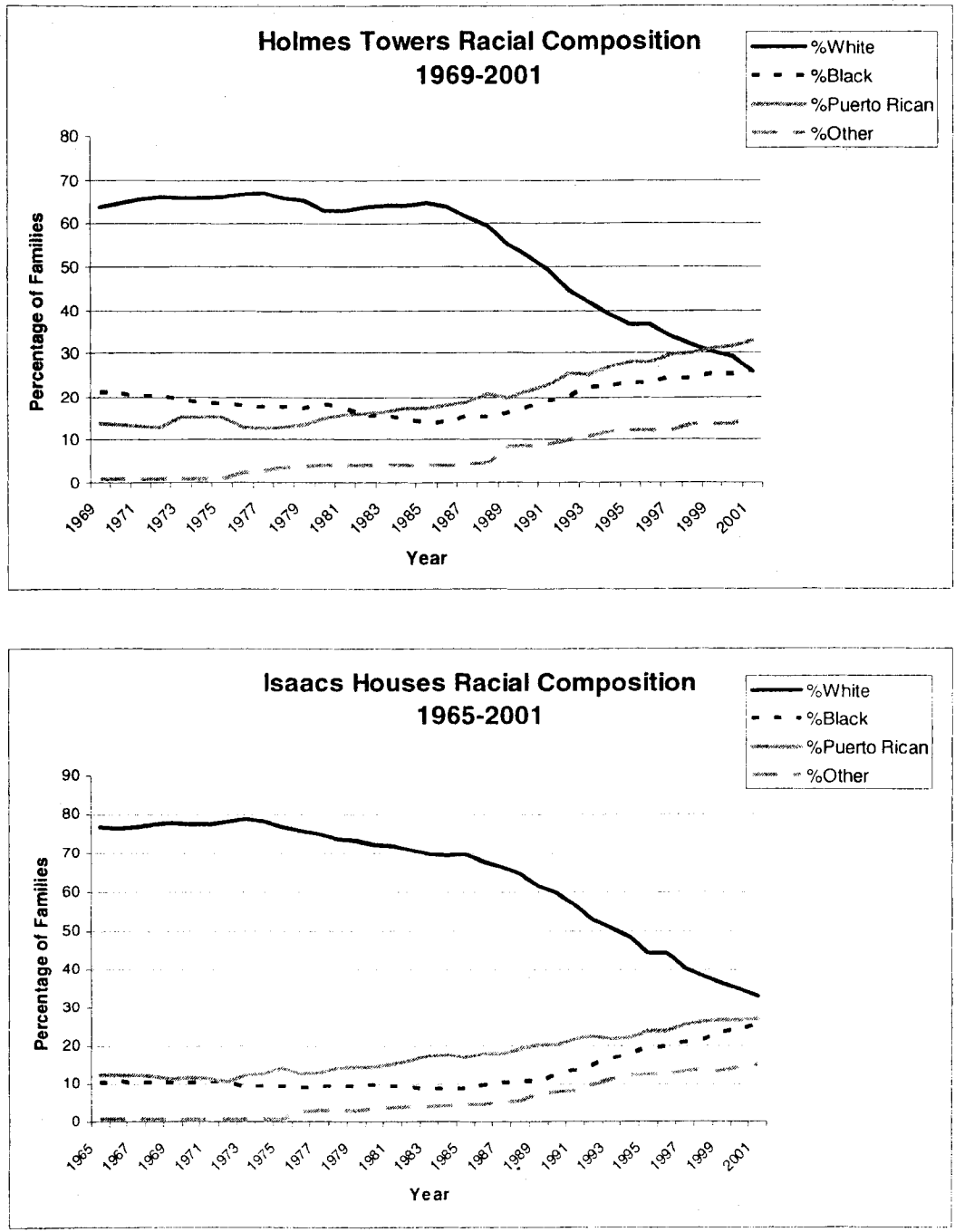
When faced with eviction notices from the city or private developers in the early 1960s, many working class families living in tenement buildings in Yorkville turned to local churches for help in finding a new place to live. Upon learning that a public housing development – the Isaacs – would be constructed in Yorkville, the clergy were particularly powerful in lobbying NYCHA to give working class families from Yorkville priority in the development. As a result, unlike the luxury apartments being constructed in Yorkville, the Isaacs were meant to cater to the working class populations of Yorkville, particularly seniors who were being evicted from their homes.

As a result, the racial composition of the Isaacs has historically been comprised of a large white population of Irish, Italian, German and Hungarian ancestry (Figure 16), something that outraged minority families who wanted to move there. While the Isaacs was historically comprised of a working class white population, most of them either moved out or passed away in the late 1980s, and now the Isaacs is comprised of predominantly Puerto Rican and African American populations. However, the Isaacs public housing development is a pocket of poverty and racial diversity in a sea of wealth and a predominantly white population.

Those “gentry” who settled in Yorkville are largely young, white, single and wealthy with different tastes and aesthetic needs than long time residents. The ratio of whites to blacks in Yorkville has historically averaged 33 to 1; it is other demographics of the white population that have changed.³ For example, the number of 25 to 34 year olds mushroomed from roughly 10,000 in the 1960s to 20,000+ in the 1990s and 2000s (US Census, 1960-2000).

³ According to US Census statistics from 1940 to 2000, the ratio of whites to blacks in Yorkville was 41:1 in 1940, 61:1 in 1950, 39:1 in 1960, 20:1 in 1970, 17:1 in 1990, and 17:1 in 2000. I was unable to construct similar statistics for the Puerto Rican population because the US Census did not recognize them as a distinct group until 1960.

Figure 16: Racial composition of the Isaacs (Holmes Towers & Isaacs Houses), 1960s-2000s



Source: New York City Housing Authority, 1965-2001

Young, single and wealthy individuals have different needs and desires than married working class families. According to Beauregard, “the postponement of marriage facilitates consumption, but it also makes it necessary if people are to meet others and to develop friendships. Both need to consume outside the home and the desire to make friends and meet sexual partners, either during the now-extended period of ‘search’ before marriage or a lifetime of fluid personal relationships, encourages the identification with and migration to certain areas of the city” (Beauregard, 1986, p. 44).

Thus it is important to point out that the gentrification process also involved the creation of new forms of entertainment, dining and luxury industries in Yorkville that catered to a specific age, class and socio-cultural cohort. An Irish grocery store became a computer store and a parking lot a private tennis court. In the 1960s developers targeted “swinging singles” and “secretaries” in their advertisements and played up the significance of the location of Yorkville and its proximity to central business districts in New York City. According to a 1963 article of the *New York Times*, many of the initial luxury apartment buildings were only at 40% capacity, therefore developers were also offering incentives such as around the world trips for two and free rent for several months. Private investors played on the “old world charm” of the working class German population that historically resided there to emphasize that this Yorkville was “a bright new community that [would] somehow retain the cosmopolitan flavor of the old.” Such advertisements were also designed to play down any fears that Yorkville was a minority community. As one Assemblyman was quoted as stating in a 1963 *New York Times* article, “If Yorkville hadn’t been lily white, it wouldn’t have been so attractive to real estate developers.”

This change in demographic and its subsequent lifestyle has often been alarming and displeasing to residents who identified with the working class German/Irish enclave of Yorkville for many decades, and for those African Americans and Puerto Ricans who are struggling to live there now. As Ricardo pointed out in the beginning of this chapter, “all the luxury buildings are here and that brings all the luxury stores, so there’s not much to do for people like me.” Today there are only a few stores along First Avenue that cater to poorer populations residing in the Isaacs (e.g., 99 cent stores, a pizza parlor that offers a relatively inexpensive menu of options). These commercial establishments (some of which are the last remaining “mom and pop” stores in Yorkville) will face continued struggles to maintain their businesses because of rising retail rents, particularly with the new Marriott that is being built on First Avenue, literally right around the corner from their stores and restaurants.

As a result of the gentrification of Yorkville, poorer residents have witnessed a sharp reduction in their quality of life. For example, the grocery stores which now cater to different culinary desires and tastes are often too expensive for poorer residents, leaving many to shop in East Harlem for food, clothing and everyday living needs. This requires residents of Yorkville to travel greater distances for their everyday supplies. In addition, many of the luxury buildings, which are typically 50 stories tall, have blocked the view residents used to have of the sun and of the East River. Finally, there is a strong sense of alienation among the cultural groups that historically resided in Yorkville (German, Irish, Italian). With the exception of one or two establishments, 86th Street is no longer the “German Broadway” it once was, and is now, what one 13 year old boy

described as his “42nd Street,” lined with chain restaurants and stores ranging from the Gap to Burger King.

The effects of gentrification and neighborhood change can also be witnessed in the experience of childhood among poorer populations. These are described in subsequent chapters of this dissertation, but are related to where young people hang out in the neighborhood and with whom they associate. For example, some childhood spaces have been gentrified from abandoned lots to expensive luxury recreational facilities (see Chapter 6, *Playin’ and hangin’* for a case study of Asphalt Green). In addition, today’s young people from the Isaacs rarely, if ever, interact with their peers who reside in luxury apartments (this applies to adults as well) (see Chapter 3, *Everyday geographies*). As early as 1963 a *New York Times* article reported that, “new and old Yorkville are, if not hostile, at least wary of each other.” In fact, outside of 86th Street, there are very few places where the “old-timers” and “newcomers” of Yorkville come together. These changes in sense of place and community are important for understanding the impact of gentrification on the lives of young people growing up in and around the Isaacs today.

East Harlem: from Little Italy to El Barrio

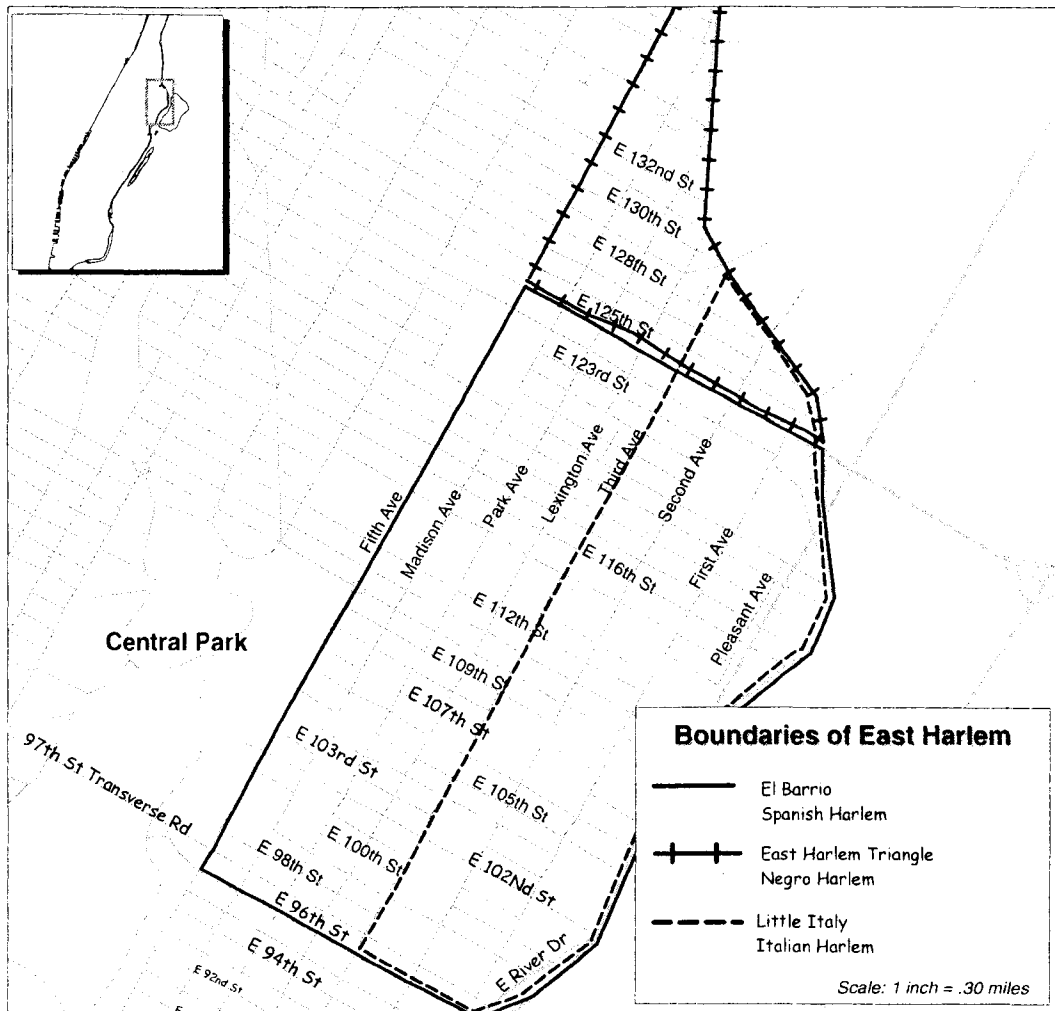
Unlike Yorkville, East Harlem has had a relatively stable physical boundary to describe its location within the urban fabric of New York City. According to most accounts, East Harlem is located from 96th Street to 142nd Street, from Fifth Avenue to the East River. However, there have been three distinct sub-territories within East Harlem recognized by planning agencies, book authors and newspaper journalists. These include: 1) “the East Harlem Triangle/Negro Harlem,” populated historically by African

American residents, 2) “Spanish Harlem/El Barrio,” populated primarily by Puerto Ricans, and 3) “Italian Harlem/Little Italy,” populated historically, but not now, by Italian Americans from Southern Italy (Figure 17). Each sub-territory has fluctuated over time in the minds of those residing in East Harlem, with frequent and often fierce confrontations among individuals as each successive immigrant groups obtained a majority in a particular territory.

The boundaries and place names attached to sub-territories within East Harlem offer a clue to the generations of immigrants who passed through the community, some of whom continue to reside there today. East Harlem once housed primarily Southern Italians, Russian Jews, African Americans and the Irish in the 1940s, but today is populated by Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, Dominicans, African Americans, Chinese, and Ecuadorians (US Census, 1940-2000). The succession of immigrant populations that called East Harlem home tended to be poor in economic wealth but rich in cultural capital. Each population has left its imprint on the neighborhood whether or not they continue to reside. Today walking along 116th Street, the commercial heart of East Harlem, one can find Cuban music stores, Puerto Rican restaurants serving *arroz con pollo* (rice with chicken) and Mexican bodegas selling a diverse pallet of hot sauce, beans and rice. Near Pleasant Avenue one can still find Rao’s Restaurant, a 100 year old Italian restaurant made famous by the once Mayor LaGuardia and the Italian mafia.

The Italians comprised the largest ethnic group in East Harlem well into the 1960s. Italians arrived en masse from Naples and Sicily in southern Italy where economic conditions were oppressive. In the 1930s, the Italian community in East

Figure 17: Boundaries of East Harlem



Sources: Community Board 11 (www.east-harlem.com, 2003), and (Administration, 1939)

Harlem was the largest in the country (www.east-harlem.com, 2003). In the 1940 and 1950 censuses, Italians represented 53 percent of the foreign born population, which declined slightly in 1960 to 49 percent (US Census, 1940-1960). By the 1970 census, the number of foreign born Italians dropped to 24 percent, while Puerto Ricans and other Latin Americans comprised 54 percent of the immigrant population (US Census, 1970).

Puerto Ricans arrived in New York in search of employment in the garment and textile industries when they lost their jobs as agricultural laborers in Puerto Rico (Bourgeois, 1995; Glazer & Moynihan, 1970; Padilla, 1958; Thomas, 1967). As early as 1949, the *New York Times* was reporting that over 1,000 Puerto Ricans were arriving each week into East Harlem. While Puerto Ricans were the dominant Latin American population to arrive in East Harlem, by the 2000 census, Mexicans (36% foreign born), Dominicans (16% foreign born) and Ecuadorians (6% foreign born) represented the latest wave of Spanish speaking immigrants (US Census, 2000). “Little Italy” is a memory to most; “Spanish Harlem” or “El Barrio” exists in its place (although the two existed side by side for a long time).

East Harlem also has a large African American population. Since 1940, the African American population has climbed from almost 12,000 to over 20,000 in 2000 (US Census, 1940-2000). African Americans arrived in New York in droves in the 1920s from the south of the United States when the mechanization of agriculture forced many agricultural laborers to seek employment in northern industrial cities (Lemann, 1992). African Americans faced high levels of discrimination within the real estate market and in their everyday lives, and therefore concentrated their settlement in some of the poorest and most crowded dwellings in the northern sections of East Harlem.

Oftentimes tensions among different ethnic groups spilled onto the streets (such as the riots in 1967) and racially motivated confrontations occurred between Italians and Puerto Ricans, and among African Americans and Puerto Ricans, as young people sought to defend their particular “turf” with each successive wave of immigrant groups (Bourgeois, 1995). Piri Thomas, in his book entitled, *Down these Mean Streets*,

demonstrated the harsh reality of growing up in East Harlem as a young person from one of the first Puerto Rican families to move into an all-Italian block (Thomas, 1967). As Grutzner wrote in a 1949 *New York Times* article, “the Italian slum dwellers, with priority of a generation and more resented the invasion of East Harlem by the Puerto Ricans. Animosities have also developed between some of the Harlem Negroes and the Puerto Ricans. One reason the dark-skinned Puerto Ricans show less inclination to learn English is that they resent being taken for Negroes from the mainland.” In fact, most Italians moved out of East Harlem as soon as they had the economic means, often because they resented the “invasion” of Puerto Ricans (Bourgois, 1995).

The living conditions and poor quality of life in East Harlem are well documented in newspaper accounts, community studies and in city reports. East Harlem is, and has historically been, notorious for its slums, crowded tenements, garbage strewn vacant lots, drug addicts and gangsters. According to the *New York Times* in 1949, because of the low economic status of the migrants, East Harlem was “shockingly overcrowded,” and it was not uncommon for “three to six families to share flats intended for one... The streets of East Harlem are dirtier than almost anywhere else in the city.” According to a report by Community Board 11, East Harlem had one of the highest population densities in the world in 1950 (www.east-harlem.com). Because of the relentless housing shortage and a lack of development in particular neighborhoods during post-war times, many immigrants had no choice but to live in such crowded conditions, and there was fierce competition between ethnic groups to secure a place to live.

Federal, state and city public policies played an important role in the ghettoization of poor populations residing in East Harlem. Unlike Yorkville, East Harlem has

historically witnessed abandonment and neglect on the part of private investors and the state. New Deal federal policies such as the Federal Mortgage and Loans Program discriminated against African Americans and other minority populations by offering loans primarily to white families who wanted to purchase homes in suburban areas, concentrating development outside of core urban centers. In addition, racially driven banking policies (such as red-lining) made it all but impossible for African Americans and other minority populations to purchase homes. To make matters worse, property owners typically allowed tenements in East Harlem to become rundown, by refusing to maintain the infrastructure of buildings and failing to pay property taxes, in order to obtain a higher profit margin and rate of return on their investment. Over time, many buildings became derelict to the point that they were no longer inhabitable. As a result, the city seized these properties and obtained a large percentage of abandoned property in East Harlem. Therefore the city is the largest investor in East Harlem.

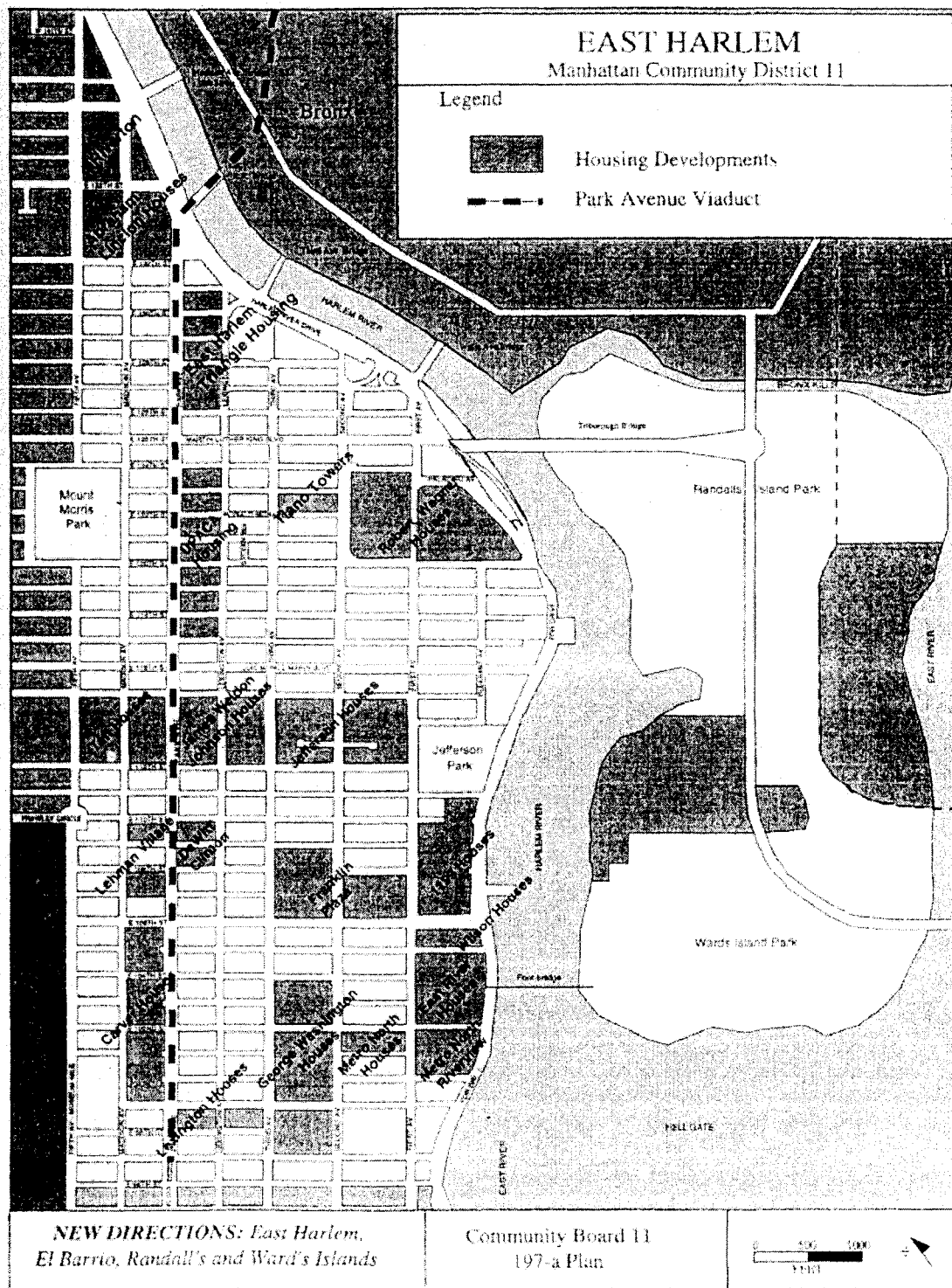
According to most critics, the city chose a destructive path for the urban renewal of East Harlem (Jacobs, 1992 [1961]; Caro, 1975). Entire sections of the neighborhood were leveled in the 1950s and 1960s, aided by the passage of Federal Housing Legislation Title I, or the “slum clearance program,” which gave city planning commissioner Robert Moses the power to destroy tenements en masse and to create the superblocks of public housing in their place (Caro, 1975). The assumption promoted in popular discourse was that “slums breed crime.” It was not uncommon for Moses to order the destruction of six square blocks of tenements, promising residents “relocation help” and “preferential status” in low-income public housing projects. In reality, however, many tenement tenants could not afford to move into Title I rentals, and most

were forced to “double up” into adjacent slum areas (Caro, 1975). African Americans and Puerto Ricans were adversely affected by the slum clearance program, representing the majority of the tens of thousands of evictees (Bourgois, 1995; Caro, 1975).

The contemporary landscape of East Harlem reflects a patchwork of older tenement blocks and massive housing complexes. According to a report by Community Board 11 in 2003, 171 acres or 18 percent of East Harlem was destroyed and replaced with public housing projects (www.east-harlem.com, 2003) (Figure 18). Forty percent of the total housing stock in East Harlem is in public housing complexes, and another 22 percent in other publicly funded subsidized and restricted housing (www.east-harlem.com, 2003). East Harlem therefore has the dubious distinction of being the neighborhood with the highest concentration of public housing in New York City (www.east-harlem.com, 2003). The housing projects cut through communities and neighborhoods and created physical barriers to travel even though their design also included “green belts” of space for playgrounds (Figure 18). Entire communities were destroyed. In their place came residents from other NYCHA projects from around the city, predominantly Puerto Ricans and African Americans. Like the residents of Yorkville who faced eviction through private investment from developers, East Harlemites teamed up to block the destruction of property and to pressure the city to build new schools (www.east-harlem.com, 2003). In addition, many residents mobilized to reclaim abandoned property and transform them into brilliant community gardens, clubhouses and Casitas.

In the 1980s, East Harlem witnessed *some* interest upon the part of private developers who concentrated their investments along 105th and 106th Street, where former

Figure 18: Major housing developments in East Harlem



Source: (www.east-harlem.com, 2003)

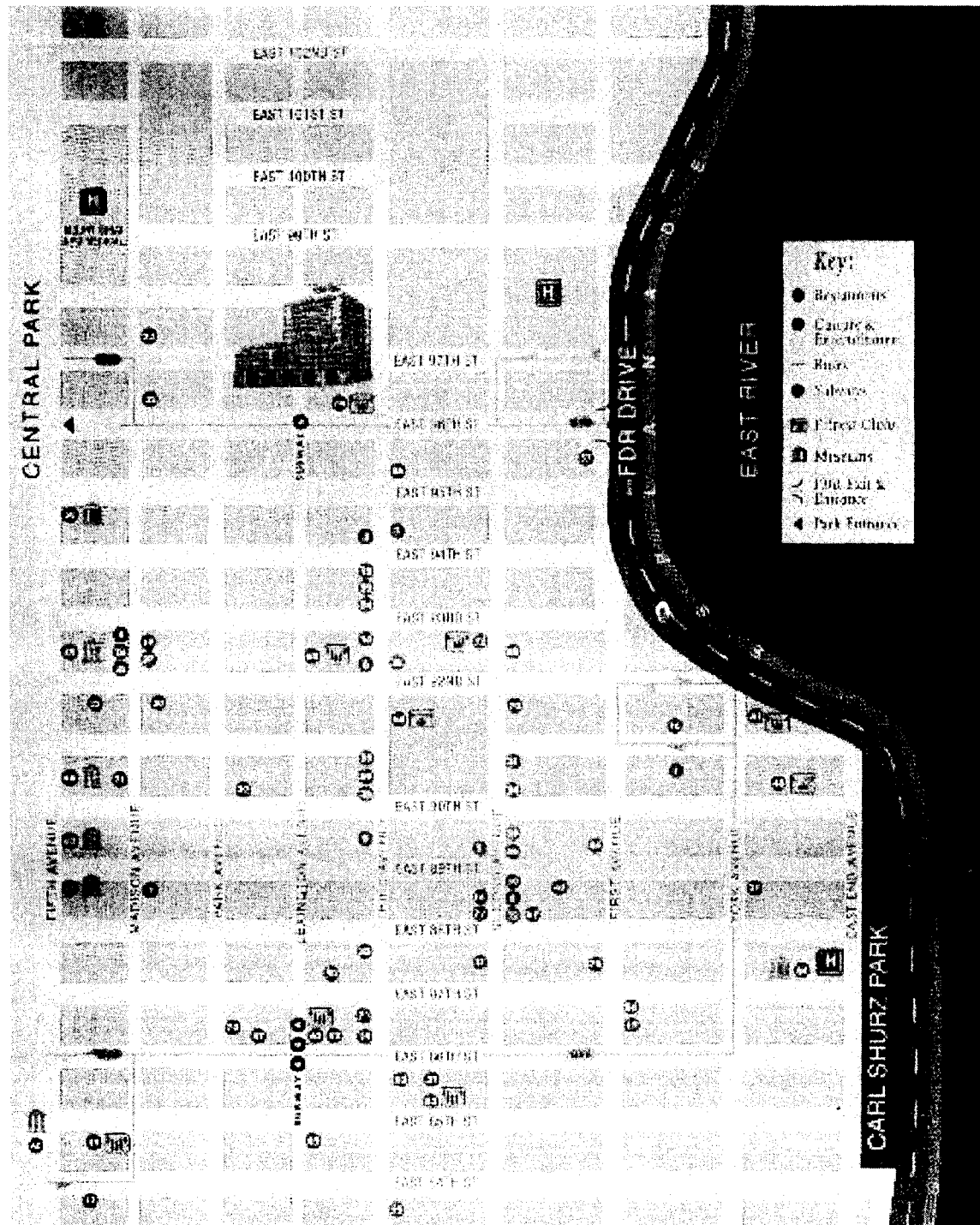
Italian tenements offered aesthetic and historical qualities important for gentrification to occur. For example, according to an article in the *New York Times* in 1985, two privately financed condominiums, “the first ever on the East Side north of 96th Street,” were sold for almost \$100,000 and despite the abandoned character of the remainder of the block, were purchased by young white professionals. The same article stated that a strong demand for housing prompted the real-estates industry’s “sudden interest in the once forsaken area north of 96th Street.” Developers commented in the same article, “the perception is that the 96th Street barrier is broken.” But, while investors were interested in the potential new market for housing, the city was still in control of over 65 percent of the property in East Harlem in 1985. The city’s role was crucial in determining the future actions in East Harlem, and it largely chose a course of inaction.

Further inhibiting the gentrification of East Harlem is the perception of “outsiders” about the safety of the neighborhood and the racial composition of the community. While investors tend to be white, East Harlem residents tend to be black and Hispanic. Nonetheless, since the late 1990s and early 2000s, the area from 96th Street and 98th Streets, between Lexington and Second Avenue has witnessed unprecedented investment by private developers, who have constructed luxury apartments and opened expensive restaurants. One such example is Carnegie Hill Place, which offered its first luxury rentals in 2002 with studios from \$1,752, 1-bedroom residences from \$2,120 and 2-bedroom residences from \$3,090. The building stands in sharp contrast to the public housing projects across the street and has well-lit sidewalks to create a feeling of surveillance.

In order to make the apartments attractive to potential renters, Carnegie Hill Place management invested a considerable amount of money in promotional literature about the neighborhood. In this literature, there are colorful pictures of Central Park, which is several avenues away, and a map showing important places in the community (Figure 19). The map, much like most of the literature, ignores the fact that Carnegie Hill Place is technically located in East Harlem, choosing instead to identify itself with Carnegie Hill and the Upper East Side. The fact that “interesting places” are located in Yorkville rather than East Harlem (save one museum) on this map is indicative of the kind of manipulation and marketing developers use to change the perceptions of potential residents that living conditions are safe, convenient and provide “easy living” (Monmonier, 1991).

The latest developments in East Harlem suggest there is a potential real estate market along the 96th border area of Yorkville, thus pushing the boundaries of gentrification further northward. This area is exactly where the Isaacs housing development is located and it is where many of the people I interviewed grew up. How this border was conceived, lived and has been socially constructed over time is the subject of the final section of this chapter.

Figure 19: Carnegie Hill Place map advertisement



MENT

Source: (Carnegie Hill promotional literature, 2002)

Constructing place and borders

The Yorkville myth depends on distance. A boozy, all-German cuckoo-clock land on the last Alpine meadow before Harlem, somehow remote from the temporary chic of the essential Upper East Side.

≈ Richard Peck, *New York Times*, January 12, 1975

Once one of the city's most cohesive ethnic communities, with German and East European people predominating, Yorkville has felt the expansionary pressure from the wealthier Upper East Side on the south, and the poorer East Harlem on the north. The nature of the community that will emerge from the current social and commercial flux is uncertain.

≈ Carter B. Horsley, *New York Times*, January 30, 1972

East 96th Street is not just a dead piece of real estate – it is a socially important corridor. With El Barrio to the north and Yorkville to the south, it could be the meeting place of two cultures, a river into which both flow.

≈ August Heckscher (New York City Park Commissioner from 1967 to 1971)
quoted in a *New York Times* article, May 13, 1984

The “Yorkville myth” poetically voiced by Peck, and the wedged world of Yorkville between the “wealthier Upper East Side” and the “poorer East Harlem” captures the essence of Yorkville’s border geography, an often tacit spatial reality for the young people who grew up in this community. As Peck saw it, in 1975 Yorkville was on its way to becoming spatially and socially associated with (some may say swallowed up by) the “chic” Upper East Side. At the same time, as the “last Alpine meadow” (read: last stop, exit now), Yorkville was considered socially and spatially distinct from East Harlem. Indeed the “nature of the community” that has developed in Yorkville is one of extreme transformation in the identity of place, in which 96th Street has become a “meeting place of two cultures” (actually, many cultures) as Heckscher predicted.

Narratives like Peck’s, Horsley’s and Heckscher’s in the *New York Times* are one of the many ways in which the identities of places are socially constructed. But they are also reflective of the social institutions, public policies and decisions by investors to (re)make place. As these narrative highlight, journalists, urban planners, public officials,

developers and other interested parties have played a discursive role in positioning Yorkville in opposition to East Harlem, fashioning a distinct geography between both communities. In positioning Yorkville in contrast to East Harlem (through the media and in other historical-narrative accounts), social variables such as race and class become prominent and associated with each place in the psyche of individuals who reside there (and elsewhere in New York City). Because the border distinguishing Yorkville and East Harlem is so distinct and unique in New York City in terms of class and race, its psychology and geographical imagination is felt in everyday life by residents of either community with good reason (see Chapter 4, *Social worlds*). This border imagery has been accentuated over time with the gentrification of Yorkville, slum clearance in East Harlem and the polarization of rich and poor typical of contemporary service-dominated urban economies (Harvey, 1990; Smith, 1996) (Figure 20).

To make this point, I now provide some historical statistics of both communities demonstrating changes in variables such as population, age structure, and income. These statistics are based on US Census data, covering 17-26 census tracts, from the 1940s to 2000.⁴ I chose these census tracts, which cover the territory roughly between 84th Street to 114th Street, from Fifth Avenue to the East River, in order to focus in more explicitly on the border geographies I intend to demonstrate (Figures 21 and 22). This proves more useful than using neighborhood or community district data, which reflects a larger geographic territory. While the census tract numbers change over time (e.g., some tracts are split into two or three areas for example) to accommodate changes in the population,

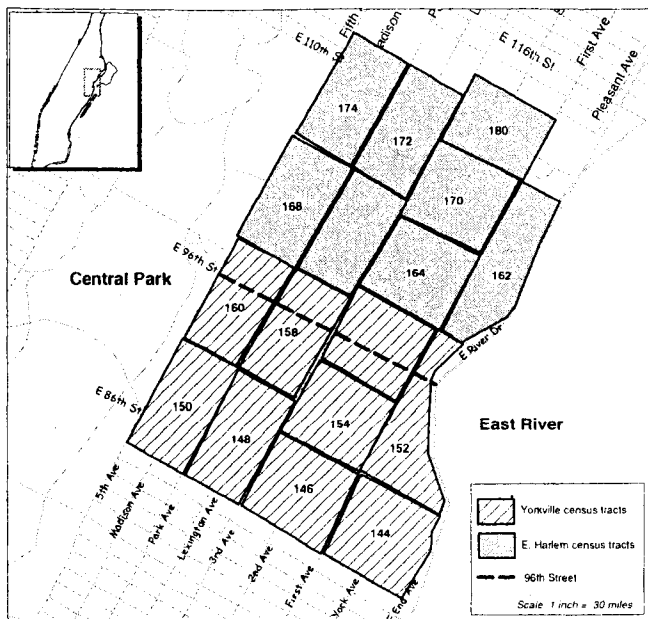
⁴ Unfortunately the 1980 Census data was not available at the time of writing this dissertation. This was due to missing pages in books at the public library and the inability of computerized versions on CDs and on the Internet to handle the multiple variable requests for each census tract I was researching.

Figure 20: 96th Street (between 2nd and 3rd Avenues), c. 1970



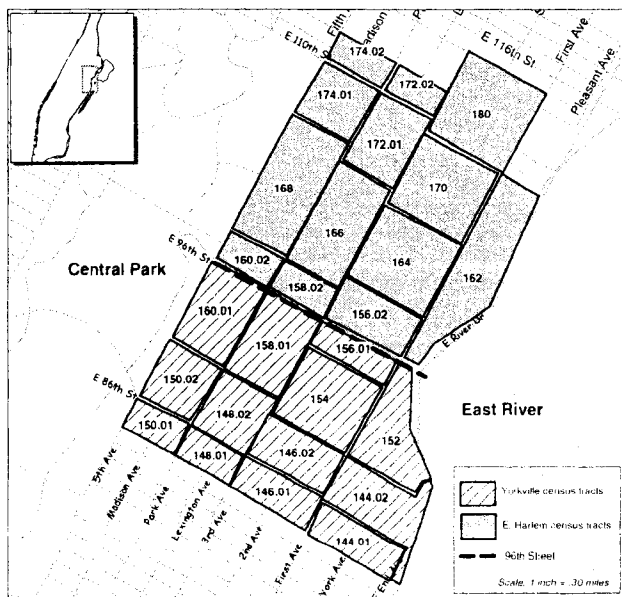
Source: Photograph contributed by the family of Debbie

Figure 21: 1940-1960 census tracts in Yorkville and East Harlem



Source: US Census, 1940-1960

Figure 22: 1970-2000 census tracts in Yorkville and East Harlem



Source: US Census, 1970-2000

the overall geographic territory I investigated changed very little, making it easier to compare statistics over time.⁵

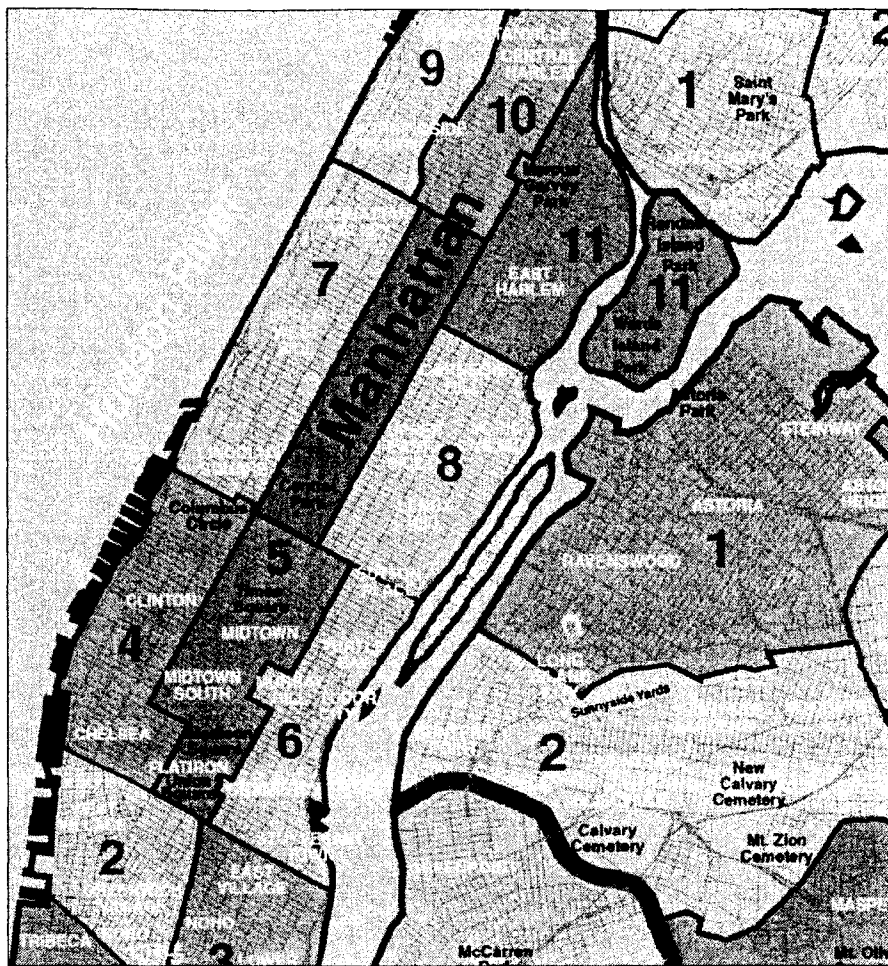
It is worth noting that the census tracts from 1940 to 1960 on the northern border of today's Yorkville (or the southern border of today's East Harlem, depending on how you look at it) extended into a territory as far as 98th and 99th Streets (Figure 21). It was not until 1970, around the time that gentrification in Yorkville was well underway, that the census tracts represented a sharp demarcation between Yorkville and East Harlem at 96th Street. In 1970 previously united census tracts were split or combined with others (e.g., 152 was divided at 96th Street, with the remaining blocks added to census tract 162; and tracts 156, 158 and 160 were divided into two at 96th Street) (Figure 22).

Such changes in the census tracts are indicative of one of the main points I am trying to demonstrate about the influence of 96th Street as a significant social demarcation between the communities of Yorkville and East Harlem. To this day, the New York City Planning Department continues to use 96th Street as a border between the "official neighborhoods" of East Harlem and Yorkville (now known by most New Yorkers as the Upper East Side, which includes the boundary-less sub-neighborhoods of Yorkville, Carnegie Hill, and Lenox Hill) (Figure 23) and in its community district boundaries (Figures 24 and 25).

The increased polarization of Yorkville and East Harlem can be observed in historical census data. East Harlem had a higher population than Yorkville until the

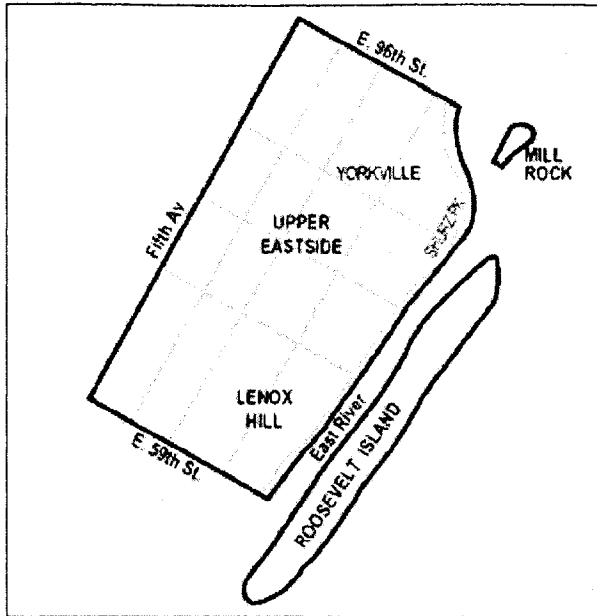
⁵ In addition, because the categories of the US Census change (e.g., race, ethnicity most notably), it makes it difficult to compare some of the population statistics over time. It is important to remember that while I use the terms Yorkville and East Harlem in my tables and figures, the data only represents the territory between 84th and 114th Street from Fifth Avenue to the East River.

Figure 23: Neighborhoods of New York City



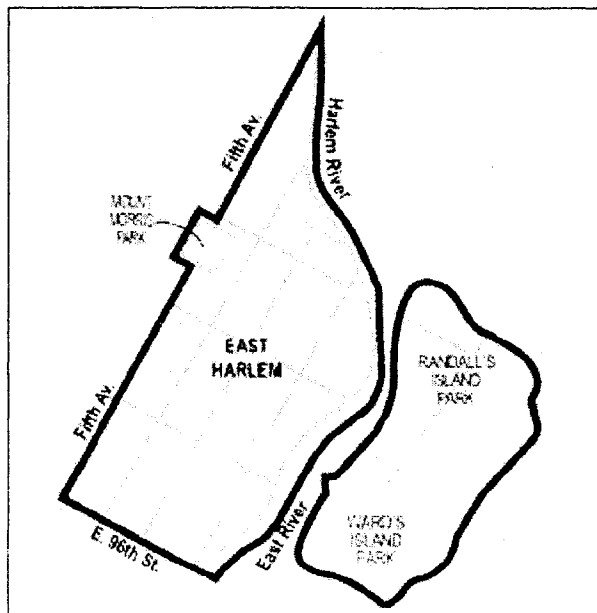
Source: New York City Planning Department (<http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/home.html>, 2004)

Figure 24: Community District 8



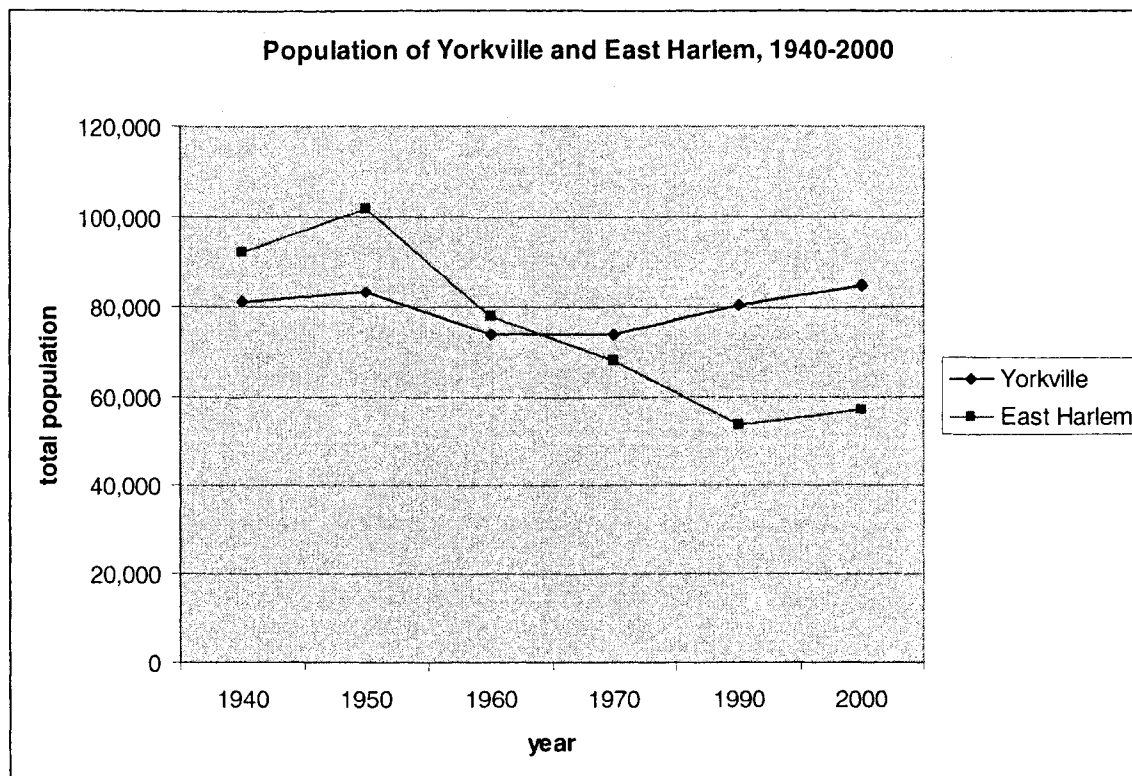
Source: New York City Planning Department (<http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/home.html>, 2004)

Figure 25: Community District 11



Source: New York City Planning Department (<http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/home.html>, 2004)

Figure 26: Population, by decade and neighborhood

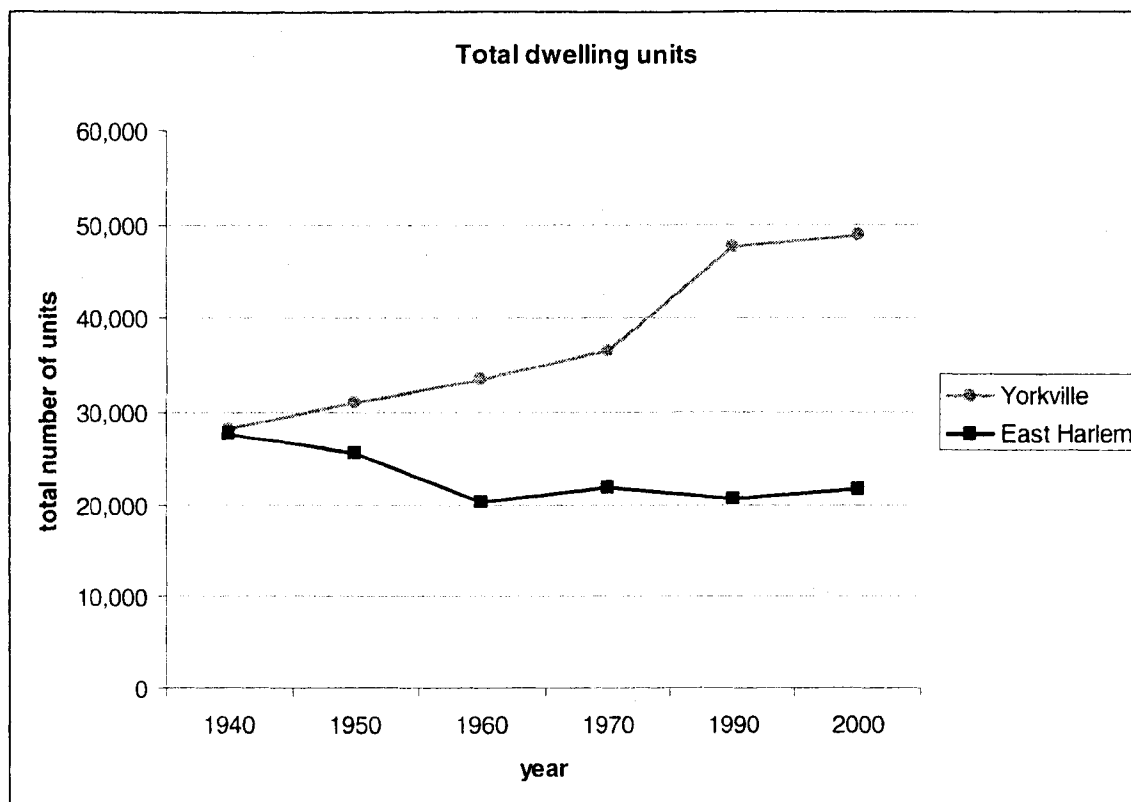


Source: US Census, 1940-2000

1970s, when the population of Yorkville surpassed East Harlem. East Harlem's population has consistently declined since the 1950s, from a high of 100,000 to 50,000 in the 1990s, with only a slight increase to almost 60,000 in the 2000 census (Figure 26).⁶ On the other hand, Yorkville's population has remained quite consistent over time, averaging around 80,000 persons (Figure 26). The decline of East Harlem's population is largely attributed to a decrease in housing stock from Robert Moses' Title I "slum

⁶ Community District 11 estimates that the population is 10% higher than official statistics suggest (www.east-harlem.com/cb11_197A_history.htm, 2003).

Figure 27: Total dwelling units, by decade and neighborhood

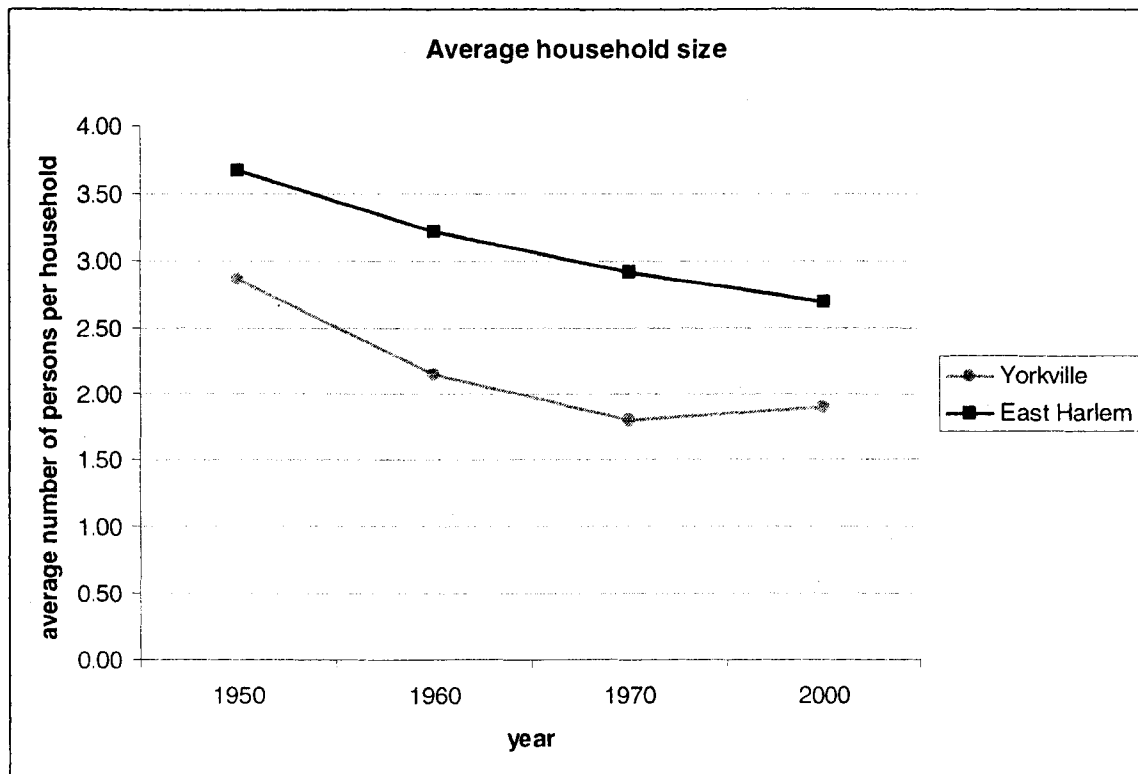


Source: US Census, 1940-2000

clearance program” in the 1950s, which reduced the total number of housing units from approximately 30,000 to 20,000 from 1940 to 1960 (Figure 27). By contrast, Yorkville has experienced a dramatic increase in its total housing units, from approximately 30,000 units in 1940, to 50,000 units in 2000, while its population has remained relatively consistent over time (Figure 27).

Given the ratio of dwelling units to population, it is no wonder that East Harlem has historically been more densely populated than Yorkville. However, the average household size has steadily decreased over time in both communities, from a high of 2.86

Figure 28: Average household size, by decade and neighborhood

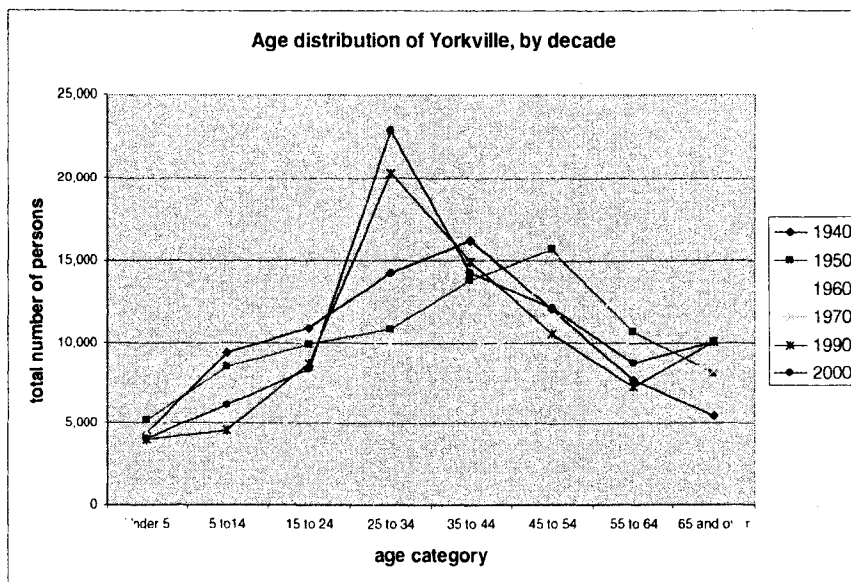


Source: US Census, 1950-2000

in Yorkville and 3.86 in East Harlem in 1950, to 1.89 in Yorkville and 2.69 in East Harlem in 2000 (Figure 28). The age distribution of each neighborhood mirrors a population pyramid of a developed country (Yorkville) and a developing country⁷ (East Harlem) (Figures 29 and 30). Yorkville's population is comprised primarily of people between the ages of 25 to 44, while East Harlem's population is comprised primarily of people under the age of 24. Yorkville has historically had a larger proportion of seniors

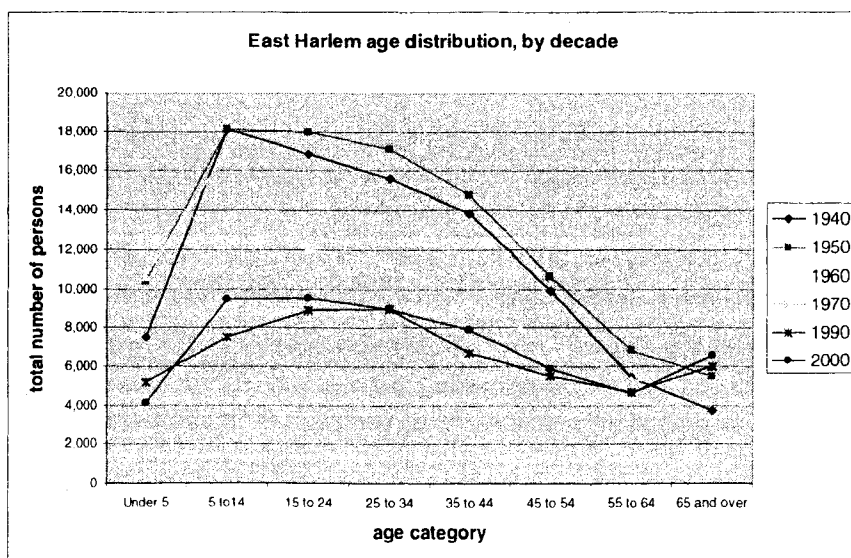
⁷ I use the terms developed and developing country reluctantly, a discourse and concept that has been challenged by geographers and other social scientists because it assumes that each country develops along a linear path of increasing economic wealth, creating changes in the demographic structure of the population among other social transformations.

Figure 29: Population and age distribution in Yorkville, 1940-2000



Source: US Census, 1940-2000

Figure 30: Population and age distribution in East Harlem, 1940-2000



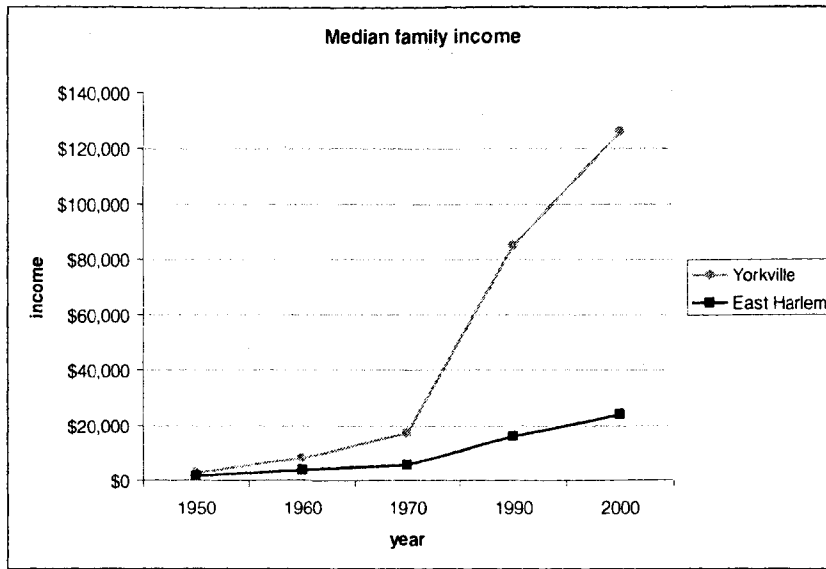
Source: US Census, 1940-2000

aged 65 and older, while East Harlem has consistently had two or three times the number of young people aged 5 to 14.

Yorkville's residents have historically been wealthier than those residing in East Harlem. However, the income gap between the two neighborhood has significantly widened over time, creating a polarization of rich and poor that typifies global cities (Castells, 1996). In 1940, the difference in median family income in Yorkville was 1.7 times that of East Harlem (Yorkville = \$3,018, East Harlem = \$1,808) (Figure 31). In 2000, the difference in median family income in Yorkville was 5 times that of East Harlem (Yorkville = \$125,991, East Harlem = \$24,001) (Figure 31).

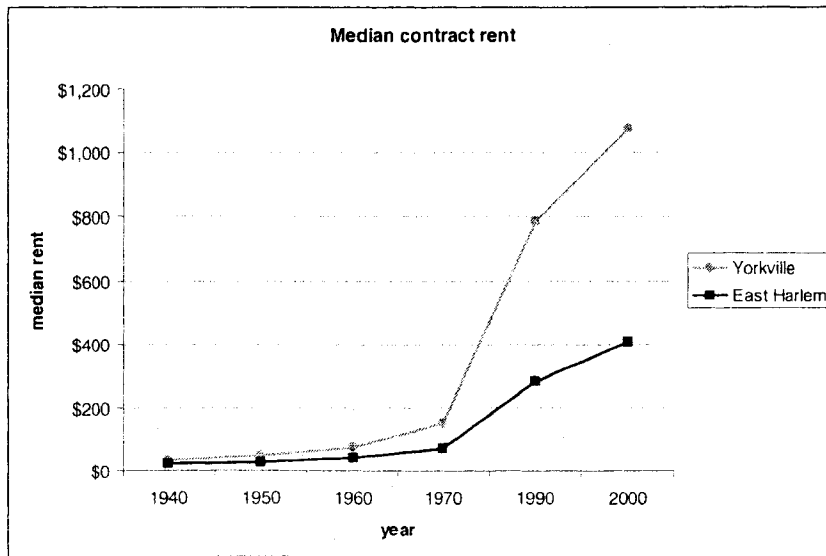
This income polarization is mirrored in the real estate market for each neighborhood. In both neighborhoods, a majority of the population rents their apartment, although there is more home ownership in Yorkville than in East Harlem. In 1940, the median monthly rent in Yorkville was 1.6 times that of East Harlem (Yorkville = \$35, East Harlem = \$22) (Figure 32). In 2000, the difference in median monthly rent in Yorkville was 2.6 times that of East Harlem (Yorkville = \$1,077, East Harlem = \$407) (Figure 32). These statistics demonstrate the sharp economic and social differences between Yorkville and East Harlem, largely a result of macro-level changes in the US economy from an industrial to advanced capitalist society in which there is a restructured industrial base and a shift to service employment. Processes of urban development are influenced by changes in the economy from a production-driven to consumption dominated society.

Figure 31: Median family income, by decade and neighborhood



Source: US Census, 1950-2000

Figure 32: Median contract rent, by decade and neighborhood



Source: US Census, 1940-2000

While certain neighborhoods become targets of investment and development for “the new middle class,” other neighborhoods witness neglect and disinvestment and house the working poor. As Smith and Williams suggest, “Priorities are reversed; whatever the importance of production-based land use allocation in the industrial city, it is consumption factors, taste and certain aesthetic, as well as political forces, which come to dominate today. Not only is gentrification the product of certain sets of consumption choices, but it represents an historically new phase in urban development and the primacy of consumption over production” (Smith & Williams, 1986, p. 5).

As demonstrated earlier, Yorkville’s history is one of investment by private investors; East Harlem’s is one of disinvestment by private investors and neglect by the state. Therefore, the polarization of rich and poor in East Harlem and Yorkville is very much a product of the spatial concentration of wealth of certain areas of the city that are favorable to consumption driven activities. Why Yorkville was targeted for gentrification over East Harlem requires delving into their socio-cultural histories. The tale of two neighborhoods presented in the previous section suggests there were racially motivated decisions made upon the part of the state and private investors who have historically favored Yorkville over East Harlem. Conceivably other factors such as the proximity to downtown Manhattan and the aesthetic qualities of historic buildings also attracted investors and renters to Yorkville. But, as Smith points out in his work on gentrification and uneven development, places are socially constructed to project an image favorable to investment in certain areas over others depending upon their potential rent gap (Smith, 1996).

A simple content analysis of articles from the *New York Times* and other literature about Yorkville and East Harlem demonstrates Smith's point about the power of everyday discourse in shaping the social imagery and identity of place (Table 3). According to these accounts, "Yorkville then" is "dead," "dying," "sleepy," "outside of the Upper East Side mainstream," is inhabited by "old-timers," "seniors" and has "old world charm" demonstrated in "mom and pop stores" and "ethnic specialty shops." By contrast, "Yorkville now" is "in transition," "fast" and "revitalized;" its "distinctiveness is fading;" it is "convenient," "safer," "cleaner" and "anonymous," "full of yuppies" and "has a campus like atmosphere" with "chain stores." In even greater contrast, East Harlem is "crowded" with "poor people" who are "black/negro," "Puerto Rican," and "Italian" living in "public housing" in "ethnic enclaves" full of "slums," "gangs" and "the mafia."

Such concepts of place are representations of a social reality and urban landscape shaped by different cultural groups, economies, politics and personal histories. This popular discourse reflects the process of gentrification in Yorkville and practices of exclusion and marginality in East Harlem by private developers and the state. The identity of place has been remade and changed in both communities, leaving some residents of Yorkville to feel like "outsiders" in a once familiar landscape. By contrast, East Harlem's residents have been consistently reminded of their marginality in the process of urbanization.

Table 3: Common words/concepts associated with Yorkville and East Harlem

Yorkville then	Yorkville now	East Harlem
Dying, dead	In transition	Italian, Sicilian, Black, Negro, Puerto Rican, Mexican, Finnish, Jewish
Links to the past	Rapid change	Poor, high rates of poverty
Solid middle-class European City	Distinctiveness is fading	Public housing, super blocks
Sleepy, decaying	Fast, revitalized	Crowded
Shabby	Upscale	Ethnic enclave, immigrants
Outside of the Upper East Side mainstream	Convenient	Slum clearance, slums
Poor, lower-middle class	Wealthy, elegant	El Barrio, Italian Harlem, the East Harlem Triangle, the West Indian Village
Empty buildings, dingy, dirty, garbage on streets	Safer, cleaner	Gangs, mafia, drugs
Sense of community	Anonymous	Casitas, community gardens
Stable	Ripping of social fabric	
Old world charm, quaint	Cosmopolitan, bright, new	
Civil-libertarian	Republican, progress minded people	
Older people, seniors	Young, yuppies, campus-like atmosphere, people on the way up, swinging singles	
Old-timers	Newcomers	
German, Irish, Hungarian, Italian, Czech	White, homogenized	
Neighbors as friends, family atmosphere	Neighbors as the people next door	
Tenements	Luxury apartments	
Mom and pop stores, ethnic specialty shops	Chain stores, department stores	

Sources include: *New York Times* (including the *New York Times Magazine*), *Village Voice*, *Daily News*, *New York Post*, *Our Town*, *New York Herald*, and *New York Sunday News*, *East Harlem.com* (articles date from 1800s-2000s)

Thus, the urban historical geography in both Yorkville and East Harlem has had an enormous impact on the everyday lives of individuals and their relationship to place. The fashioning of distinct communities and their border is a lived reality of residents in Yorkville and East Harlem and has changed the context in which childhood occurs. The remaining chapters of this dissertation highlight the relationship between urban development and young people's geographies, their identities, their experiences and their imagery of place. "In short," Relph writes, "people are their place and a place is its people, and however readily these may be separated in conceptual terms, in experience they are not easily differentiated" (Relph, 1976, p. 34).

Chapter 3

Everyday geographies

My mother never asked me questions about where I went, just to be in before dark. In those days nobody had phones.

☞ Tommy, age 71

I was always the first one who had to go upstairs on my street. My mom was really strict when we were growing up. It was like 4:30 or 5 and we had to come upstairs. And like all my friends would make fun of me you know. All my friends could stay out later than me, like 8, 9 o'clock. All my mother had to do was scream out the window, 'Jennifer, let's go.' I'm like, 'mom, please five minutes.' 'NO!!!!' 'Mom please can I go down?' 'I said no.' And if you keep drilling her, finally she'll give in and say, 'all right fine, go, leave me alone.'

☞ Jennifer, age 30

Well we always have somebody, um... Paula's brother is 20, usually he takes us out and supervises and we all have cell phones and beepers, so we constantly call our parents because we hate for them to worry. 'Ma, we're going to McDonald's, bye.' 'Ma, we're out of McDonald's, bye.' 'Ma, we're going to the movies, two hours.' 'Ma, we're out of the movies, bye.'

☞ Shaquena, age 13

The purpose of this chapter is to analyze historical trends in young people's everyday geographies in terms of their geographic territories and spatial range (how and under what conditions they can travel from home and where they go) and their free time activities when not in school. As the quotations of Tommy, Jennifer and Shaquena demonstrate, young people must negotiate their experiences in place with their caretakers. For example, Jennifer often argued with her mother to stay out later on her block until her mother finally gave in. In Shaquena's case, a friend's older brother provided her with some spatial freedom, and she used her cell phone to check in with her mother on a constant basis in order to travel with friends around the city. For Tommy, his spatial behaviors were never questioned by his mother as long as he was home before dark.

Factors influencing children's everyday geographies are numerous and include variables such as a young person's gender, class, and race, parental concerns for their son/daughter's safety, a young person's social networks, and physical barriers such as major streets that prevent further geographic exploration. It is also important to examine larger economic, cultural, and historical factors that influence how young people are raised. For example, a marked increase in single parent families in the 1970s, drug-trafficking and gang violence in the 1980s, and the invention of the computer and Internet in the 1990s, all present unique challenges and opportunities to young people in making decisions about where and how they will spend their leisure time.

In this chapter I review literature that analyzes opportunities and constraints to young people's geographies and their leisure time activities. This chapter is designed to present a broad overview of the literature on children's geographies and to provide a context for subsequent chapters in this dissertation that look at specific ways in which young people experience place. I rely upon a number of interviews, academic articles and books, and popular literature to understand how young people's use of space has changed over time in relation to transformations in their leisure time activities, urbanization and social change. These transformations include the following historical trends: 1) the expansion of children's geographic territories, both literally and virtually through the invention of mobile technologies and the Internet, 2) an increased concern among parents and/or caretakers for their children's safety in public space from both real and perceived threats by strangers, violence in our society, and the deterioration of a sense of community, and 3) an increase in the time demands of young people in structured environments to provide surveillance of their activities and to increase their

potential to succeed in a global economy. These trends are described in turn in the following sections of this chapter.

Geographic territories and spatial range

A young person's geographic territory was relatively small in the 1940s, largely confined to several blocks, in large part because there was no reason to venture into the larger world of the city. A young person could walk to school, buy 1-cent candies and play with their friends without leaving their neighborhood. As Hillary, a 71-year-old French-Italian woman who grew up on 102nd Street repeatedly stressed in her interview with me, "All I went to was this street, to this street, to this street." In general, young people were expected to stay around their home, and on occasion, they ventured elsewhere in the city with friends or family to visit relatives or to go to the movies, typically on foot. "Not that we never left the block," Debbie, a 59 year old Italian-Spanish woman who grew up on 96th Street noted, "but we didn't deviate much." People were poor in the 1940s, especially those whom I interviewed growing up in Yorkville and East Harlem. Young people rarely had money to go shopping for amenities like clothes or music, to purchase a subway, trolley or bus ticket, and most families did not have automobiles. In short, everyday life occurred in your immediate neighborhood, and if there was a reason to travel elsewhere, it was often difficult to get from point A to B for financial reasons.

Young people's geographic territories have generally expanded over time, primarily because their leisure activities have changed, and because of diversification in the number and types of places important to young people's everyday lives, which are no longer isolated on the local, but rather, occur throughout the metropolitan area of New

York City. For instance, many young people attend after school programs located outside of their community and participate in organized sports in parks and organizations throughout the city. Given the expansion of space accompanied by the diversification of leisure opportunities and the commercialization of play, young people and their parents/caretakers have had to develop strategies for negotiating and embracing the life – the good, the bad, and the ugly – of the city. These might include parent-child strategies for checking in on their son/daughter when they are engaged with a particular activity or traveling between places, and making decisions about the limits of their son/daughter's spatial freedom when alone, with friends, or with other adults. Factors such as age, gender, a child's social networks and their cultural identity weigh into these decisions and are reviewed next.

Caretaker conventions and child rearing ideology

Caretaker conventions about child rearing ideologies are the primary factor in presenting opportunities and constraints to young people's everyday geographies. Many researchers have examined the role of parents in facilitating or hindering where children can go, how far they roam unaccompanied, and how parental fears about social and physical hazards restrict children's mobility (Aitken, 1994; Cunningham et al., 1996; Francis, 1984; Harloff et al., 1998; Hart, 1979; Katz, 1993; Matthews, 1992; Moore, 1990; Moore & Young, 1978; Nieuwenhuys, 1994; Valentine, 1997a, 1997c; Williams & Kornblum, 1994; Wridt, 1999). That is, to what degree do parents/caretakers embrace the idea that their children are competent in negotiating their environment? How do they foster this competence or prevent it from happening and why?

Some parents/caretakers believe that children should be limited in their spatial freedom to protect them from a variety of social and physical hazards, while others emphasize the fostering of independence and the development of competence with the environment (Iltus, 1992). Consider the case of Jay, a 38-year-old African American who grew up in the Isaacs on 96th Street. “The farthest I probably went on my own [when he was 12 or 13] was 76th Street to John Jay Pool. I’d walk along the pier, or walk along York Avenue heading down [south]. To my mother going down [in Yorkville] that far was not as bad, you know, because going down that way there was a lot more police patrolling then. She gave me a lot of leeway because she wanted her boys to be strong.” Jay’s mother made the decision to foster competence in his negotiations with the environment, which as his narrative suggests, was related to her perception about the safety of Yorkville.

Hart (1979) found social, gender and class variations in children’s spatial freedom outdoors and the kinds of activities afforded by the landscape, which he hypothesized, were also related to different visions of what caretakers wanted for their children. The extent to which the physical environment is used, both consciously and unconsciously, as an instrument of socialization is reflected in Jay’s narrative that his mother wanted him to be “strong.” On the other hand, the mother of Shaquena, a 13-year-old African American girl who is residing in the Isaacs, was told by other parents that her daughter’s interaction with the environment provided valuable learning opportunities. As Shaquena describes her mother’s worries, “my mom is very scared; she doesn’t like me to go out by myself and travel. But everyone keeps telling her that she has to let me because I have to learn.”

As Shaquena and Jay's quotations highlight, child-rearing practices and cultural value systems are quite often gendered. That is, many caretakers are particularly protective of girls and their autonomous interactions with people and places. Researchers have shown that girls are more restricted in their spatial range from home than boys who are often left to make their own decisions about where to go (Cunningham et al., 1996; Hart, 1979; Katz, 1993; Matthews, 1987a; Matthews, 1987b; Maurer & Baxter, 1972; Valentine, 1997a, 1997b). Ivy's story exemplifies this point clearly.

Ivy, who was 38 years old when I interviewed her, was born in East Harlem but raised primarily in the Isaacs. Ivy grew up in a Puerto Rican family with an older sister and brother and mother and father on the 17th floor of building 405. Ivy was restricted in where she could go and with whom, while her brother was given more leeway.

"Culturally...um...my parents didn't let us go out a lot. Like girls don't hang outside. So, while my brother had friends outside and he would say, I'm going out, that wasn't acceptable to us. We had to be somewhere or they had to know where we were going. I think there was a big issue with girls versus boys. Like my brother was always out and my brother was always playing basketball. We were more sheltered. We couldn't go out like he would. Like when all the other kids were playing outside, we weren't really allowed to go outside, unless my parents were sitting outside on the bench. It's interesting, because when I was younger I think they were more, they were more open to let me go play. Then they started getting like, in middle school, I guess when I started developing, becoming a young lady and stuff, that's when they kind of [makes a sound of cutting something off]. They were strict, I mean there were opportunities, I would say

that there were opportunities to go and play, but they were few and far between, in comparison to, you know, girls were expected to be home.”

As Ivy’s story demonstrates, girls are often confined to the home out of fear for their sexual molestation or abduction and because of their body politics (Hart, 1979; Katz, 1993; Matthews, 1992; Williams & Kornblum, 1994). In addition, girls often do not have access to recreational places or other safe spaces where they would have an opportunity to socialize with their peers (Krenichyn, 1998). In Ivy’s case, she considered such gender politics to be reflective of cultural values indicative of her Puerto Rican family’s expectations. These intersections between gender, age, and cultural identity shape how youths view their right to be in public spaces and how they negotiate their personal geographies (Cahill, 2000; Katz, 1993; Kotlowitz, 1991; Kozol, 1995; Wridt, 1999).

In recent research, scholars stress that young people negotiate their geographies with caretakers, rather than simply being passive recipients of environmental demands (Harloff et al., 1998; Hart, 1979; Medrich et al., 1982; Valentine, 1997b; Wood & Beck, 1994; Wridt, 1999). In particular, boys are more easily able to negotiate their own geographies when compared to girls (Hart, 1979; Wridt, 1999). Jennifer’s story exemplifies this point. Jennifer was 30-years-old when I interviewed her and came from an Italian-German family with strict rules designed more for her than for her brother, who was two years older than her.

“That’s the most stupidest thing I’ve ever heard.” Jennifer was recounting how she reacted towards her mother allowing her brother to stay out late on the block while she was required to come inside. “‘Mom how come he can go?’ ‘Well because he’s a

boy.’ ‘And I’m a girl so what, so why can’t I stay out as late as him?’ ‘Well he’s older and he’s a boy.’ I just think that she just didn’t want to let me go outside. Or maybe she just felt that I would get, like get in more trouble maybe, because my brother never disrespected my mom. Like he, I mean he hung out and she had to look for him and he drank and he did all that, but he never like, he never answered her back. He was always like, ‘okay mom, yes mom.’ And I was like the rebellious little one, who like always answered her back and like always gave her a hard time and always questioned her when she said no.” Thus Jennifer was deemed rebellious because she wanted the same freedoms as her brother – the ability to do what he wanted outside.

Parents fear social and physical hazards such as child abduction, molestation, sexual promiscuity, traffic accidents and personal injury, and therefore, restrict children’s autonomous mobility and range from home (Hart, 1979; Katz, 1993, 1994, 1998; Matthews, 1992; Valentine, 1997c). These fears tend to be gendered and vary by age as well, preventing girls from ranging far from the home, while allowing boys to roam unaccompanied during their play and leisure activities. According to Jennifer, “it took me a while to be like, to be allowed to come here [to the Isaacs – two blocks away] cause my mother would always be like, “No, I don’t want you in Batman Park,” because it’s crossing an avenue, and she really didn’t like me crossing avenues. When she would let us out, she would like us to be on our block so she could look out the window and see us and call us at any time. But here, she can’t see what we’re doing, who we’re with. I guess it’s sort of like more freedom and she didn’t really like that. But she learned how to find us if she needed us, that’s for sure [laughing], she always did.”

But it is not always the case girls are more restricted than boys in their everyday exposure to the environment and community. “Stranger danger” and “terror talk” in the media and in social discourse has contributed to the increased surveillance of young people’s body’s in public space (Katz, 1998). “Stranger danger” and “terror talk” refers to the increased sensationalization of child abductions and other forms of child abuse in the media and how these reports transform the public’s image or perception of the safety of their communities. As Victoria, a 60-year-old Italian woman who grew up on 96th Street, described it, “you could let your children go play in the streets back then. Nobody was gonna kill your kids in those days. It was a rarity that you heard something bad happened, because everybody on the block was looking out for your kids, watching. If you did something wrong, somebody inevitably went back and told your mother. So you never did anything, you had a hard time doing anything wrong.” Thus, the decrease in sense of community (which can be attributed to many factors, including the gentrification of Yorkville and the reduction of what Jane Jacobs refers to as “eyes on the street”) and the increased perception of potential “terror” that can be inflicted on your child is an important psychological factor in a parent’s degree of comfort in allowing their children to explore the environment.

Carlos, an 11-year-old Puerto Rican residing in the Isaacs, tells an interesting story about “stranger danger.” “Around 8 o’clock my mom doesn’t like me to be in Asphalt Green. They don’t keep the lights on but a lot of people go play soccer there. So my mom thinks somebody’s gonna kidnap me or something. Even though that hasn’t happened to me, God forbid. She thinks a guy is gonna kidnap me or something. Like every time I go down the stairs instead of taking the elevator, she’s like, ‘yo, there’s a

man like that's crazy, he's gonna get you.' She says don't take the stairs because there's a crazy [motioning quotation marks] man or something. Her and my grandma [say that]. Yeah, I put it in parenthesis because I don't know if it's real." The fact that Carlos questions his mother's notion of a "crazy man" indicates his skepticism of this reality and the important role of social discourse in shaping young people's negotiations of their environment with their parents. On the other hand, Carlos's mother is training him to deal with "stranger danger" whether it is real or not.

Parents are generally very fearful of social hazards such as gangs, drugs and violence among teenagers in poor urban areas. Williams and Kornblum (1994) conducted a detailed ethnographic analysis of considerably older teens than those in this research living in public housing in Harlem, New York City. In their research they identified factors that shape young people's geographies in this setting. These include, but are not limited to: 1) the identification of a young person as 'street' or 'non-street', suggesting that 'street' teens are those who have been fully exposed to the harsh morality of street life, while 'non-street' teens are those who have been sheltered from street life by parents, educators, and community leaders (see also Cahill, 2000); 2) lock-ups, or the forced retention of teens, particularly girls, within the home setting; 3) home training, or the passing on of everyday life rules to be honorable, take care of the family, stay in school, avoid street life; and 4) safe places, or adult strategies to create safe havens for their children to grow and prosper.

I witnessed the "lock-up" phenomenon in my research with contemporary young people residing in the Isaacs. There was a clear distinction between "street" and "non-street" in the sample of young people I interviewed. Some parents tried to completely

shelter their children from the street, while others were more lenient about their child's public interactions. Recall Shaquena's mother being told by other parents that she has to "let Shaquena go so she can learn." What they mean is that Shaquena needs to learn about life on the street, how to read a social scene and how to negotiate potential hazards on her own – to develop street literacy (Cahill, 2000). As a result, Shaquena was given leeway in her spatial range, as long as she had her cell phone, friends with her, and checked in on a regular basis. Shaquena's geographic territory is therefore very diverse and covers a large territory (Figure 33). On the other hand, Zaina, a 12-year-old African American girl is completely sheltered from the "street" and is not allowed to go anywhere besides school (which includes a random trip to Central Park for outdoor lessons) and her after school program. Her geographic territory is therefore very restricted, even though she is allowed to ride the bus by herself to school (Figure 34).

It is more often the case that girls have to work harder than boys to extend their spatial range and they must check in more frequently with their parents/caretakers. The diverse ways in which contemporary young people check in with their parents/caretakers is exhibited in Table 4. In general, the girls I interviewed had to check in constantly with their mother via cell phone, whether they were in the immediate area of the Isaacs or in the surrounding community. On the other hand, boys only had to check in once or twice (with the exception of Carlos, who for reasons explained earlier, is very restricted in his daily travels) by shouting to their mother in the window, or by calling via pay phone. It is interesting to note that every time a young person checks in, it is with the mother (or in one case a grandmother). Therefore it is the mother who enforces the rules of their

Figure 33: Map of Shaquena's geographic territories

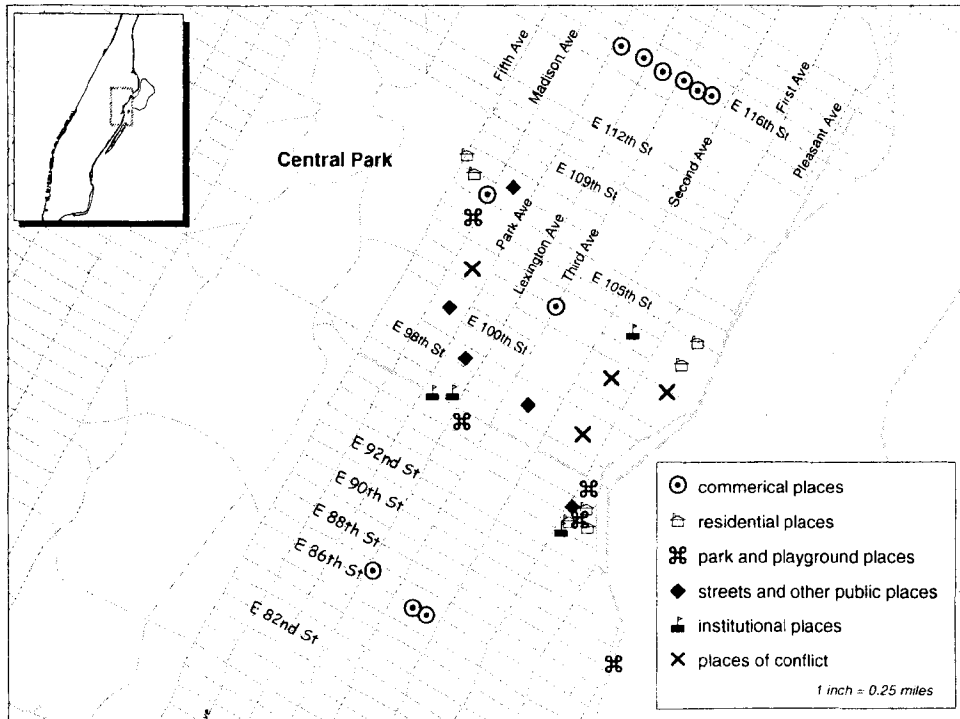


Figure 34: Map of Zaina's geographic territories

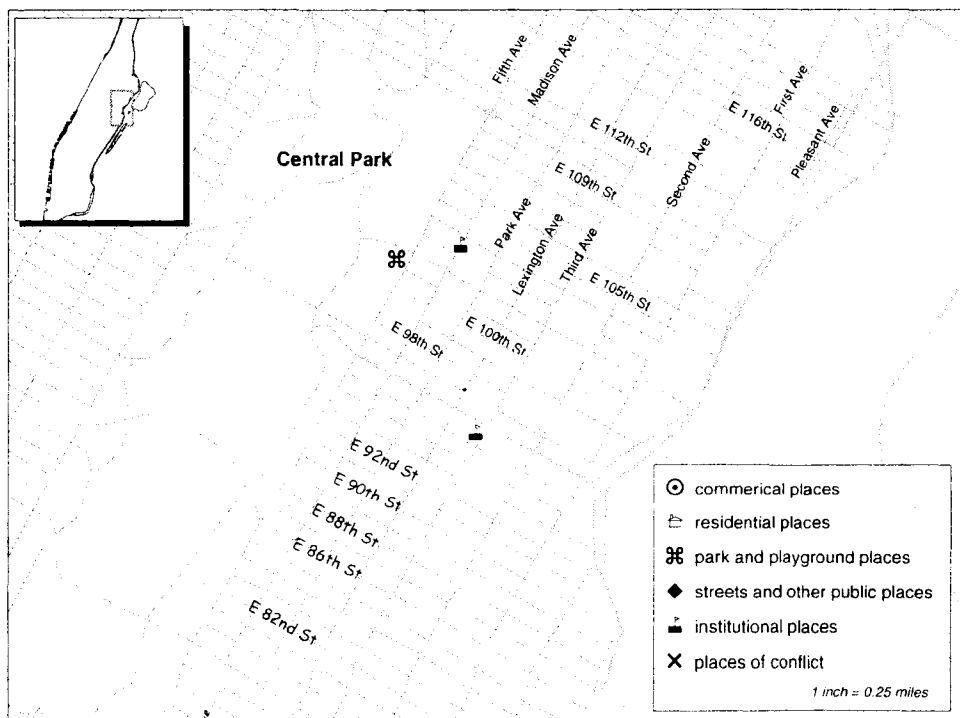


Table 4: Methods of checking in, contemporary childhood

Gender	Age	Place of activity that requires checking in	Method	Frequency	Responsible person
Female	13	Immediate neighborhood	Cell phone	3 times if out for more a couple of hours	Mother
Female	13	Immediate neighborhood or other places in the city	Cell phone	Constantly, upon entering and leaving a place	Mother
Female	13	Immediate neighborhood	Cell phone	Constantly	Mother and grandmother
Female	11	Not applicable because she is not allowed to go outside	n/a	n/a	n/a
Female	11	Not applicable because she is never alone when she is outside	n/a	n/a	n/a
Male	11	Immediate neighborhood	Whistle or wave to mother who is nearby	Every 15 minutes	Mother
Male	13	Immediate neighborhood or other places in the city	In neighborhood – look up to window where mother is looking, in other places – cell phone or pay phone	Once or twice if out for a couple of hours	Mother
Male	12	Immediate neighborhood	Calls to mother at window or uses the intercom to talk to mother	Every few hours	Mother
Male	13	Places outside of neighborhood	Pay phone	Once	Mother
Male	13	Not applicable because he is not required to check in	n/a	n/a	n/a

child's environmental experiences. Two of the five girls did not report any checking in rules because they were never allowed outside unaccompanied and therefore such rules were not applicable to their negotiations with the environment. On the other hand, there was one boy who did not have to check in at all with his caretaker.

In some ways then, cell phones and beepers have increased the ability of girls to explore their environment because parents feel they can reach their daughters anytime anywhere. On the other hand, cell phones "locate" girls in a way that they are more surveilled than ever before. Therefore, girls must still struggle for this autonomous spatial freedom, as exhibited by the two girls in my sample who were not allowed outdoors without someone like a family member or other trusting adult. By contrast, boys were expected to report in via telephone or through a wave up at the window,

largely on their own initiative. In other words, girls have to be available at all times via cell phone when they are exploring their environment (either alone or with friends), while boys are expected to initiate contact on their own, and it is left to their own discretion as to when and where they will make contact with the mother.

Girls often find themselves making up lies or badgering their caretakers in order to push their boundaries of exploration. Recall Jennifer's quotation at the beginning of this chapter in which she "kept drilling" her mother in order to be able to play outside. Of course boys make up lies and badger their parents as well, but they are less often required to legitimate their desire to go outdoors. Tommy's quotation at the beginning of the chapter highlights this point because, his mother "never asked questions" about where he was going. Caretakers will often use their son/daughter's desire to go outdoors as a bargaining chip. For instance, parents/caretakers will tell their son/daughter that they have to "do all their chores and homework" before being allowed to go outdoors. Similarly, if a young person does something wrong, a parent/caretaker may use their son/daughter's desire to go outdoors as a form of punishment, i.e., they will "ground" a young person. Increasingly, however, this bargaining chip is less about the desire to explore the outdoor environment, and more about other forms of leisure activities such as a young person's desire to play video games (especially for boys) or to chat online or talk on the phone (especially for girls) (e.g., "You can play video games and/or go online when your homework is done.").

Researchers also recognize the importance of the everyday lives of caretakers in explaining young people's geographies (Hampel et al., 1996; Wridt, 1999). That is to say, many young people's environmental experiences are a direct reflection of adult-

environment transactions. Young people often run errands with parents, visit their place of work, and rely upon them for travels into the larger metropolitan community (Wridt, 1999). This is particularly true for girls, who often accompany their mother to go grocery shopping and to conduct other tasks important to the domestic sphere of everyday life. For example, Jennifer was required to go to the supermarket on a daily basis for her mother, unlike her older brother, who had no domestic responsibilities.

“My mother would send me to the supermarket every day. So I know Key Food by heart. I can tell you every aisle, I know every isle in the supermarket. It was horrible, I hated it. My mom came up with a good way to help me, like when I had to get things from the store. She had this bucket, cause we’re on the fifth floor, so who wants to come upstairs...and she would lower the bucket out the window and then give me the money with the list of what I had to buy, and if it’s light then I just put it inside the bucket and she just pulled it back up. She hardly ever sent my brother to grocery shopping. My brother didn’t have to do anything really. He cleaned his own room, but that was by choice, that was because he wanted to, but he never, like she would never send him to do the laundry. We had a washer but we didn’t have a dryer, so she would send me to dry the clothes.”

In my research on the everyday geographies of young people in Eugene, Oregon, I found that boys were skilled at negotiating out of doing chores and running errands (Wridt, 1999). This was also the case with some of the stories I collected for this dissertation. For instance, Selina, a 33-year-old African American who grew up on 102nd Street, tells a story about how her brother was able to get out of doing laundry. “When we were younger, as a chore, we had to go to the laundry. But my brother would always

lose clothes on purpose so she would stop sending him. My brother was in charge of the garbage, that's all he did. I cooked, ironed, did the dishes, cleaned, washed and waxed the floors." Such an example points to the different ways girls and boys are socialized in relation to the private domestic domain of everyday life. Such domestic duties decrease a girl's free time and opportunities to explore their environment, unless they are in the neighborhood running errands with their mother and/or caretakers.

In summary, child-rearing practices have an enormous impact on children's geographies. Clearly child-rearing practices are structured by a variety of factors such as gender, cultural expectations and class, all of which are important for childhood experiences in the border environment of Yorkville and East Harlem. Other factors influence where young people go and how they spend their time, and these are reviewed in turn.

Social networks

As children grow, their social networks play an important role in determining their personal geographies. Researchers have examined the importance of peer and familial networks in shaping child-environment transactions, particularly among adolescent populations (Cahill, 2000; Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1984; Matthews et al., 1997; Medrich et al., 1982; Noack & Silbereisen, 1988; Skelton & Valentine, 1998; van Vliet, 1983; Wridt, 1999). Research suggests that an adolescent's place behavior is primarily driven by relationships with their peers and takes place in spaces not intended for youth socialization (Bjorklid, 1982; Matthews et al., 1997; Noack & Silbereisen, 1988; Wood, 1984). For instance, adolescents often frequent places where they can socialize with their friends such as malls, parks, streets, friends' homes, and

undifferentiated places such as vacant lots and parking lots (Cahill, 2000; Holloway & Valentine, 2000; Lieberg, 1995; Skelton & Valentine, 1998).

In my research, peer relationships were an important factor in shaping children's geographic experiences regardless of the time period in which a young person grew up (see Chapter 4, *Social worlds*). What has changed over time is how, where and under what condition children are able to be with their friends. For example, public space has become less accessible to children and youth in Yorkville, due to the gentrification of abandoned lots that were once fruitful places for poorer young people to hang out and play, to be discussed in Chapter 6, *Playin' and Hangin'*. In addition, young people's relations with their peers along the border of Yorkville and East Harlem are increasingly more structured and occur in settings under adult supervision (such as after school programs, which are reviewed later). Because young people's social relations are discussed at length in other chapters of this dissertation, I merely mention this variable here to acknowledge its importance in young people's everyday lives and personal geographies.

Livelihood and cultural norms

Cultural norms play a significant role in children's geographies. Children growing up in industrialized nations often have quite different roles than those who grow up in nations with agricultural economies (Bronfenbrenner, 1972; Hawes & Hiner, 1991). Anthropologists and geographers working in less-developed countries have found children's geographies directly linked to their productive activities (Katz, 1989, 1991, 1993, 1994; Nieuwenhuys, 1994; Robson, 1996). Children spend a great deal of their time engaged with daily chores related to agricultural development and food preparation.

These chores often replace a child's time spent in school, a more Western conception of childhood. Young people in more industrialized nations spend more time in schools or other social institutions (Katz, 1983, 1989, 1991, 1993, 1994). Therefore, the political and economic context is an important umbrella in which young people negotiate their geographies (Bronfenbrenner, 1972; Fernea, 1995; Hawes & Hiner, 1991; Katz, 1989, 1991, 1993, 1994; Lynch, 1979).

Within nations there is a tremendous variation in child-rearing practices related to cultural values and social norms. For example, a child who grows up in a married household will have a qualitatively different childhood than that of a child who grows up in a single parent household. These social and cultural differences are also related to where young people can go, what they do, what expectations are placed upon them, and how they are expected to negotiate their social and environmental existence. In the case of young people growing up in Yorkville and East Harlem, there were a number of ways in which class affected young people's everyday lives and experiences in the neighborhood. These relate to: 1) the need for young people to supplement the productive activities of their parents to obtain money for themselves and their strategies for purchasing inexpensive food, clothing and acquiring other material possessions, and 2) the lack of interaction between poor and rich young people in Yorkville.

In my study sample, many of the young people developed strategies for obtaining money to purchase items for entertainment, pleasure and to elevate their social status (clothing, sneakers). In general, girls engaged in domestic duties to obtain an allowance or one time sum of money (doing dishes, caring of younger children within and around the home). Boys also engaged in domestic duties for money and three of the five I

interviewed participated in the trading (selling/purchasing) of Japanese Animation cards. Some of the cards they traded were valued at \$50. In addition, two of the five girls I interviewed and all of the boys I interviewed had plans to work at the age of 14, the legal age at which a minor can engage in certain forms of employment in New York City (such as an intern at a police station or for a community center). The adults and seniors I interviewed did not discuss similar needs or desires for obtaining money, but one senior male and one adult male were employed (off the books) when they were 12 years old. The senior, Tommy, was a newsboy (he sold newspapers on 42nd Street) and the adult, Raul, was a delivery boy. I present Raul's case in turn because his experience exemplifies how young people are capable of an enormous amount of responsibility at a young age, and also how class differences in Yorkville influenced his social relations with peers in the community.

Raul, who was 33-years-old when I interviewed him, was born in Panama, but grew up in New York City in a tenement building on First Avenue around the corner from the Isaacs. Raul was raised in a single parent family; his mother and younger sister shared a small apartment that Raul described as being "messy." Raul's mother was an alcoholic, something he talked about as a matter of fact, and sometimes had different men staying with her family in the house. "I think I first started realizing that she was [an alcoholic] when I was maybe 10, and I guess I probably detached a couple of years after that a little bit and was able to sort of cope with it a little better." Raul felt responsible for and took care of his younger sister and mother as best he could, "my sister and I still sort of laugh, we went through enough cans of ravioli."

Raul worked to obtain money for his family, which was struggling on public assistance, but also because he liked the independence associated with having his own money. “At 12 I was delivering Chinese food for this Chinese restaurant right on First Avenue, so I started doing that pretty young after school. And I would do that sometimes until 10 o'clock at night when they started closing. I felt like making money was great. It's nice to have money in your pocket to do things for yourself. I never sort of had to ask for anything. We were on public assistance at the time also, so my money that was coming in was basically the cash for the household kind of, so it was necessary, but it was also, it felt good to actually you know do something.”

Raul did not like the emotional baggage that came with being home, so he did what he could to be away from home after school, including working and playing sports. “I was playing in sports, I was participating in leagues, and I was still doing all those things while working.” Raul participated in both informal pick up games in his neighborhood as well as organized sports through Asphalt Green and the Isaacs Center. Organized sports enabled him to meet people from the neighborhood he normally didn't associate with. “Here it was mostly sort of white working class Irish, and then you had the Isaacs sort of crew, but there were a lot of Irish in that [league] also. Then you had the kids from the Rupperts [a middle- to upper-middle-class apartment building], which we always felt were a little more upper class than the ones from down the hill, just because they lived you know in the nicer buildings and like, it was just, you could always tell...not tension, but there was something different. Because they never really hung out together kind of, there was always some sort of separation.”

The separation Raul is talking about is between the wealthier residential areas that increasingly were taking over more territory “down the hill” towards First Avenue where he grew up. As Raul’s story demonstrates, young people from “up the hill” rarely interacted with young people from “down the hill” unless an organization such as the Isaacs brought them together. This trend continues today with contemporary childhood experiences in the neighborhood. The poorer young people I interviewed more often interacted with other poor young people residing in public housing developments in East Harlem rather than with wealthier young people residing in other areas of Yorkville.

The gentrification of Yorkville has also influenced where young people shop and their ability to acquire material goods. In general, young people today hang out along 86th Street, the commercial hub of Yorkville, which is lined with popular chain mega stores like Barnes & Noble, the Gap, HMV, Staples, Foot Locker, and a range of fast food restaurants like Mc Donald’s and Burger King. I stated that young people “hang out” on 86th Street, because in general they cannot afford to purchase the merchandise offered in many of the stores. Consider Alecia’s experience as a 13-year-old Dominican girl growing up on 95th Street. “We go shopping. We have no money but we still like going into the store and going, ‘uh hum, this is nice, we’re coming tomorrow, we’ll have some money tomorrow.’” Instead young people typically shop in East Harlem along Third Avenue and 116th Street where prices are a bit easier on their pocket book.

Identity and difference

As mentioned previously, a child’s gender, age and cultural identity are prominent factors in determining their transactions with the physical environment. For example, adolescents, particularly minorities, are often viewed as creating trouble when they are

observed hanging out in public places (Cahill, 2000). Male adolescents, particularly minorities, are more often assumed to be creating mischief and are often misinterpreted as being in gangs when one or more are present on the landscape (Cahill, 2000; Mays, 1954; Williams & Kornblum, 1994). Such racial and social conditions are particularly intense in Yorkville where a majority of the population is white and wealthy. For example, most of the minority boys/men and girls/women recounted some experience at being racially profiled and/or identified in public space in Yorkville, suggesting such experiences were prevalent regardless of the time period in which a young person grew up (this is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4, *Social Worlds*). I witnessed this phenomenon on a number of occasions, but one story that was recounted to me by an adult mentor in the community makes this point clear.

Three young boys and an adult mentor (all of whom were minorities) went shopping on 86th Street to Footlocker. Upon entering the store, they heard over the loud speaker, “security to 2nd floor.” According to the mentor, there were no other individuals on the second floor besides his group. The assumption made by the adult mentor was that the security call was racially provoked. To mentor the young boys he was with, he approached the manager and informed him that such a situation was unacceptable to him and that he would no longer shop at the store. The adult mentor recounted the story as an important learning opportunity to teach other young people how to behave in situations like this.

The surveillance of young people’s actions in public space parallels an overall increase in the surveillance of public space in the wake of the terrorist attacks on New York City, and public policies like the *Quality of Life* campaign initiated in the late 1980s

under Mayor Giuliani. The *Quality of Life* campaign is equated with the Giuliani's administration's enactment of "Zero Tolerance," a policy for the surveillance and policing of an individual's everyday use of public space that includes "stops and frisks" as well as stringent enforcement of minor violations (McArdle & Erzen, 2001). More importantly, police apply the *Quality of Life* laws in a discretionary and subjective manner. The enforcement of *Quality of Life* laws tends to occur in gentrified or gentrifying neighborhoods (e.g., the Lower East Side and Yorkville) where there is a push towards capital investment and a reversal of a supposed "dirty looking" neighborhood. In these neighborhoods (sometimes referred to as "enforcement zones"), minority youth and anyone else that doesn't fit the "new feel" of the community become targets of harassment (Cahill, 2000; McArdle & Erzen, 2001).

In addition, young people who grow up in public housing projects must learn to negotiate their environment with housing police and the NYPD officer assigned to their project. At the Isaacs, the community center makes an effort to establish a dialogue between young people and the police so that this relationship takes on more characteristics of a mentoring relationship rather than one based on harassment. Nonetheless, I witnessed police surveillance of young people in public space on a number of occasions around the Isaacs, especially when they are in a group and appear to be "doing nothing." According to Shaquena, a 13-year-old African American girl residing in the Isaacs, these interactions are all about breaking up the group and trying to determine if they are cutting school or doing something wrong. "When it's like raining, instead of staying home, we'll hang out in the lobbies which we aren't supposed to be

doing. Because the police come over and they say we're loitering and stuff. They tell us to move, so we'll just go to each other's houses."

Other individual or psychological characteristics are also important in the examination of young people's geographies. Where a young person goes is linked to their personality, desire and motivation to do certain activities in qualitatively different environments (Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1984; Moore & Young, 1978; Newson & Newson, 1968; Noack & Silbereisen, 1988; Wyllie & Smith, 1996). For example, Wyllie and Smith (1996) found that children who exhibit extrovert personality traits are more likely to range far from their homes than children who exhibit introvert personality traits. Newson and Newson (1968) found differences among "indoor children" and "outdoor" children to be important factors in children's development.

According to Moore and Young (1978), "For children 'indoors' is a private domain, the source of physical shelter, social security, and psychic supports. 'Outdoors' is...an explorable public domain providing engagement with living systems and the prevailing culture – the locus of volitional learning" (Moore & Young, 1978, p. 88). A wide body of literature also suggests children's place preferences and fears about people and places govern their interactions with the environment (Chawla, 1992; Hart, 1979; Matthews et al., 1997; Owens, 1988).

A historical study about growing up along the contrasting cultural border of Yorkville and East Harlem reveals important insights into how young people express and are affected by their gender, race and cultural background in and through space. This hybrid environment offers a unique setting from which to understand how children have historically negotiated their identity and difference in a culturally and economically

diverse community setting. These topics are explored in depth in Chapter 4, *Social worlds*, and Chapter 5, *Block politics*.

The design of cities

The design or layout of small towns and cities also presents unique challenges to young people. The infrastructure of cities, such as large streets or boulevards, cemeteries, and train tracks often present barriers to young people's geographies (Bjorklid, 1982, 1984; Cunningham et al., 1996; Eubank-Ahrens, 1984; Hart, 1979; Matthews, 1992; Moore, 1990). As mentioned previously, the production of space is governed by the means of production and reproduction, and therefore, the built environment reflects characteristics that help foster or hinder the exchange and flow of goods, communication and people (Lefebvre, 1991).

Hillman's (1997) research suggests that an increase in the use of automobiles and traffic in England from 1970 to 1990 has decreased the mobility of children in terms of where they can go, with whom, and how. Similar findings are echoed in research reports from Australia and other parts of Europe (Camstra, 1997; Scanlan, 1978; Tranter, 1993). In meeting the demands of a car-oriented society, planners often do not address the implications of street design for children's autonomous travel (Aitken, 1994; Cunningham et al., 1996). This topic is addressed in Chapter 6, *Playin' and Hangin'*, but supports the notion that the automobile has transformed the street from a "child playground" to a "bourgeois playground," – or a space facilitating the movement of goods and people over the leisure or slower paced activities of residents.

Parents set clear boundaries about crossing streets and avoiding entire sections of cities perceived as dangerous or harmful to their children (Bjorklid, 1982, 1984; Hart,

1979; Matthews et al., 1997; Matthews, 1992). In addition, some geographic settings present problematic physical hazards to young people in their daily geographies (Hart, 1979; Moore, 1990; Moore & Young, 1978). In the case of young people growing up along the border of Yorkville and East Harlem, there are a number of physical and social hazards that often curtail young people's exploration, or at least set boundaries for a young person's interaction with their environment. These are discussed throughout this dissertation, but include public spaces in housing developments, construction sites, traffic on major avenues, gang violence and confrontations with young people over their "turf" (see Chapter 5, *Block politics*).

Cities with public transportation allow young people, particularly adolescents, greater access to environments outside of their immediate home territory (Harloff et al., 1998; Matthews et al., 1997). As discussed earlier, culture- and class-segregated cities typically act as barriers to young people's travel and may curtail social integration among teen populations (Cahill, 2000). While minority populations are often required to travel into white worlds where they may not feel comfortable, the converse is not as likely, unless children and youth attend structured activities that foster social and cultural integration (Kotlowitz, 1991; Williams & Kornblum, 1994). Culture- and class-crossing is typically a phenomenon experienced by minority youth who seek employment or consumption in more economically viable neighborhood districts. This topic is discussed at length in Chapter 4, *Social worlds*.

Finally, location of residence plays an important role in determining a young person's personal geographies (van Staden, 1984). For example, children living in high-rise apartments have less access to the outdoors when compared to children living in low-

rise houses or apartment buildings if they live on the higher floors (Bjorklid, 1982, 1984; Camstra, 1997). Much of this is attributed to caretakers' inability to supervise their child's outdoor play from a high-rise apartment building. In my research young people often communicated through the intercom as opposed to shouting up at the window if they lived on higher floors. As Javier, a 12-year-old Puerto Rican described it, "Every few hours I guess I'll buzz, 'mom I'm in front of the building, or mom I'm going to the store.'" Clearly the design of the Yorkville and East Harlem communities has changed over time with the development of public housing and the eradication of tenement buildings, and with these changes are new conditions of living and learning, which are discussed at length in Chapter 5, *Block politics*.

The quality of environments

The diversity and quality of environments in which young people's activities take place are of paramount concern to geographers and planners (Aitken, 1994; Bartlett et al., 1999; Bunge & Bordessa, 1975; Cunningham et al., 1996; Francis, 1984; Hart, 1979; Lynch, 1973, 1979; Matthews et al., 1997; Moore, 1990; Moore & Young, 1978). These studies have identified and classified childhood territories important for a young person's physical, social, cognitive, and emotional development. These territories include, but are not limited to:

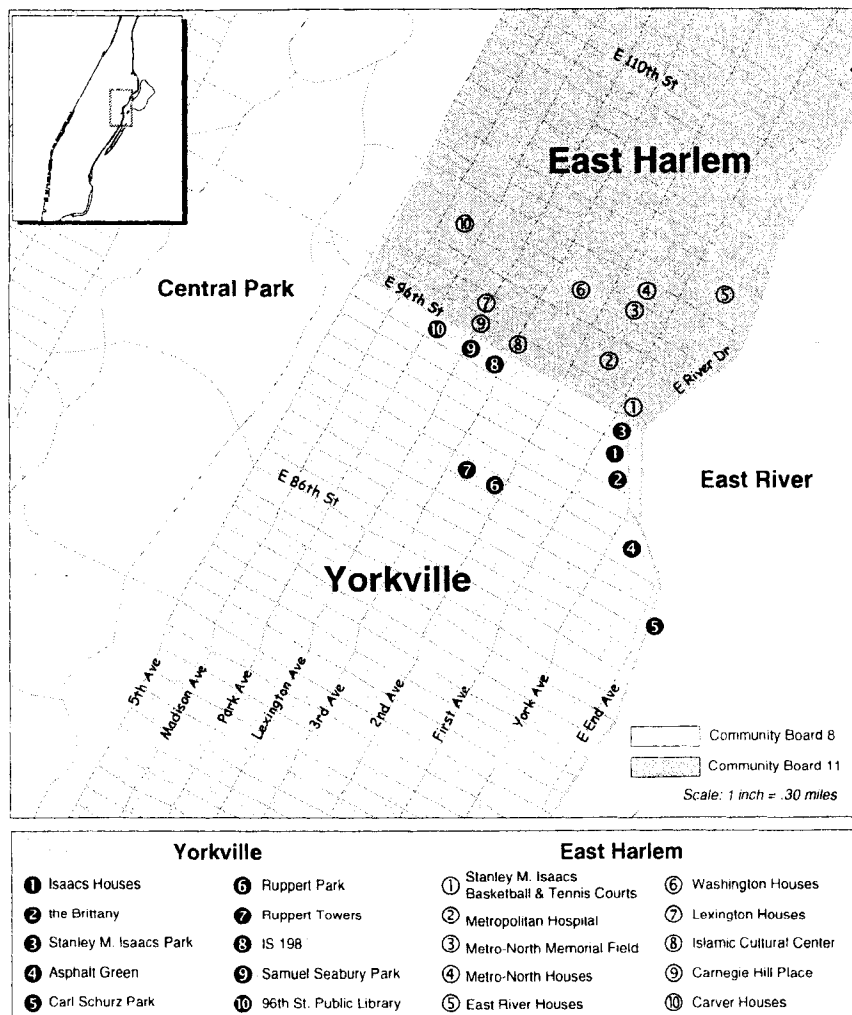
- *Flowing terrain or pedestrian networks* where young people can ride their bicycles, wander around, hang out, and have very lengthy contact with the social and physical phenomenon around them;

- ***Habitats around the home*** such as sheds, garages, transitional niches, alleys, car spaces, and streets where young people can engage in autonomous, informal play and socialize with their peers;
- ***Parks, playgrounds, and recreation facilities*** that encourage a young person's sense of adventure, imagination and physical capabilities;
- ***Green spaces*** such as school grounds, baseball fields, wooded lots, small parks and grassy spaces where young people can creatively determine their use of space;
- ***Friends' homes*** where young people can socialize with their peers,
- ***Commercial centers*** where young people can interact with an intense blend of people, peers, and take part of the community scene, and
- ***Rough ground, abandoned places, vacant lots*** where young people can have a sense of possession, are motivated to explore, and have creative agency over the landscape to do many different things to suit their needs.

Clearly Yorkville and East Harlem offer qualitatively diverse place experiences for young people. These place include major commercial districts such as 86th Street, 116th Street and Third Avenue, recreational facilities offered by Asphalt Green and public schools, a variety of playgrounds, school yards and two major parks (Central Park and Carl Schurtz Park), the East River Esplanade, a pathway that follows the East River where young people can walk, bike and skate, public spaces in housing developments, friend's homes and relative's homes (Figure 35).

Today's young people growing up in the Isaacs therefore have a potentially wide array of opportunities for exploration of their environment. Nonetheless, young people have differential access to these places for numerous reasons (exclusionary practices

Figure 35: Important places and landmarks along the Yorkville/East Harlem border for contemporary childhood environmental experiences



based on race and class, physical and social hazards, parenting norms, public policies, etc.) which were reviewed here and are discussed throughout this dissertation. Figures 36 and 37 demonstrate how these variables factor into young people’s exploration of their environment. These maps demonstrate the geographic territories for the boys and girls I interviewed between the ages of 11 and 13 (5 young people in each category). In comparing these map sets, one notices that the places girls identified as important to their everyday life are located in both Yorkville and East Harlem, while the boys tended to

Figure 36: Map of contemporary female sample's geographic territories

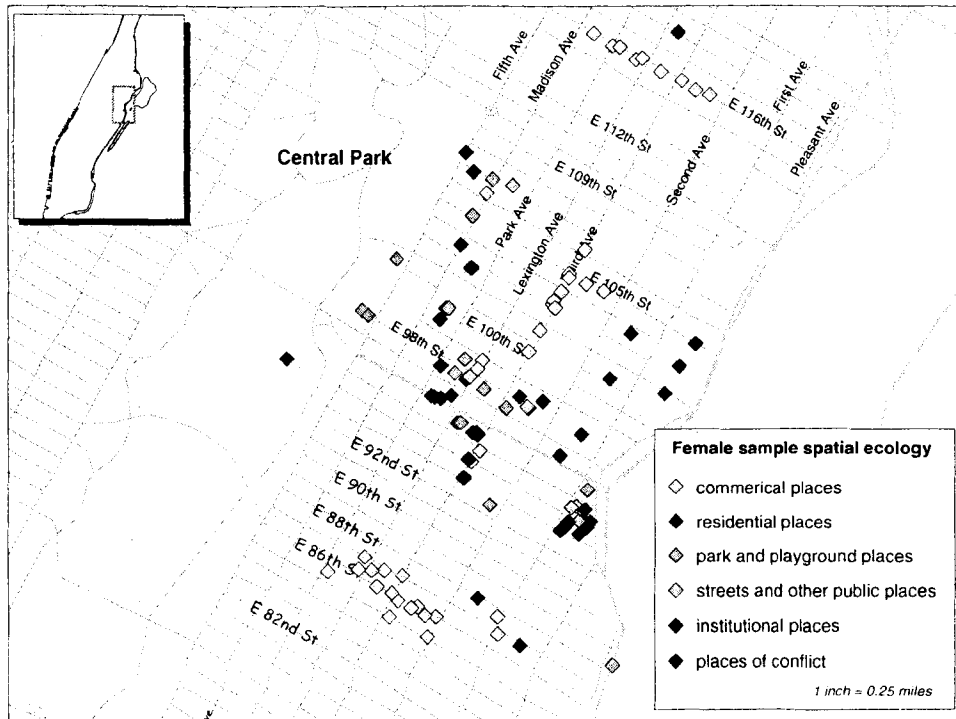
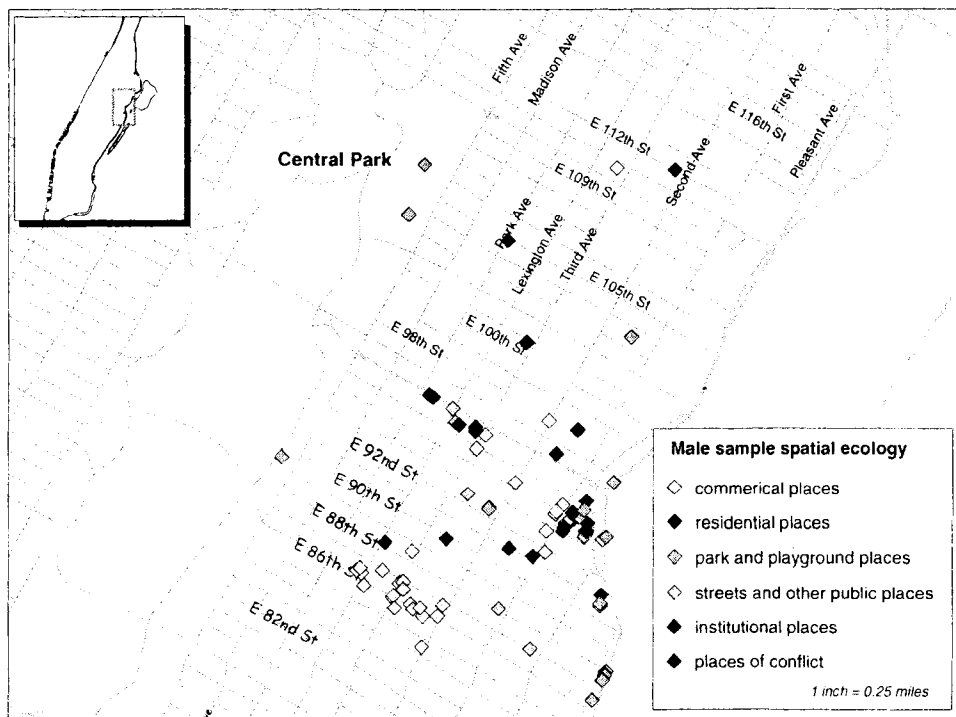


Figure 37: Map of contemporary male sample's geographic territories



concentrate their activities in Yorkville. In addition, girls go to more places than boys and their activities cover a larger geographic territory.

Both these findings seem to be contradictory to the literature on children's geographies reviewed earlier that suggests girls are more restricted in their everyday travels. Several factors influence this contrasting mapped mosaic. First, girls travel more places because they often run errands with their family (usually the mother), e.g., note that most of the places visited by girls are commercial places along Third Avenue and 116th Street in East Harlem and along 86th Street in Yorkville. While not all visits to commercial places are functional for the domestic sphere (e.g., some are for leisure to window shop and hang out), the girls in my sample were also typically accompanied by family or friends in their travels. In addition, the use of mobile technologies such as cell phones and beepers has enabled girls to explore their environment to a greater extent than in the past.

Boys also frequented commercial establishments, but they traveled to parks and playgrounds more so than girls, often alone or with friends rather than adults. The boys I interviewed tended to set clear boundaries for themselves about where they went. In particular, boys often avoided traveling into East Harlem because they had previous experience or knew of someone who had experienced harassment and violence from peers in this neighborhood, particularly within the public spaces of housing developments. Girls also experienced such social hazards in these areas, which are related to how young people define and maintain their "turfs" (see Chapter 5, *Block politics*). In addition, boys experience conflict in the parks and playgrounds they frequented, which tended to be minor disputes over sporting activities.

These map sets demonstrate the wide variety of variables that influence the ways in which girls and boys experience place. Gender, race, class, social hazards and parenting norms are important factors that pose opportunities and constraints to children's geographies. In addition, young people's leisure time activities are changing, therefore creating new conditions in which young people interact with their environment.

Leisure time activities

Investigating how young people spend their free time requires analyzing historical trends in the time demands of children and youth. According to Goodman (1979) and Nasaw (1985), the concept of "leisure time" was invented in the 19th century in opposition to the time spent in school when education became compulsory. The time after school then became an important period during the day in young people's lives. According to some scholars' speculations, children historically had more free time to play and engage with self-designed creative activities (Camstra, 1997; Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1984; Medrich et al., 1982). For example, in the past young people spent a lot of their free time playing on the streets in front of their homes (see Chapter 6, *Playin' and Hangin'*). Families were comprised of two parents and other relatives who either lived nearby or in the same residence, which offered a system of social support in child rearing during the after school hours.

Young people today have a range of activities in which they participate during their leisure time, which includes hanging out in public spaces (see Chapter 5, *Block politics*) and in neighborhood parks and playgrounds (see Chapter 6, *Playin' and Hangin'*), participating in after school programs, playing indoors, watching television, playing video games, doing homework and chores, listening to the radio, talking on the

telephone, exercising and surfing the Internet (Table 5). The differing opportunities for leisure time activities reflect the diversification of the economy, the commercialization of play and recreation, and technological innovations in leisure pursuits.

In recent years, with economic development and the transformation from industrial to service-oriented economies, both parents spend longer hours at work to maintain their livelihood, and there are more single-parent families than in the past. In turn, the system of social support in child rearing has largely dissolved and many parents, particularly from poorer families, face serious challenges in developing new strategies for the care of their children after school. The infamous “latchkey child” phenomenon became pronounced in the 1980s and drew wide speculation from the larger society about the potential impact on young people’s exposure to drugs, violence and other destructive behaviors. Latchkey children are defined as those children who lack adult supervision during the after school hours, often requiring children to look after themselves. Families with greater financial resources have typically been more capable of preventing their children from becoming latchkey kids (Robinson et al., 1986; Rodman, 1990) (also see special issue on the topic found in *Children’s Environments Quarterly*, 1995).

A problem related to the latchkey phenomenon is juvenile crime and young people’s use of public space. When it became apparent that many children were spending their free time after school unsupervised, society began to question how this related to the moral development of children. Psychologists and sociologists suggested that latchkey children were more susceptible to delinquent, unhealthy, and immoral behaviors. For instance, governmental reports and news articles suggested that young people spent a great deal of their after school time unsupervised, and that the highest rates

Table 5: Self-reported leisure time activities, contemporary childhood

Leisure activity	Males (N=5)		Females (N=5)	
	Reported doing activity	Average time spent doing activity	Reported doing activity	Average time spent doing activity
Hanging out outside	5	2-3 hours per day	2	2-3 hours per day
Video games	4	½ - 1 hour per day	---	---
Watching television	5	2-3 hours per day	5	3-4 hours per day
Doing homework	3	1 - 1 ½ hours per day	1	3 hours per day
Other indoor play	2	Not specified	1	Not specified
Exercising	2	Not specified	---	---
Participating in after school programs	5	Once in a while for a couple of hours	5	Every day after school
Surfing the Internet	1	1-2 hours per day	2	3-4 hours per day
Reading	2	Not specified	2	1-2 hours per day
Doing chores	2	Not specified	4	Not specified
Talking on the telephone	---	---	2	1-2 hours per day

of crime among adolescent populations occurred during the hours of 3-8 PM (Herbert, 1997). While these perspectives about childhood are debatable and contested, they nonetheless had a profound impact on the way society reacted to the absence of supervised care during the after school hours. Because many latchkey children are minorities, these reports also contributed to the stigmatization of, and negative discourse about, young people of African American and Hispanic/Latino backgrounds.

These economic and social changes in society have led many parents to enroll their children in after school programs or highly structured activities. The resulting changes in time-demands have created different geographies for children and youth, leading to their diminished presence on city streets, in parks and playgrounds, and in other public places (Cunningham et al., 1996; Katz, 1998; Medrich et al., 1982). In addition, research suggests that parents seek to involve their children in extra-curricular activities that are no longer neighborhood specific, but rather, more oriented around adult needs such as the proximity to a caretaker's place of work (Camstra, 1997; Wridt, 1999; Wridt et al., 1999). Instead of sending children home alone, parents of wealthier families have sent their children to private clubs, recreation groups or childcare facilities. Poorer

families, however, represent a high proportion of latchkey children because they are unable to afford such private services and because they must rely upon publicly funded after school programs.

After school programs

It's estimated that 3-4 million children ages 6-14 spend 3-5 days per week in after-school programs, and every indication is that participation rates are growing, especially for the urban poor (Halpern, 2002). After home and school, the after school setting is becoming the third most important developmental setting for low- and moderate- income children in urban areas. Given the high participation rates and the amount of time children spend in these settings, it is important to reflect upon the evolution, philosophies, purpose and quality of after school programs and their role in children's everyday lives.

How, why and under what conditions did after school programs first emerge in the United States? After school programs were created in relation to changes in the economy and the social context of childhood, including: 1) a decline in the need for children's paid labor in the urban economy, the passage of compulsory education and the subsequent creation of free time, 2) the desire of middle class "child savers" and reformers (e.g., Jacob Riis and Jane Addams) to program the play opportunities for poorer children to protect them from immoral behaviors found in the streets and to Americanize immigrant children (Addams, 1998; Riis, 1997), and 3) the feminization of the labor force, or the increasing need for both parents to work and the absence of child care alternatives.

The work of Jane Addams is the most influential in the history of after school programs in the United States (Addams, 1998). In the late 1800s, she was the primary leader in the “settlement house” movement in urban areas like New York City. Settlement houses were designed to care for immigrants in poor industrial neighborhoods, by providing the community with basic social and educational services to improve their quality of life. Included in these activities were after school programs. In addition small, idiosyncratic boys and girls clubs emerged in the late 1880s in a room, in a church, or a storefront in a local building, run by volunteers who were intent on rescuing children from the physical and moral hazards of the streets. Private businessmen, church leaders, civic minded women, settlement houses and ethnic organizations were the primary leaders in the after school program movement.

The first after school programs were privately funded, in which donors set their own policies and priorities that reflected middle class norms about the meaning of childhood and the demoralizing affect of the streets on children’s identities (see Chapter 6, *Playin’ and Hangin’* for a more detailed analysis) (Goodman, 1979). These included programs that promoted the social cooperation and team building skills among children, the Americanization of immigrants by fostering creativity and self expression among children and character building activities, helping young people acquire vocational or domestic skills, educating them about how to negotiate sexual risks and how to cope with stress related to war. Initially young people were not impressed by after school programs and adults developed strategies, such as the use of game rooms, to lure children in from the streets. Young people also resisted conforming to structured play activities, which forced workers to try new approaches and to consider alternative methods of interaction.

In the past after school programs targeted low-income children under the age of 14. Boys and girls activities generally were separated and activities reflected social expectations for a particular gender (girls learned arts, crafts, food preparation, while boys learned sports and skilled trades). In addition to gendered norms and practices, racial politics also influenced the children served by after school programs. For example, blacks were often excluded from settlement houses out of fear of losing the white immigrant children as a clientele. While learning focused on the whole child – e.g., there was a recognized importance of the physical, emotional, moral, and cognitive well being of children’s development – there was also an emphasis on free play. Today after school programs still target children under the age of 14, although some like the Isaacs offer programs to older teens as well (e.g., “Teen Night” a drop in center for youth to hang out, play games and use computers). Today’s after school population in urban areas tends to be minority children coming from lower to working class families.

In the early to mid-19th century, there was a marked institutionalization of after school programs, solidified by the developments of the human service system between 1920s-1950s (Halpern, 2002). With the development of public housing in the 1950s, there was a push for indoor recreation centers in public housing developments such as the Stanley M. Isaacs Neighborhood Center. Since the 1950s, a number of economic and social transformations have altered the goals of after school programs. For example, because both parents increasingly needed to work, there was a more explicit goal of providing child care for working families. In addition, the breakdown of social organization on the streets due to gang violence in the 1980s created what some after school programs termed a “toxic setting” of child development for low-income children

(Halpern, 2002). Subsequently, there was pressure to provide a “safe haven” for children and this became a prominent discourse of after school programming.

In more recent history, after school programs are expected to make up for the failures of day time schools to prepare young people for the global economy (Halpern, 2002). Just as after school programs were thought to “fill the void” or social inadequacies of families, they were also assumed to “make up for” the failure of schools. In doing so, many after school programs focus upon reading and writing fundamentals, mathematics and other basic subject material by providing students with “homework help” or other types of remedial education. Therefore after school programs are increasingly becoming test preparation centers, are preoccupied with academic standards and improving the cognitive capabilities of children as opposed to other important developmental aspects of childhood such as free play, creativity and socialization with peers. The Isaacs Center is unique in many ways because they have resisted pressure from funding agencies to focus their programming exclusively on cognitive-based activities. Instead they provide a rich array of activities ranging from arts and crafts, dance, sports, fashion design, community improvement projects and homework help. The Isaacs Center’s philosophy, “if you’re not having fun; they’re not having fun” is emblematic of this approach.

However, many after school programs are not as skilled in negotiating the demands of and fluctuation in giving by non-profit funders and state agencies. For example, the fact that community centers like the Isaacs Center increasingly rely heavily upon city funding to run their programs creates serious problems in the consistency and quality of care for poorer children, particularly during the summer months (Robinson et

al., 1986). This has serious implications for poor parents who often lock their children indoors when the city cuts or reduces spending on summer programs (Quindlen, July 8, 1990). Parents would rather not leave their children alone, and many will go to great lengths to get their son/daughter enrolled in an after school program. For instance, some of the youth counselors at the Isaacs reported to me during “sign up” to enroll children in summer camp, a summer program offered by the center, that some of the parents tried to bribe them (e.g., money, movie tickets) in order to ensure their son/daughter made it on the short list. This indicates the great need for after school programs throughout the year, particularly in poorer families, and the impact of a lack of sustained financial support from the state.

In my study sample, all of the young people I interviewed attended some form of an after school program (girls more consistently than boys). Of the adult sample, 50 percent had attended after school programs. Of the senior sample, 10 percent had attended an after school program. As my data suggests, the number of children attending after school educational programs has grown exponentially over time. Almost every moment of a child’s life is now programmed with an organized activity, leaving little time for free or “unsupervised” play and recreation. Children are increasingly spending their leisure time in institutional places such as after school programs, recreation centers and in places with other adult-supervised activities. In addition, these social institutions are increasingly relied upon to provide child care and other basic social services to poor children.

All of these factors – economic, social, and intellectual - have contributed to a greater degree of institutionalization of children’s lives. By this I mean that children’s

lives are more structured, programmed and organized by adult perceptions (primarily represented by the school system) about what is adequate for their moral, intellectual, emotional and physical development. Government policy has played an important role in the institutionalization of childhood, by offering funding and other incentives (such as Welfare to Work) for community- and school-based settings to develop and implement after school programs. While many of the reasons for the development of after school programs can be attributed to questionable perceptions of children and youth, there are many programs that provide rich intellectual, emotional and social support to young people, in a way that consider young people's perspectives and ideas as fundamental to the learning process.

Within this social and historical context, the after school setting presents unique challenges and opportunities to educators and learners. For instance, research shows that after school programs in New York City tend to have a small teacher to student ratio (usually 1 educator to 10-15 students). This permits a greater exchange of ideas and social interaction among students and youth counselors. There is also a greater opportunity for dialogue among youth counselors and parents, as many programs require that young children be picked up and dropped off by adults. In addition, program administrators and educators have a greater opportunity to "think outside of the box" because they are not held accountable through state curriculum standards and national testing. This factor is supported by the scale of after school programs, which typically do not include large numbers of children and staff in their overall design.

On the other hand, the increased institutionalization of childhood inadvertently constrains children's spatial freedom, because children spend more time in one setting,

that of the after school program, rather than negotiating their use of public spaces in a community. This is not necessarily a bad thing. As Williams and Kornblum pointed out in their book, *Growing Up Poor* (1985), “superkids” or “youth who manage not only to survive in a community devastated by crime, drug addiction, and violence, but to be recognized as achievers” are a direct result of “the influence of one or more adults [who] account for the constructive direction of their lives” (Williams & Kornblum, 1985, p. 17). I witnessed this phenomenon at the Isaacs Center.

The Isaacs Center staff has a unique relationship with the young people in Yorkville and East Harlem. One reason the Isaacs Center is so effective is the degree to which the staff are able to transform power relations, or the way power is expressed in adult/child interactions. The Isaacs Center involves young people in making decisions about its programs through the Youth Management Team, a group of young people who have participated in their programs and can speak knowledgeably about policy decisions. The Isaacs Center takes risks in the learning process. It allows young people’s desires to influence the learning process and the learning environment as adult mentors and young people interact in everyday situations. As a result, young people respond. They respond by participating in programs offered by the Center and by choosing to be involved with their peers and the community rather than participating in destructive activities. The impact of after school programs on young people’s everyday lives is therefore very idiosyncratic, and can range from providing babysitters and surveillance to empowerment and growth.

Technological innovations and indoor play

In the past young people spent most of their leisure time outdoors, but when indoors, they played games, listened to the radio and visited with family and friends. According to Debbie, a 59-year-old lifetime resident of Yorkville, “we didn’t get a TV until 1957. I think it used to be better back then because you had a lot of things available to you to use your brain and to think and originate within yourself. I mean computers are wonderful. I love my computer, but now a kid comes home from school and it’s like now they’re into their computer or their playing a video game or something. It’s not the same as when we were able to enjoy other toys. I have a grandson today and he spends all his time on video games. And I think to myself, my God, you’re missing out on so much, there’s a whole world out there.” Thus, when young people were growing up in the early decades of the 20th century, they had a limited range of opportunities for indoor play and leisure. For example, according to the 1950 census, only 17 percent of the population in Yorkville and 12 percent of the population in East Harlem owned a television (US Census, 1950).

As Debbie’s comment suggests, young people are increasingly attracted to cyber or digital environments as a medium of indoor play (Katz, 1998). Research suggests young people spend a majority of their time watching television, playing video games and surfing the Internet when indoors (Aitken, 1994; Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1984; Holloway & Valentine, 2000; Medrich et al., 1982; Valentine & Holloway, 2001). These activities take on added importance in climates where seasonal temperatures prohibit young people’s outdoor engagement with the landscape (Bjorklid, 1984; Hart, 1979; Moore & Young, 1978). In addition, public disinvestments in outdoor childhood spaces such as parks, playgrounds and recreation or community centers inevitably means young

people look elsewhere for enjoyment (Cunningham et al., 1996; Gaster, 1991; Katz, 1998).

In my research I found gender differences in the types of indoor leisure activities: 1) boys participated in a more diverse range of leisure time activities than girls, 2) girls spent more time watching television than boys, 3) boys spent more time playing video games (no girls reported playing video games), 4) girls spent more time doing chores (discussed previously), and 5) girls spent more time doing homework. These differences suggest that boys and girls are gaining differential access to technology, but they are also indicative of gender norms and socialization practices that require girls to contribute to the domestic sphere and which encourage boys to be exploratory, both in digital (video game) environments and real environments.

According to the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and the Harvard School for Public Health, children in the United States watch an average of three to four hours of television a day, averaging around 21-23 hours per week.⁸ If such reports are accurate, the boys in my sample are watching less television than the national average, while girls are at the national average. There are a number of factors that might be influencing this trend. One reason is that some boys get bored easily with television and would rather play video games which are more interactive. "I play games," Terrance, a 13-year-old resident of the Isaacs explained. "I'm not really a TV person, I get bored real quick because of them commercials, so I'll turn off the TV and play video games." The same holds true for board games, which are considered boring to some boys. "He plays video games all day." David, a 13 year old resident of the Isaacs is

⁸ (<http://www.aacap.org/publications/factsfam/tv.htm>, 2004)
(<http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/press/releases/press12082003.html>, 2004)

describing his brother's addition to video games. "But I say, 'come on, let's play Monopoly.' And he's like, 'no, it sucks.'"

Some young people do not have access to certain toys, video games or new technologies, and therefore, their indoor activities reflect this disparity. For example, while every young person had access to a television in their home (and thus all of them reported watching television), only 1 boy and 2 girls reported having a computer at home with Internet access. Even in homes with computers, access to the Internet is often limited because there is only one phone line or because of the location of the computer in the home. "I gotta sneak at night if I wanna go on [online] by myself." This is Andy, a 13 year old resident of the Isaacs, explaining his computer use. "Usually my mom doesn't want me to use the Internet because the phone line gets tied up and so many people are calling my house." The young people I interviewed enjoyed using computers; however, and they adopted a number of strategies to gain access to the Internet and to other toys that they might not have access to. These included attending after school programs, going to the library to play games on the computer, or going to a friend's home where they have access to video games, a DVD player or a computer with Internet access.

In some ways then, young people in my sample do not reflect the growing mass of middle to upper income children who have reliable and consistent access to computers, the Internet and other technological mediums of entertainment. Thus reports in the *New York Times* that teenagers are increasingly using instant messaging to communicate with their peers and parents does not necessarily apply to poorer children. For instance, the two girls I interviewed who had access to the Internet considered it crucial to their

communication with friends, but they had to negotiate this access with parents and in consideration of the financial ramifications of such usage. As Alecia, a 13-year old resident of Yorkville described, “my dad complains about the phone bill and stuff and I’m wasting his phone, because it’s on his phone line not on mine. So I wanna say a couple of hours I’m on the Internet looking for clothes, CDs, get like ringing tones for my phone.”

Summary

The economic and cultural conditions in which children grow up are crucial to understanding the historical significance of changes in the meaning and experience of childhood. The research reviewed here is suggestive of certain trends in young people’s geographic territories, free time and leisure activities. First, young people’s geographic territories have expanded over time, both literally and virtually through the invention of mobile technologies and the Internet. Second, because of the increased concern among parents and/or caretakers for their children’s safety in public space from both real and perceived threats by strangers, the deterioration of a sense of community and urban policies that foster surveillance of young people’s activities in public space, young people spend less time outdoors than in the past (although they still have access to public space). Third, the institutionalization of childhood in adult-supervised environments (e.g., after school programs) results in less free time for child-driven leisure time activities. These findings vary by gender, race, class and parenting norms, which are the most influential in describing young people’s geographic territories and free time activities.

A more theoretical analysis of these historical trends is discussed in the final chapter of this dissertation, *Childhood then and now*.

Chapter 4

Social worlds

Ivy once told me in passing that residents of the luxury apartments across the street walked their dogs around the Isaacs, often leaving a pile of poop without remorse. Ivy ought to know about these things, since she has lived and worked in the community since she moved into the Isaacs with her Puerto Rican family in 1968. Of course I was still shocked and skeptical of such a story, until one day I witnessed it. I was sitting in what residents of the Isaacs refer to as “Batman Park,” a playground and sitting area wedged within the public housing development, when I noticed a white man in his 40’s walking a large, lethargic German Shepard. This man was talking on his cell phone, presumably to a significant other, making arrangements to buy some groceries for dinner. He was clearly out of place at the Isaacs, as one resident put it, “you can just tell when someone is not from your project.” I tried to avoid eye contact with the man as the dog did its business while he made recommendations about a good bottle of red wine.

Perhaps talking on a cell phone makes it difficult to dispose of dog feces, or possibly what I observed was something of chance, an isolated incident. While there are plausible reasons for disregarding city pet care laws, I became more cynical when I witnessed this act on more than one occasion by different individuals. As a white researcher entering into a cultural world largely different than my own, I was particularly attentive and sensitive to such social scenes. Conceivably there is a deeper meaning to such individual actions. There is a complex story to be told about the contrasting social worlds that co-exist in and surround Yorkville, something that was accentuated by the

gentrification process, and which was discussed in the Chapter 2, *A tale of two neighborhoods*. In this chapter I explore how these social worlds are/were created and constructed by young people and how they interpreted and experienced them.

Young people growing up in the Isaacs today are continually confronted with issues of class and race in their everyday lives, some enlightening, others particularly challenging. It is inescapable. Simply crossing from one side of the street to the next on First Avenue entails moving from one economic world to another, with contrasts in median household incomes of over \$100,000 (See Chapter 2, *A tale of two neighborhoods*). Similarly, Yorkville lies at the nexus of contrasting racial and cultural groups, in which 96th Street has remained an important symbolic and concrete border between a white and black world. Growing up in this context requires young people to become skilled in the cultural codes and norms representative of these differing social worlds, what Williams and Kornblum (1994) refer to as *culture crossing*, and what Anderson (1999) refers to as *code switching*. Differences in language, clothing, skin color and social behaviors enable young people to label and to be labeled by others different from them, and in response many learn to switch from one “code” to another.

Throughout this process of differentiation, young people and the community at large are involved in social and cultural boundary making that has an associative spatial or physical form. Social and cultural boundaries are dynamic and fluid, responding to shifts in social solidarity and processes of urban development. Young people play an important role in confronting and challenging these boundaries in their everyday lives. In this chapter I rely upon number of biographies to explore young people’s constructions of race and class from a spatial and historical perspective. These viewpoints are based upon

young people's experiences growing up in Yorkville and East Harlem as they formed friendships, traveled to and from school, stores, relatives' and friends' homes and other places significant to them. These perspectives are also a product of urban development and gentrification, schooling, generational learning, the media and other social forces, most of which will only be mentioned cursorily for their importance in demonstrating a point (but are discussed later in the final chapter, *Childhood then and now*).

Many of the young people who grew up in and around the Isaacs public housing development recounted personal experiences with social labeling based on historically specific constructions of race, class, gender, ethnicity and culture, which was accentuated because of their proximity to the boundary between Yorkville and East Harlem. These experiences often posed emotional and psychological stress in a young person's everyday life, in addition to an informal community education about race, class, civil rights and a sense of one's place and social location in the world. It is therefore important to underscore the relevance of learning how young people develop notions of *difference* and of the *other* in relation to place, feelings of exclusion, marginality and power in their everyday lives.

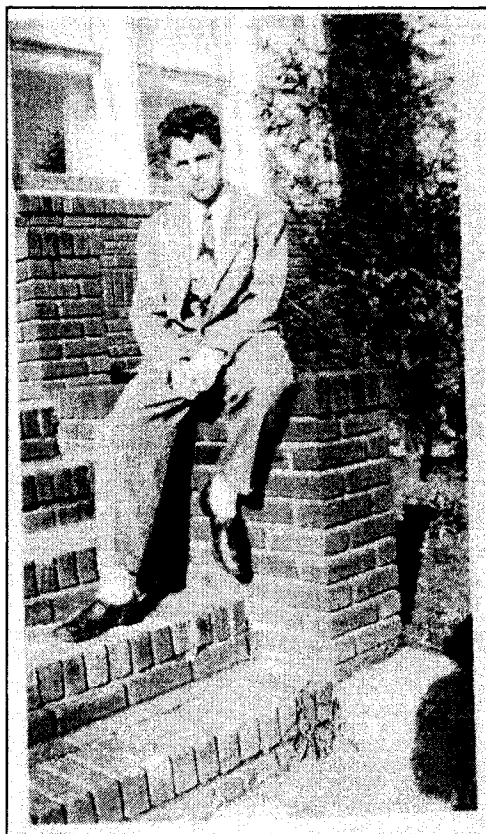
Tony's story: life in "little Sicily"

Tony was born and raised on 106th Street and Lexington Avenue in East Harlem, or what he referred to as "the Teeming East Side" and "little Sicily." His family settled on 106th Street when they moved from Sicily because they knew other immigrants from their hometown who resided on the block. Tony was 71 when I interviewed him, and grew up in a large Catholic family in the 1940s (Figures 38 and 39). He was the

Figure 38: Tony in East Harlem, c. 1930



Figure 39: Tony in New Jersey, c. 1940



youngest of 11 children (5 boys, 6 girls) born to his mother Francesca and father Antonio, all of whom lived in a five-room tenement dwelling. In his interviews, Tony often recounted the crowded conditions that his family lived in because it was emotionally taxing on him as a young child. One outcome of this crowding, or so Tony suggested, is that his family life was often “chaotic.” Tony admitted that his father beat his mother and that he learned to fear his father as a young child. Tony sought solace in the church to deal with his emotions.

A young person’s geographic territory was relatively small in the 1940s, largely confined to several blocks, in large part because there was no reason to venture into the larger world of the city. For example, children attended schools a short walk from their homes (Tony’s school was across the street from his home), and families could obtain access to doctors (who worked out of their homes), and food stores that catered to their culinary desires (such as the Italian markets along First Avenue) within a matter of several blocks. This spatial compression provoked a sense of territoriality among the European immigrants residing in East Harlem, which created a climate of mistrust among different groups and influenced how young people formed friendships with one another (Glazer & Moynihan, 1970). For instance, Tony recalled that his father was always telling him stories about Italy, which he felt indoctrinated him with a nationalist spirit towards Italians, Sicilians in particular.

“It was probably nice before I was born and then different groups started coming in. Like before the Sicilians were there, the Irish were there along with the Germans and the Jews. [They] probably had a better life than when the Sicilians came in because they had different living habits. They [the Sicilians] probably weren't educated you know, a

lot of them were gangsters, like the Mafia and all that.” Tony’s description of his childhood neighborhood reflects his perceptions of a cultural pecking order among the European populations who settled in East Harlem. Despite having pride in his nationality, Tony viewed Italians to be some how less than the Irish, Germans or Jews who resided in his community. This perception is rooted in Tony’s experiences with young people of nationalities and cultural backgrounds different than his own, and his internalization of the impression among many European groups that Italian immigrants, particularly from southern Italy, were uneducated and lacked the skills necessary to survive in an urban world (Glazer & Moynihan, 1970). “There were a lot of clashes between the Irish and the Italians, and that's how we grew up.” Despite these clashes, Tony’s only childhood friend was Irish, someone he met at school while serving together as altar boys.

Tony was very scared to venture out onto the streets of East Harlem as a young child. He feared violence from young people different than him, but also from his own people such as “racketeers” and “thugs” his age that hung out on the street. These experiences made him aware of class differences as a young child, provoked by the economic hardships he witnessed in his own neighborhood and by his proximity to Yorkville, which he viewed as being more affluent. “Well I used to like to walk downtown because the neighborhoods got better as you went downtown. There weren't as crowded conditions as up here, and with so many ruffians. The people were more up upbeat, and I used to like to be with those types of people instead of mine.” As a young boy, Tony associated wealth with happiness and felt that he suffered because of his economic circumstances.

“Only the ones who would fight their way up got out of those circumstances. The ones who got out to better neighborhoods, I envied them you know? There were bad people, good people in the neighborhood, racketeers, and prostitutes, honest working people – it was a conglomerate of everything. I used to like to go down there [Yorkville] because I didn’t grow up with people who were affluent, and I was very angry. I was very envious of them. In fact I might have even despised them. I was jealous of them. How come they got it good and in my heart I have to suffer? There could have been rich people in my neighborhood too. They made their money dishonestly in the rackets, and see, I was unaware of all that going on.”

Tony witnessed the cultural transformation of East Harlem when he was growing up. This change (re)named the neighborhood in the minds of residents, as Tony says, “Today they call it Spanish Harlem.” Tony felt disturbed when Puerto Ricans started moving into his neighborhood and admitted that he was probably racist, which he attributed to his nationalistic spirit towards Italians. “I’d say I noticed as I got older, then the neighborhood got slummish, like when the Puerto Ricans came in, because a big family used to live all in one room. And I thought I had it bad! Then when they [Italians] noticed that other groups started to move in, they moved away. I don’t know where they went, but I used to say the building’s getting occupied by mostly Hispanics, the Puerto Rican influx into the neighborhood.” Despite his professed racism towards Hispanics, Tony met and married a Puerto Rican woman from his block. Today Tony and his wife live in Yorkville in the Isaacs housing development. Tony rarely ventures into East Harlem as an older man because he feels alienated from the community.

Reggie's story: life as an "Oreo"

Reggie was born in 1971 in the South Bronx and moved into the Isaacs housing development when he was five with his mother, father and sister. Reggie grew up in the Isaacs in the 1970s and 1980s in a bi-racial family with a Brazilian mother and French-Canadian/Irish father. During one of our interviews Reggie referred to himself as "an Oreo," a popular cookie that he felt represented the black and white worlds of which he was a product, and which he experienced firsthand in his everyday existence as a young person growing up along the border of Yorkville and East Harlem.

From before birth Reggie was fascinated by music and dance. "Maybe I love music so much because my mother went dancing with me in her belly until I was born." Reggie became a skilled dancer at a very young age and would perform on the street for money with his friends. His dancing led him to be invited by a renowned DJ to *Disco Fever*, a popular club in the South Bronx touted as one of the places where hip hop music originated (Fricke & Ahearn, 2002). Reggie began going to clubs around the age of 11 and his indoctrination into the underground dance scene led him to live a dual life. By day he would attend school (only on occasion) and interact with his peers; by night he was at clubs hanging out with adults and celebrities. Unlike most of his peers, Reggie was traveling all over New York City via subway and bus to attend dance clubs that represented all walks of life (Latino, Jamaican reggae, gay). Reggie would tell his mother that he was sleeping at a friend's house in order to go to the clubs.

Music was as much a passion for Reggie as it was an escape from his own childhood, which was marked by confusion, drugs, drinking and life on the street. Reggie's confusion was related in many ways to his identity as a black man growing up

in a white world with an interracial family. “Well I guess I was pretty displaced in the sense of, you know, being on the border of East Harlem and Yorkville. Back then 96th [Street] was literally a border,” Reggie declared. “I’m going to use the terms white and black, which I don’t normally use, [but] just for the sake of simplicity, white people wouldn’t pass 96th Street, they just wouldn’t go past that border.” But Reggie traveled on into both Yorkville and East Harlem in his everyday life and was exposed to emotional stress on both sides of the border.

“Going downtown and living south of 96th Street,” Reggie shifted in his chair, “the people that [were] actually supposedly my friends, like endearingly called me nigger Reg.” Reggie and I had countless discussions about his experience of racism and how he learned to negotiate his bi-racial identity growing up along a border that exemplified these social characteristics. “If I went up to the high-income neighborhoods,” Reggie paused as if he was remembering the experience, “a normal reaction especially on school days coming home from school and stuff, there was great fear amongst my peers. In other words the kids my age, like they literally would run to their buildings thinking I was going to rob them or whatever.” Reggie seemed pissed off, rightly so I thought. “Cops used to roll up on me and question me, ‘what am I doing here’ just for walking down the street.”

However, Reggie is a strong individual with great character and learned to deal with racist situations in such a way that he remained open to peers from diverse backgrounds. Reggie’s music and dancing were something older teenagers and adults in the neighborhood appreciated, and by playing his radio in neighborhood parks he became friends with people much older than himself and of different races. Reggie’s childhood

friends and personal geography were in large part dictated by where and with whom he could obtain marijuana, which most often meant going into East Harlem. “Now I go uptown (East Harlem) on the other hand,” Reggie laughed, “I wasn't accepted by them either because there was this whole jealousy thing.” “Jealous of what?” I asked. “I'm not really down [cool, accepted] because I'm not really from the ghetto. I lived in you know, a white neighborhood (Yorkville). Uptown I was considered not black enough.”

Reggie's stories point to a number of social worlds discussed by many people his age and by young people residing in Yorkville today. The first is a perceived and real border between the white world “downtown” and the black world “uptown,” which in Reggie's experience, was demarcated symbolically in space at 96th Street. Uptown is often synonymous with “the ghetto,” and downtown a “high income neighborhood.” These terms are unconsciously used by most individuals in everyday conversation but are laden with symbolic meaning to differentiate “us” from “them.” Who “us” and “them” constitute is more complicated than simply a classification of white/black, rich/poor, and clean/dirty even though this is the most common way individuals articulate differences among the populations of Yorkville and East Harlem.

For example, Reggie's comment that his peers “uptown” did not accept him because he lived in a “white neighborhood” located “downtown” offers a more complicated picture of these dichotomies. Even though Reggie's skin color is black, the fact that his housing project was located in a white, high-income community meant that he did not experience the same lifestyle as his peers (he wasn't considered “down”) who resided in public housing “uptown” in the heart of the ghetto, presumably within an equivalent economic situation. Young people are often identified by the place they are

from, which could be a neighborhood or block, and the perceived character of such places. "People are likely to assume that a person who comes from a 'bad' area is bad," writes Elijah Anderson in his book, *Code of the Street* (1999, p. 77). Being "bad" means being tough or having a reputation based on one's ability to fight and defend one's interests.

Reggie possessed cultural capital; he learned how to negotiate both worlds uptown and downtown. "One minute I'll be hanging out with really rich kids that go to prep schools and all that. The next minute I'll be hanging out uptown with people that are just as ghetto as ghetto can get. And it was really interesting cause, just doing that, you change the way you speak from one place to the other. So one minute I'll be talking really proper English and the next minute I'll be talking, you know slang and everything else. If you would slip you'd really be made fun of. Like if I was hanging out with a bunch of upper class white kids and I'd say something, you know slang, they'll make fun of it and treat me like I'm illiterate or something, because they didn't understand that's Black English and it's like a whole other subject. Like I said, if I talked properly in the ghetto, oh forget it, they're like 'oh my goodness,' they'd call me a white boy."

Although Reggie was not from uptown, he was exposed to street life in the ghetto in many forms, including drugs and violence. To deal with his perceived identity uptown as a "white boy" (he might disagree with my assessment), Reggie befriended "ghetto celebs," or individuals who were known by everyone in the ghetto. By befriending these individuals, Reggie would be protected from others who tried to start fights with him. Reggie didn't believe in fighting and would often run away from such situations, even at the risk of being dubbed a "punk" or a "sucker." While he was angry with his father for

not teaching him how to fight at a young age, when he was older, he appreciated his father's wisdom.

Selina's story: hablo español?

Selina, a 33-year-old African American woman, tells an equally complicated story of her experience with social class and race. Selina was born on the "west side" (a common way of referring to the African-American section of Harlem) and moved into the Washington Houses when she was nine. Washington Houses are a massive public housing development located in East Harlem, from 97th Street to 104th Street between Second and Third Avenues. Selina comes from a single parent home and lived with her mother and older brother on the 7th floor facing an interior courtyard. Selina could be classified as a "latchkey child," because she was responsible for taking care of herself when she came home after school until her mother returned from work. Selina's mother was employed by a neighborhood cleaner and could not afford childcare. To deal with this situation, she required Selina to check in with her on a frequent basis via telephone to make sure she was okay and not getting into trouble.

Much like Reggie, Selina discussed differences in race and class in the context of her experiences with peers in the neighborhood. When Selina lived on the "west side" or the more African American section of Harlem, she had never really been exposed to a Hispanic population. "It was funny because I had always lived on the west side where there was nothing but black people. And then when you were in school, the only other people who you saw were white people who were your teachers, the students were all black. So when I moved to Spanish Harlem that was my first interaction with Puerto Ricans. And it was kind of funny, because I remember the first time I saw this dark

skinned girl and I thought she was black, and then she said something to one of my friends and she spoke Spanish perfectly. And I was like, 'Where did you learn how to speak Spanish?' And she was like, 'I'm Puerto Rican.' And I was like, 'get outta here, you're black you're not Puerto Rican.' And she was like, 'no I'm Puerto Rican.' And that's when I realized that they came in all colors." Selina's exposure to Puerto Ricans made her realize that her stereotype of what and how they looked was incorrect.

Language and skin color are just one of many ways young people labeled each other in Selina's neighborhood. "These people that were from over here," Selina laughed, "they knew that we were from this part because we behaved differently than they behaved." According to Selina, Washington Houses was comprised of three areas or sub-territories, based upon the groupings of apartment buildings located between 104th and 102nd Street, 102nd and 99th Streets, and 99th and 97th Streets. Those who lived further north were referred to as the "104th Street people," those who lived in the middle section were called "the 102nd Street people" and those who resided further south were "the 97th Street people." "These kids over here," Selina is referring to "the 104th Street people," "they were bad asses, like they did nothing but start trouble." Selina resided in the middle territory of the development and described it more favorably. "Here we were more connected and kinda hung out with each other." In reference to "the 97th Street people," Selina stated, "these kids somewhat wanted to be like them ["the 104th Street people"], but couldn't because they were closer to 96th Street."

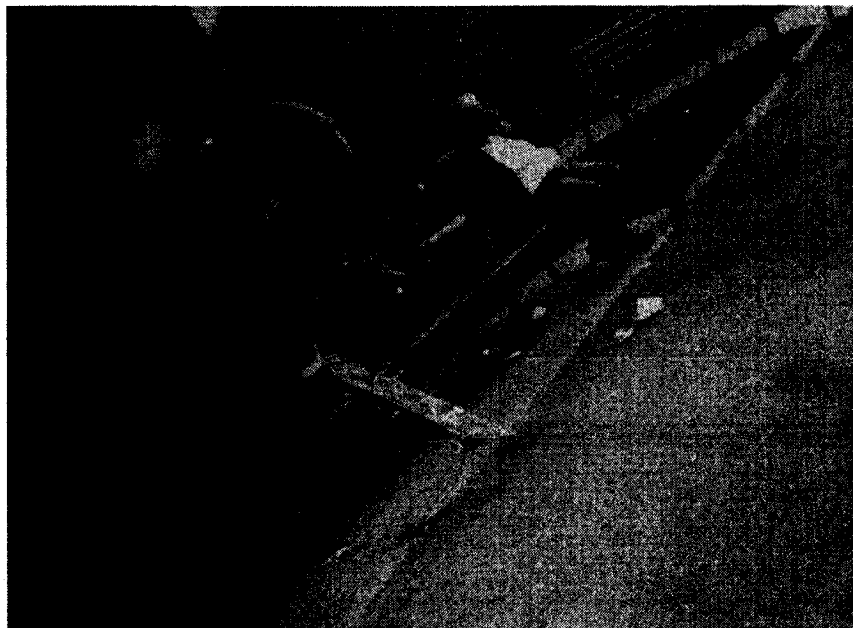
According to Selina's memories, there was a close association between a young person's residential proximity to 96th Street and their reputation or ability to fight. "If you go to 96th Street and you stand on this side of the street, it is totally different than

when you cross the street. It's a different feeling, like, back then when we were growing up it was clean. Like you would be on this side and you could tell you were on the ghetto part of 96th Street, and if you went on this side you knew you were on the white part of the neighborhood. So these people that were here ["the 97th Street people"], because they were closer to this area [they] tried to act differently." When Selina and her friends would enter into "the 97th Street people's territory," "they would always kinda you know, give you the look. And we would just laugh at them because we were like, 'you're from this part, why would we even be worried about you?'" Selina's story underscores Reggie's experience of being associated with a particular area that was not considered "bad" because of its proximity to a white neighborhood.

Andy's story: "white boy"

Andy, a 12 year old of Hungarian ancestry, was born in Florida and moved to New York City to be with relatives after Hurricane Andrew destroyed his home (Figure 40). Andy comes from a large family (3 sisters and 3 brothers), and his extended family has been known to live temporarily in his home for periods of time. Andy's father is a musician and his mother is a housewife. Andy loves to listen to Hungarian rap music and is open minded about many things young people his age are generally not interested in. Andy wants to be a herpetologist when he grows up – he loves reptiles, especially snakes and Iguanas. Andy's parents sent him to a neighborhood Catholic school until the 8th

Figure 40: Andy skate boarding in the Isaacs, c. 2000



Source: Photograph provided by Terrance

grade, when he transferred to a public junior high school. He was happy to transfer because he could skate in the school yard and a lot of his friends from the neighborhood are enrolled there.

Andy's life is consumed with being a skateboarder and graffiti artist. His personal geography is dictated in large part by where he can find places to skate. While he does go to other places off his block, Andy spends most of his time skateboarding in and around the Isaacs housing development. Andy looks after people he likes and teaches them how to do things (skateboarding, computers, and graffiti art). His outgoing personality and seemingly natural leadership skills enabled him to make friends with peer groups different than him ethnically/racially. Young people who live at the Isaacs look up to Andy and try to be like him. He is a trendsetter. Andy's friends from the neighborhood, who are African Americans, Puerto Ricans, Dominicans and Chinese,

affectionately call him “white boy.” This label is fitting given that Andy and his younger relatives are some of the few remaining white children residing in the Isaacs housing.

Like Reggie, Andy is skilled at negotiating different social worlds. As a young white person in a community that is largely oriented to black culture, Andy has demonstrated to his peers that he is “down” and can be treated with respect. Some of this respect is gained by Andy’s creativity and skill in everything he does (e.g., skateboarding, graffiti art) and the unique quality that comes from being one of a few young white people on the block. While Andy is knowledgeable of black culture, he tends to maintain a white identity in terms of his clothing style, his music interests and his general demeanor. But Andy also knows how to defend himself when necessary, something his peers in the neighborhood took notice of.

Much like Reggie, Andy possesses cultural capital. He knows how to use his whiteness as an asset and as a defense. He understands and accepts the laws of the white world, i.e., if he gets into a serious fight, he may be in trouble with the law because of his actions (as opposed to a young person of color, as Anderson suggests (1999), who may discount such laws and consider them illegitimate). Andy equally accepts his label as “white boy” because he knows that his ethnicity is something that makes him unique among his peers, who would likely have defended him if he had gotten into a serious fight. However, Andy’s cultural capital with people of color is spatially limited to the Isaacs development, and in some cases the skating areas in the New York City area where he has made friends of different racial backgrounds.

If Andy travels further uptown into East Harlem, he is likely to encounter serious problems associated with his racial identity. Given such, Andy sets a boundary for

himself at 100th Street. “Why 100th Street?” I asked. “I don't know it's just a boundary,” Andy replied. “It's like the beginning of uptown, like they got a Mc Donald's up there. And I have like enemies up there. People that I've met that I've had fights with, they live up there, so they might catch me off guard.” This example illustrates that Andy is aware of the limits of his whiteness “uptown” and develops a boundary for himself according to this social position. However, Andy can roam freely within Yorkville without meeting much resistance from his peers or other community members. He often travels to nearby parks located adjacent to upper income luxury apartments without any problems, even though he often “tags” these buildings (as he did on our neighborhood walk) with his graffiti name “Viper.”

Alecia's story: I'm Dominican first

Alecia was 13 years old when I interviewed her and lived in Normandy Courts, a middle to upper-income apartment complex located on 95th Street between Second and Third Avenue. Alecia's family was able to capitalize upon an income-stabilized apartment in Normandy Court, which she referred to as “expensive.” She had been living on the fourth floor of an apartment overlooking Third Avenue since she was 9 years old, and from her window she described being able to see the New York Mosque on 96th Street and Third Avenue and the Washington Projects further north and west. Alecia shares a bedroom with her younger brother and bemoans the fact that she has to be with him all the time. “I do take care of him, everywhere I go out, ‘Take your brother, I don't know where you going.’ You know, just make sure I'm with somebody.” Alecia knows that her parents send her younger brother with her so she is not alone when out in the

neighborhood, but she also knows that she plays a role in taking care of him. In other words, it's a reciprocal relationship.

Alecia, like Reggie, has multiple ethnic/racial identities that she has learned to negotiate in her everyday life. When asked about her family's ethnic history, Alecia rattles off a long list of linguistic, ethnic and racial signifiers. "My dad speaks Spanish, my mother, she speaks Spanish with me. My dad's mother is bright [meaning in color] and so is my dad's father. We're not really sure where he came from, but he's Puerto Rican, half Puerto Rican, half black, but he looks Puerto Rican so I say he's Puerto Rican." Alecia's attention to racial appearance ("bright") as a means of identifying her father as Puerto Rican as opposed to black points to a historical distancing between the African American and Puerto Rican community in New York City, something that has been played out over generations living in East Harlem and elsewhere (Padilla, 1958).

According to Piri Thomas, Puerto Ricans who have darker skin were often mistaken as African Americans or black, something that many Puerto Ricans loathed because this ethnic/racial association did not produce favorable outcomes in employment opportunities, housing, and everyday life living conditions (Thomas, 1967). As one sociologist described it, "The Puerto Rican, if white or slightly colored deeply resents any classification which places him with the Negro, finding the American-born Negro confronted with serious disadvantages in this country, the Puerto Ricans want to maintain their own group and to distinguish themselves from him" (Chenault, quoted in Glazer & Moynihan, 1970, p. 92). Today young people continue this tradition of social distancing, for example, by referring to dark skinned young people as "burnt."

“My friends are always asking me, ‘what are you, because you *that* cool?’ and I go ‘Dominican,’ and they go ‘oh,’” Alecia mimicked a negative tone. Alecia has a diverse group of friends, whom she described as “Muslim,” “Puerto Rican,” “white,” “Jewish” and “Dominican.” According to Alecia, the disapproving tone about being Dominican comes from her Puerto Rican friends. “I don’t have no beef [problems] with nobody. They think that Dominicans have an attitude problem.” Differences between Puerto Ricans and Dominicans are historically and socially rooted in each nation’s history, which has transcended their islands and made its way into the everyday life of New Yorkers.

“I say I’m Dominican first because I’m more like my mother, I look more like her and stuff. So I say [I’m] 1) Dominican, 2) Puerto Rican, and 3) black.” Alecia acted out her friends’ typical reaction to such a trilogy of races/ethnicities. “When I say ‘Dominican,’ they’re like ‘oh’ [disapproving tone], and I say ‘Puerto Rican’, and they’re like ‘oh’ [approving tone], and I say ‘black’ and they’re like, ‘oh’ [approving tone]. In other words, it’s “good” to be Puerto Rican and black, but not Dominican in the eyes of some of her friends. But Alecia chooses to remain “Dominican first” despite such negative stereotypes. “Dominicans, they have no problem with me, they’re so cool, and I don’t have a problem with them.”

David’s story: the newest arrival

David is 13 years old and moved to New York City when he was six from the Fujian region of southeastern China. David was born in the United States, but spent his early childhood in China being looked after by extended family members while his mother and father lived in Chinatown. At the time I interviewed him, David lived with

his grandmother, aunt and younger brother in the Isaacs housing development. During the first six years of his life in China, David learned the Fujianese dialect, and then learned English when he moved to New York City. His mother lives in Queens and is married to a man other than David's father, with whom she has had two daughters (who were also sent to China to live the first five years of their lives). David's father passed away when he was young, and his grandmother has a Buddhist shrine honoring him in their living room.

David's life is marked with residential, social and emotional uncertainty. Most of this instability is related to his life as a first-generation immigrant. David is one of the growing numbers of young Fujianese immigrants in New York City, whose presence poses a significant challenge to public schools and community centers (Zhao, March 19, 2002). Extended relatives in China often raise Fujianese children, as opposed to the children's parents, who reside in America illegally and cannot afford childcare or time off of grueling work schedules to care for them. Once coming to America the children have a difficult time adjusting to their new home and their new caregivers, that is, their biological parents, from whom they feel estranged. David's childhood was representative of such social shuffling, and to this day he only sees his mother on the weekends. David, in all practicality, acts as the father to his younger 12-year-old brother Erin, and serves as a translator for his grandmother who does not speak English.

"My mother lived in a house in a small town in Fuzhou, China," wrote David as the opening line in a school essay he entitled, "Immigration – My Mother." "The home was by the mountains where they buried the dead and where shepherds would have a small gathering of goats. The neighborhood was very clean but now the river by her

house is very dirty so no one swims in there anymore...A lot of people said that America was a great country with many opportunities. Her dad was already in America so she went too. Her family came to America to find jobs and she also wanted to give better things to her next generation (me).” Generally the children of immigrant families do far better than their parents economically, but this gain always comes with the cost of adjusting to a new culture and way of life, which is often emotionally taxing for a young person. “I wanna be Puerto Rican,” David confessed. David thinks that if he were Puerto Rican like his friend Juan it would be more “fun” than being Chinese. David tends to stick to himself or to hang out with his brother and cousins.

David encounters conflict in his everyday life about his Chinese identity (e.g., the way he looks, his religion) at school (“most of the teachers don't understand Chinese customs”), on the streets, and in the after school programs run by the Isaacs community center where he spends a lot of his free time. David is easily influenced by what other people say about him; he has a short temper and will often get into verbal and fist fights with his peers. David also takes care of his brother, cousins, and younger people whom he feels are defenseless. “I defend my friends that are weak cause I don't want them to really get injured. Once my cousin was on Canal Street and he got really injured cause he got jumped by 10 people for some reason, I think cause they were like racists and they beat him up. On Canal Street a lot of people are roaming the streets and it's dangerous. I don't want to go into details, cause like it might be racist you know, and I don't want to be like that. Like sometimes people start cursing at you and then they start making fun of you, of your religion or something, they're mostly like black people. I don't want to be rude or anything, but some of the Native Americans [meaning people born in the United

States], like just to use an example, like some of the black people are really nice, but most of them are like really mean.” “They’re mean to you because you’re Chinese?” I asked. “Yeah, sometimes they’re like really nice, but I don’t really like that cause they get me really mad.”

David’s experiences with street life factor into the decisions he makes about where to go in his neighborhood, but they are also a reflection of his grandmother’s concern for his safety. “She don’t want me to go uptown, like past 106th Street, but since my cousin’s right there, I go to his house.” “And why doesn’t she want you to go uptown?” I probed. “Well, cause she thinks like, you know, the thing I told you before about people [referring to “Native Americans” and “black people”].” After thinking a minute, David corrected himself, “well I can travel up there, but she don’t want me to go up there. She wants me to go to schools downtown, not uptown, and you can understand why.” Obviously David takes his chances in areas that he knows might pose a potential threat to him, something a lot of young people do because they know through experience that such altercations are rare, especially if one knows how to “read” the social landscape and anticipate problematic situations.

Place, identity and friendship formation

As these personal stories reveal, there are a number of ways in which race, ethnicity, class, gender and culture are experienced *in* and *through* place in the formation of young people’s identities, and in their relationships with peers and the larger community. Young people’s accounts of the *other* and of *difference* reveal historically and geographically specific notions of race, ethnicity, class and culture. As Stuart Hall suggests, “the question is not whether men-in-general make perceptual distinctions

between groups with different racial or ethnic characteristics, but rather, what specific conditions make this form of distinction socially pertinent, historically active” (Hall, 2002, p. 58). Why and how Tony, Reggie and Andy experienced being “Sicilian” in the 1940s, an “Oreo” in the 1970s, and a “white boy” in the 2000s demonstrates that young people’s identity construction has *social, historical, and spatial* characteristics.

For instance, awareness of young person’s own distinctiveness and identity is aroused by their contact with individuals who exhibit different cultural codes than their own, such as behaviors and clothing style, attitudes and values, language and skin color (Kroger, 1996). In the case of New York and many other urban areas in the United States, one does not have to leave the city to experience a sense of difference. Place is as much a factor in the process of “othering” and identification as are “other” people. Social labeling and the identity construction of peoples and places is typically more pronounced at the boundaries of communities that exhibit contrasting cultural, economic and political norms (e.g., as opposed to a core area of a particular ethnic neighborhood where the population is more homogeneous) (Sack, 1986).

As we saw in Chapter 2, *A tale of two neighborhoods*, the boundary between Yorkville and East Harlem today could be considered analogous to the US/Mexico border in terms the dramatic differences in economic livelihood, living conditions and cultural norms and practices. However this boundary, which in many ways represents a color and class line, was not as pronounced in the 1940s and 1950s when the seniors I interviewed were growing up. As Tony points out, however, Yorkville was always perceived as a more “affluent” and “happier” place to be as a young person growing up in the 1940s. In addition, as Tony’s story demonstrates, there were marked social struggles between the

Irish and Italian in East Harlem despite their common racial backgrounds. The “othering” process experienced by Tony was therefore grounded primarily in class and national/ethnic identities rather than race.⁹

However, it is important to point out how Tony’s identity construction changed as he grew older and the neighborhood changed from Italian to Puerto Rican families. As the demographics changed, Tony began to identify himself as white, rather than as Italian, in comparison to the Puerto Rican community. According to Roediger, the transformation from a “not-yet-white-ethnic” to a “white American” developed historically, and was a result of the “Americanization of immigrants” and their desire to be accepted as “white” rather than “Italian” or “Irish” in the face of demographic changes in the African American and Puerto Rican population (Roediger, 2002). In fact, many groups that are now considered to be “white” were historically regarded as “non-white” or of questionable heritage. As Roediger states, “in the case of working-class Italian Americans in and around Harlem, proximity of position, language, culture, and appearance made for an especially sharp need to establish that Puerto Rican migrants were of another race...”(Roediger, 2002, p. 329).

Such transformations in identity politics point to the socially constructed nature of race and ethnicity, which operates under different historical conditions, thus influencing young people’s sense of the “other” in their own identity formation (Kroger, 1996). Accordingly, Hall states, “different racisms are historically situated and in their difference they can be a product of historical relations and possess full validity only for

⁹ It should be noted that Piri Thomas, who also grew up in East Harlem in the 1940s, experienced both racial and ethnic “othering” by his peers as a Puerto Rican living adjacent to both a black and Italian community. These encounters are described in his book, *Down these Mean Streets* (Thomas, 1967).

and within those relations” (Hall, 2002, p. 57). Thus, as the population composition started changing in the 1940s-1960s with a large influx of Puerto Ricans into East Harlem and the increasing population of African Americans, the boundary between Yorkville and East Harlem became more racialized in the minds of residents living on the border of these two communities. Of course there is a close association between race and class in America, and therefore race and class became defining characteristics of the Yorkville/East Harlem border area.

Equally important to the development of the social boundary at 96th Street are larger transformations in race relations in the United States, which were manifested in the riots in Harlem and the civil rights movement in the 1960s. The 1970s was also a period in New York City’s history, like other urban areas in the northeast, in which suburbanization, white flight and the decay of public services culminated in the ghettoization of urban centers such as East Harlem, further contributing to the “us” and “them” mentality among the more affluent white populations who remained in the city and the minority populations residing in areas labeled by society as ghettos (see Chapter 2, *A tale of two neighborhoods*, for more information about the social construction of place in the media).

By the time Reggie was growing up in Yorkville in the 1970s and 1980s, his experience with the “other” was clearly that of a racialized identity politics. As Reggie stated, it was a “white and black world” when he grew up, and this dichotomy was represented in Yorkville (read: white) and East Harlem (read: black). Unfortunately (or fortunately, depending upon how you look at it), Reggie did not fit nicely into either category as a bi-racial child and he had to straddle both identities at the same time.

Reggie's *personal racial identity* was further confounded by the *racial identity of the place* in which he spent his time as a young person. In Yorkville, he was considered "black" by his peers and by white residents, and in East Harlem, he was considered "not black enough" by his peers because he lived in Yorkville. The situational nature of identity construction is demonstrated by this example and points to the colonization of the body through inscribed notions of place (Lefebvre, 1991).

In negotiating different racial identities and social worlds, young people have in some cases developed sophisticated skills to code switch or to change their behaviors (e.g., linguistics, style of walking) to be more reflective of one culture or another, sometimes referred to as "passing" (Piper, 1992). In most cases, a young person of color is required to learn codes of a white world as opposed to the reverse (although Andy clearly is an exception to this trend) in order to find employment and participate in a society dominated by white institutions, norms and practices (Williams & Kornblum, 1994). Some young people of color do not develop code switching skills, as Anderson (1999) suggests, because they deem this to be "selling out" or because they never were exposed to the social and environmental conditions in which this informal learning takes place.

The same holds true for young white people, who do not want to be associated with people of color because they have been taught to fear them (e.g., by parents and grandparents, in schooling and through the media) or because they simply have never ventured into or have been exposed to a "colored" world. Andy presents an interesting case on this question, because on the one hand he considers young people of diverse racial backgrounds to be his friends, and is in many ways associated with black culture.

On the other hand, he is able to maintain his identity as a “white boy” through dress and musical interests. Perhaps Andy represents a new form of code switching among an increasingly shrinking white population in poor or working class urban communities, one in which claiming whiteness or accepting this label from your peers affords white people the opportunity to enter into minority worlds, particularly if they are of similar social classes and demonstrate legitimate understandings of a black world (something that is witnessed in the music of Eminem, for example).

In the case of Selina and Alecia, one could argue that their perceptions about class and racial structuring among Latino/Hispano communities in New York City is a product of the subordination of each nation’s notions of race and class to an American idea of social labeling and colonization (Padilla, 1958). The fact that Selina was not aware of black Puerto Ricans until she moved to East Harlem, and that Alecia has a specific notion that Puerto Ricans are lighter skinned than blacks and Dominicans points to evidence of this phenomenon. As each new group of immigrants arrives in New York City, they must learn how to fit into the existing social structure of America, but also in their particular community (although they also help to produce and change this structure). In the case of David, he clearly would prefer to be Puerto Rican than Chinese because he feels that would give him an advantage living in the Isaacs and in his relations with “natives” (recall this is how he referred to African Americans). In addition, the fact that David would prefer to be Puerto Rican instead of white is interesting considering that many Asian groups are inclined to be associated with “whiteness” (Zhou, 2004).

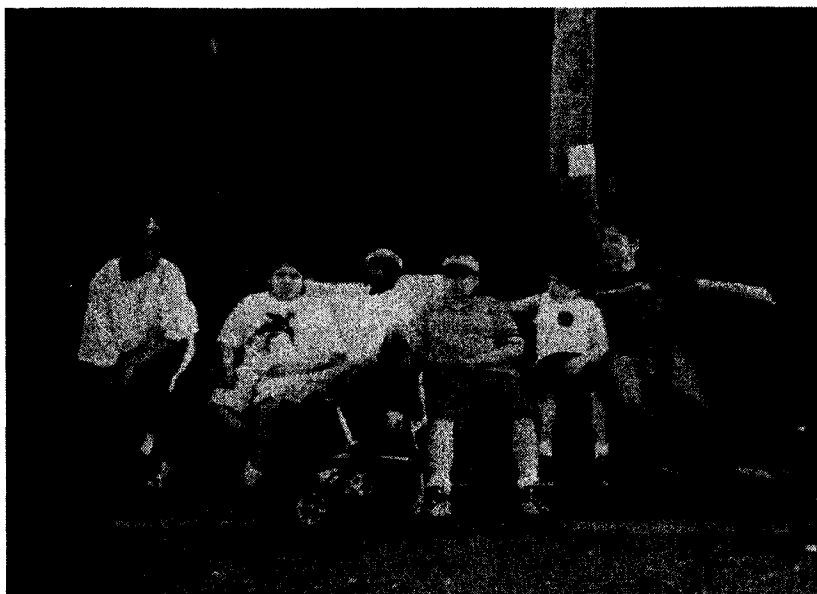
Notions of race and class can be concealed *in* and *through* place as these stories have pointed out. Its concealment enables it to provide form and structure to young

people's experiences, reactions, and identity constructions which could have potentially negative implications in their friendship formations. Most research on adolescent friendship formations is recent (in the last 20 years) and suggests that young people choose friends who are *similar* to them in attitudes and values, in their interests and activities, and in demographic characteristics such as sex, age, race and class (Aboud & Mendelson, 1996; Adler & Adler, 1998; Hartup, 1993).

Cultural values expressed by parents, peer groups, friends and in the media are important umbrellas under which young people choose friends as well (Krappmann, 1996). In addition, external factors such as the heterogeneity or homogeneity of a school or neighborhood play an important role in influencing a young person's access to friends who are racially different than themselves. In cases in which schools or neighborhoods are racially or ethnically diverse, research suggests that black and other minority children tend to have more other-race friendships than white children (Aboud & Mendelson, 1996). Girls tend to be more sensitive than boys to exclusion based on race and gender; however black girls have more other-race friends than white girls (Aboud & Mendelson, 1996; Killen, 2002). Research also suggests that by the end of middle school, other-race friendships tend to dissolve due to pressures of tracking and structural racism in the school, and of the subsequent development of single-race relationships (Lewin, 2001).

My research supports the generalization that young people make friends with peers like themselves, in the sense that young people of minority backgrounds make other-minority friendships (although these are often different minority group friendships, e.g., between Puerto Rican, African American, Dominican) (Figure 41). For example,

Figure 41: The ethnic/racial landscape of contemporary friendships at the Isaacs, c. 2000



Source: Photograph provided by Terrance

Table 6: Race and gender friendship formation, by gender and age

Females	Young people	Adults	Seniors
Mixed race friendships	90%*	100%	25%
Same race friendships only	10%	---	75%
Mixed gender friendships	40%	100%	100%
Same gender friendships only	60%	---	---
Males	Young people	Adults	Seniors
Mixed race friendships	100%	100%	---
Same race friendships only	---	---	100%
Mixed gender friendships	10%	10%	---
Same gender friendships only	90%	90%	100%

*Percentages reflect the number of participants who indicated a type of friendship in proportion to the total number of males or females for a particular age category, therefore taking into consideration differences in sample size.

those who lived in racially diverse communities during different periods of history developed other-race friendships, with the exception of seniors, who developed friends from other ethnic backgrounds but of the same race (Table 6).

This exception is largely attributed to the demographic characteristics of the blocks on which seniors resided, which tended to be multi-ethnic (Irish, Italian, Czech, Hungarian) but all white. In those cases where more than one race resided on the same block in the 1940s, but young people did not develop other-race friendships, parental preferences were cited as the reason. For instance, Tommy, a 71 year old African American stated that his mother was “suspicious” of non-Caribbean (white, European, Jewish) people who resided on their block, and preferred that he develop friendships through her personal network of Caribbean friends in the building. It is not clear that such preferences are racially or ethnically based exclusionary practices or simply a matter of acceptable cultural norms for kinship networks within the Caribbean context.

My research confirms other reports that girls were more willing to consider both sexes as friends, while boys tended to be exclusionary towards female friends. This was true of every generation I interviewed; however there is some evidence to suggest that girls growing up today are more inclined than in the past to choose same-gender friends like their male counterparts (Table 6). This is perhaps a condition of increasing surveillance of young women’s bodies by their parents in relation to reports of teen pregnancy and other sensationalist media that highlights incidents of molestation and “stranger danger” for girls in urban communities (Katz, 1998).

The fact that young people are willing to make friends of different races could suggest that while they hold stereotypes of race and class from influences such as parents and the media, on an individual level such notions are “tucked away” into the “back stage” in their “performance” with one another (Goffman, 1959). Young people’s interactions with each other could be viewed as a theatrical performance shaped by

environment and audience, constructed to provide others with impressions that are in line with the desired goals of the actor, in this case, making friends. If such notions are true, they raise questions about the legitimacy, intimacy and function of friendship formations in young people's everyday lives. In general, my interviewees described two groups of friends when they were between the ages of 11 and 13. The first group of friends are those they met playing or hanging out on the playgrounds and public spaces of their neighborhood. The second group of friends are those they know through school or after school programs and clubs.

Based on my interviews and ethnographic observations, friends from school tended to be different from friends from the neighborhood in terms of their function in the everyday lives of individuals and in their longevity and intimacy. Friends from the neighborhood tended to have stronger kinship type relations (as discussed in the next chapter, entitled *Block politics*) and are based primarily on proximity in living conditions and the relations that such closeness in space requires in terms of a young person's solidarity, legitimacy and reputation. In such contexts, a young person's race, gender and class tend to be subordinate during times of conflict with young people who are not from the block (i.e., from the neighborhood), while at other times are front and center, such as in situations demonstrating one's athletic ability or desire to date. On the other hand, friends from school, as the research suggests, tend to be increasingly homogenized by the end of middle school due to tracking and structural racism in the educational institution.

Identity is therefore a question of *articulation* depending upon a situation, place and the context in which young people distinguish themselves from other young people. I witnessed very strong bonds between young people of different races and ethnicities, a

phenomenon that urban communities like New York City offer to our education on the evolution of race relations in America. But these relations, however powerful, also have an ephemeral quality in which a young person's perceived racial identity can become an object of ridicule. The situational nature of identity points to the important role of scale and place in shaping young people's images of themselves, of other places, and of people who come from places that have ascribed meaning, either from their own experiences or from larger social processes indicative of urban communities and the national ideologies in which they are embedded.

Chapter 5

Block politics

“You see Pamela,” Reggie laughed, “you have this thing, people tend to have this thing where they hang out in one place every day, and they just don’t want to do anything but hang out at that place.” Reggie, a 31-year-old African American disc jockey from the community, was always good at giving meaning to something I witnessed but could not fully articulate. As someone who seized every opportunity as a young person growing up in the 1970s and 1980s to explore his surroundings and the city itself - driven by curiosity, music and mayhem - Reggie could never quite understand what he referred to as “block people.” “People that hung out on this block, they’d be here every single day of their lives – routine – that’s what they do. I could not do that, that would drive me crazy, you know? The whole idea of sitting on a stoop or a bench, every single day, I don’t know how the monotony could not drive someone crazy.” Reggie could not understand how people living in a city as exciting and diverse as New York could spend almost all of their time in one place - on “the block.”

Even though he talked about “block people” with some disdain, Reggie admitted that he had a territory he thought of as “the block” when he was 12 years old. This was a nearby public housing development called Lexington Houses, where he would hang out with men older than him who had cars, access to liquor and drugs. Reggie confessed that it was easier for him to get away with things his mother would disapprove of if he were on “someone else’s block.” Yet, from those I interviewed who discussed their experiences both on and off “the block,” it is quite clear why one might develop

reservations about leaving a territory where everyone knows you and where you feel safe or comfortable. You might get “the look,” or perhaps get “jumped” (beaten up) if you are daring enough to enter someone else’s block. On the other hand, spending a lot of time on your block creates problems if you want to try and get away with something like a puff of a cigarette or a “blunt” (marijuana rolled in cigar paper), swearing out loud, or kissing your first love, especially when “bench warmers” or “grandmas” from the community know your mother and will tattle on you.

As Reggie suggested, for most people “the block” is the place where, as a young person growing up in New York City, you spend most of your time when not at home or in school. To develop an affiliation for a block requires that a young person spend time outdoors and participate in public life (thus some young people – about 30% of my study population – did not experience everyday life on the block because their parents did not allow them to be outdoors for a myriad of reasons). Young people’s experiences and interactions with others on the block are most pronounced during the after school and evening hours throughout the summer months or when the weather is moderate. How a block is defined and characterized and what it means to a young person depends in large part upon where they physically lived (e.g., in a public housing development or tenement), their gender and race, and the larger historical and social context in which they grew up. The concept of “the block” is often synonymous to that of neighborhood. In most instances, when my interviewees identified the block they lived on, they were also describing what they considered to be their neighborhood. Solidarity to the “the block” can be viewed both as fixed and/or ephemeral depending upon a complex array of social actors and situations.

The “face block”

Those who grew up in the 1930s and 1940s typically described their block as a particular street (e.g. “I’m from 94th Street.”), sectioned off by two major avenues, or conversely, an avenue sectioned off by streets (Figure 42). This is particularly true for the seniors I interviewed, all of whom grew up in four to six story tenement dwellings in Yorkville and East Harlem. Sociologists often refer to this social landscape as a “face block,” because residents recognize one another (they recognize their “face”) because they live close to one another and use similar facilities (Suttles, 1972). It is worth noting that the physical landscape is also important in influencing this phenomenon: the tenement buildings, windows and stoops literally “face” one another, like a mirror.

A mixture of residential and commercial land uses characterized most blocks during this time period (and still do in many New York City neighborhoods today), although some were exclusively residential in nature. A typical block featured small stores at the street level such as meat markets, laundrettes, tailors, candy stores and dry goods stores, with tenement buildings rising up to six stories in height above or immediately adjacent to these commercial establishments. The tenements offered stoops and sidewalks for people to congregate and talk, and to watch young people playing in the streets (Figure 43).

Families residing on street blocks in Yorkville and East Harlem typified the European immigrants who settled in New York City at the turn of the 20th Century (Handel, 2000). In general, families settled on particular blocks because they knew someone who lived there, such as a relative or someone from an affiliated church. It was not uncommon for immigrants to settle on a specific block that was comprised of

Figure 42: Map of typical "face block"

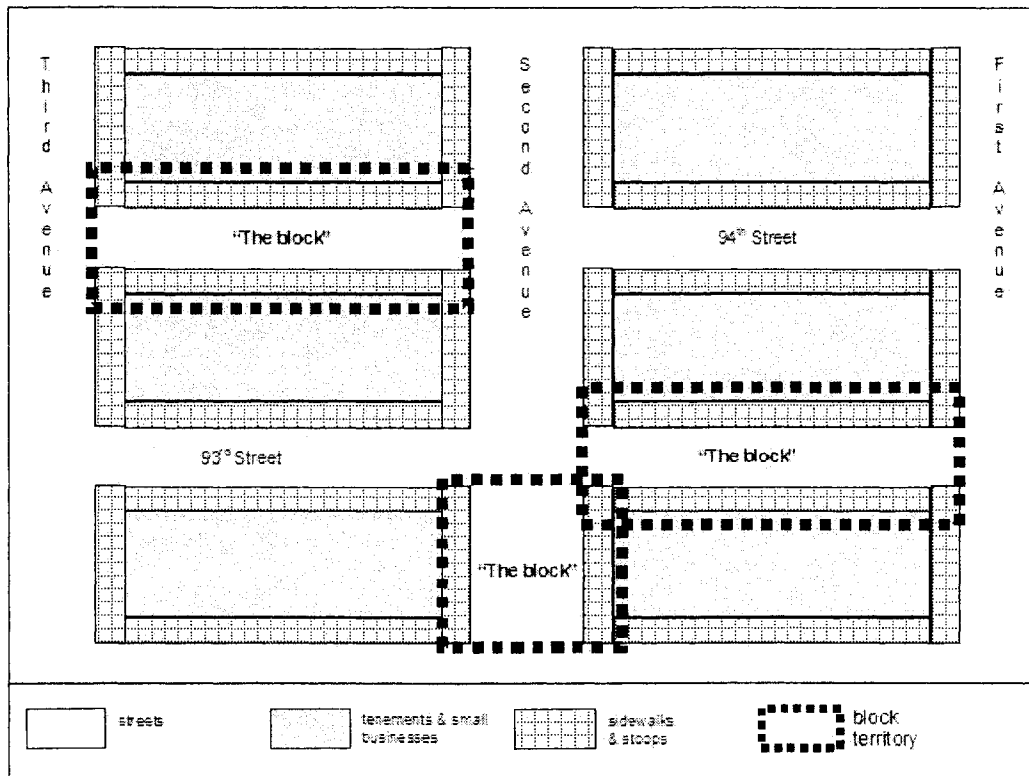
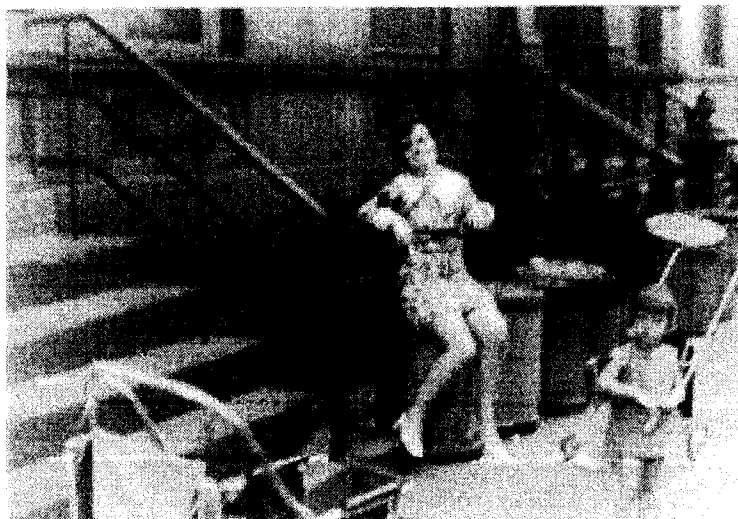


Figure 43: Typical stoop on the 94th Street block, c. 1960



Source: Photograph contributed by the family of Debbie

residents from their hometown (Suttles, 1968). As a result, some blocks were miniature portraits of the linguistic, culinary and social relations that typified small towns in distant places. These familial and geographic affiliations served to promote block solidarity and a sense of belonging.

Young people often identified or referred to “the block” by its cultural characteristics. You can picture a cultural map of Yorkville when Marie, who was 68 years old when I interviewed her, described her recollections of particular blocks. Marie grew up in a German/Irish family of five on York Avenue between 80th and 81st Streets in the 1930s and 1940s. According to Marie, the block where she grew up was very socially integrated despite having particular ethnically homogenous blocks. “We used to say ‘tell us the street you lived on and we could tell you your nationality.’ One block, like 80th Street, was all Irish, oh my God, we could tell you everybody's name. Down in the 70s, 70th and 71st was Polish and Slovak; they had a Slovak pool down there. Up here in the 90's was Irish and German.” Marie's memories highlight the importance of social networks, such as the church, in the settlement patterns of the population. “82nd [Street] was mixed. It was Irish and Hungarian, on account of St. Stephen's [a Hungarian church] being there. And then, 87th with St. Joe's, that area was very German.” Marie felt a sense of belonging to her block and offered her own explanation of why this was the case. “We never came up into the 90s, because like, we used to call it your territory. It was where you lived and where you stayed.”

The street was the focal point of social life in the 1930s and 1940s, and it is precisely this fact that created a sense of belonging to “the block” as perceived by those who lived and grew up there. On a typical day during this time period, you might have

seen mothers tending to young children and visiting with neighbors, shop owners sweeping the sidewalks and greeting patrons, children playing games, and peddlers selling items on pushcarts. “We were a close knit neighborhood in the fact that we knew everybody.” Marie, a 69 year old Irish woman, elaborated on the social ecology of the tenements stating, “there were only five story buildings, usually two families on a floor, and everybody knew everybody. You knew their parents, you knew the children, they knew you, and everybody was allowed to chastise you.” Neighbors often took on the responsibility of helping raise young people as if they were extended family members. “You wouldn't dare think of answering anybody back,” laughed Marie, “and if you did, you really would pay a toll - they'd tell your parents.” Belonging to a block meant that you looked out for one another, which in some cases would create problems for young people who were trying to get away with something like playing hooky from school, or doing something socially unacceptable like talking back to an adult or elder.

Many seniors I interviewed remembered participating in group activities that engendered solidarity for their block (something that is echoed in the oral histories and WPA's guides to Yorkville and East Harlem, see The Federal Writers' Works Progress Administration, 1939; Kisseloff, 1989). In some cases these activities focused upon young people's games. One such activity was a stickball tournament in which boys from one block would play another group of boys from a neighboring block. According to Marie, “the boys were always playing ball. We always went to some ball game. One block would play the other, like 81st would play 82nd, 83rd would play 84th.” These informal stickball tournaments took place directly in the streets. “Even the mothers and fathers would bring their chairs out and sit to watch their sons play ball,” Marie smiled.

“Then the next night, it would be in the next street, who ever won. Like say if 81st won, you'd come back to 81st, but if they lost, you went to their street. It was a very big thing.” To celebrate the winners of the stickball tournament, neighbors organized block parties in which neighbors would play music, cook, and dance on the street.

Growing up in this social context meant that caregivers felt comfortable allowing their children to play on the block, along the sidewalks and streets. Street games were the most important leisure time activity for young people growing up in the 1930s and 1940s (Nasaw, 1985). Typically the boys would play games directly in the streets because their games required a lot of space (e.g. stickball), while girls would play primarily on the sidewalks (e.g. jumping rope). While some play activities were gender segregated, other games such as *ringolevio* (an elaborate form of tag and hide-n-seek), would involve boys and girls from the entire block. These types of games were confined to the territory of the block, e.g., it was a rule that you had to stay on the block when you went to hide. Presumably this rule was rooted in parental requests of their children to “stay on the block.” While these types of games promoted block solidarity among young people and encouraged them to form relationships with one another, Suttles argues that the “face block” is not based on the organic development of what he terms “primordial solidarities,” but rather is a “prescribed social world dictated by parental fears of wider social relations for their children” (Suttles, 1972, p. 57).

While the overwhelming majority of seniors I interviewed had idealistic memories of their block, many also articulated how gendered norms and practices influenced the experience of girls and boys on the block and the relationships they formed with one another. Largely confined to the block (girls were often not allowed to

leave this territory, while boys left to run errands and work), some girls who grew up in the 1930s and 1940s found it difficult to negotiate body politics within this space. For instance, some women I interviewed described how the strong social networks on the block served to curtail their activities with the opposite sex, especially as they got older (e.g., neighbors would tattle on a girl if they saw her with a boy from the block in the hallway of a tenement, which would be viewed by parents as an act of disgracing the family). On the other hand, the boys were expected to marry girls from the block and were able to interact with them without much judgment on the part of neighbors. Such differences in childhood experiences demonstrate the importance of block politics in the socialization of girls and boys.

The “super block”

Adults and children who grew up in the 1970s and 2000s constructed their notion of the block differently than that of the “face block” of the 1940s due to changes in the physical and social landscape. For instance, those who resided in public housing developments generally viewed their block as the area in which the multiple high-rise apartment buildings were situated (yet those who lived on the traditionally grid-like streets had similar constructions of the block from the 1940s) (Figure 44). The public housing complex, what some term a “super block” (Jacobs, 1992[1961]), is closed to traffic and is comprised of different sections devoted to high-rise apartment towers, playgrounds, sitting areas and/or benches, pathways, parking lots, green spaces and gardens, and industrial spaces such as garbage stations, heating/cooling facilities, and maintenance facilities (Figures 45 and 46).

Figure 44: Map of typical super block, the Isaacs

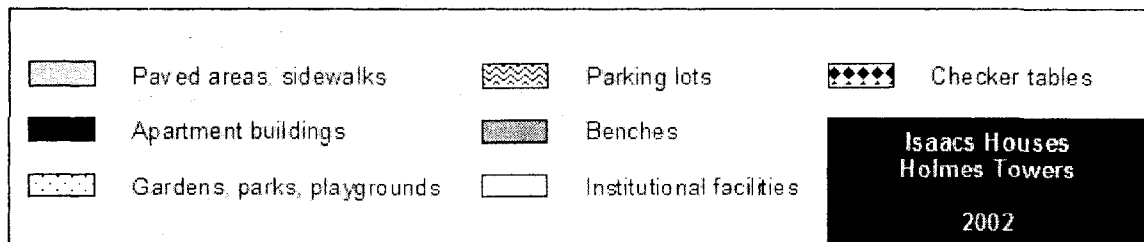
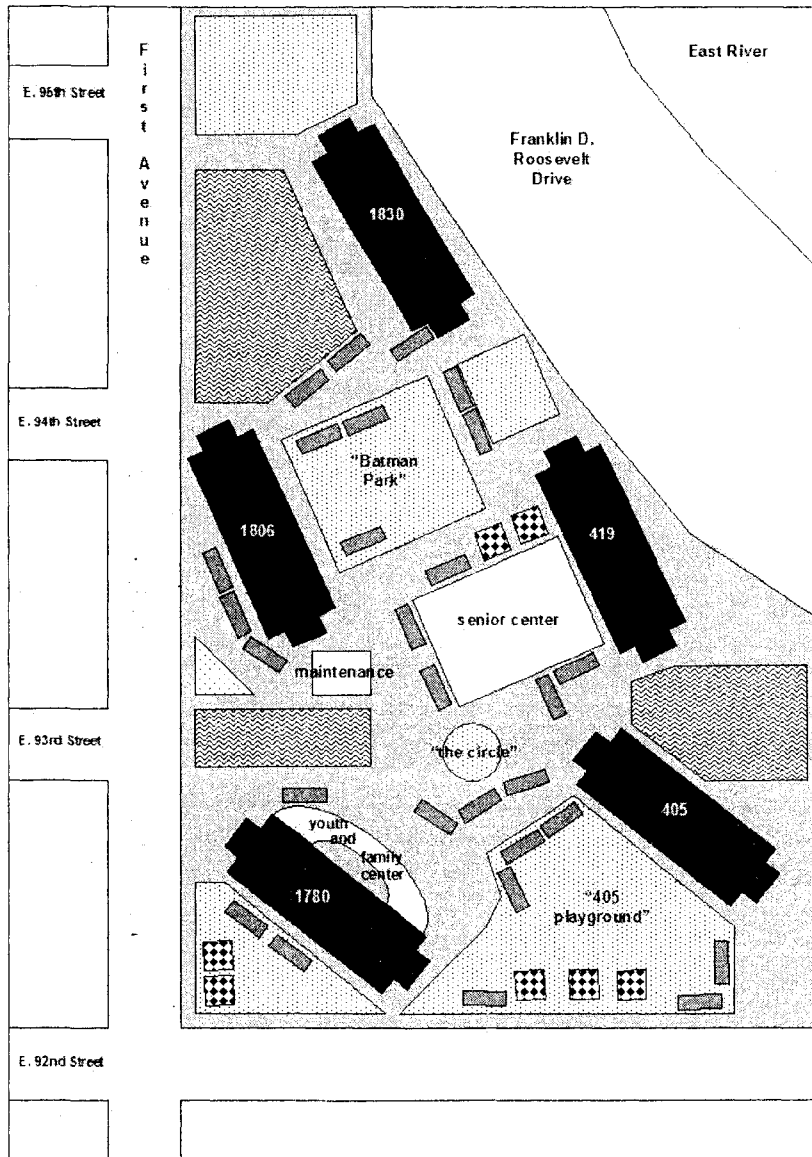
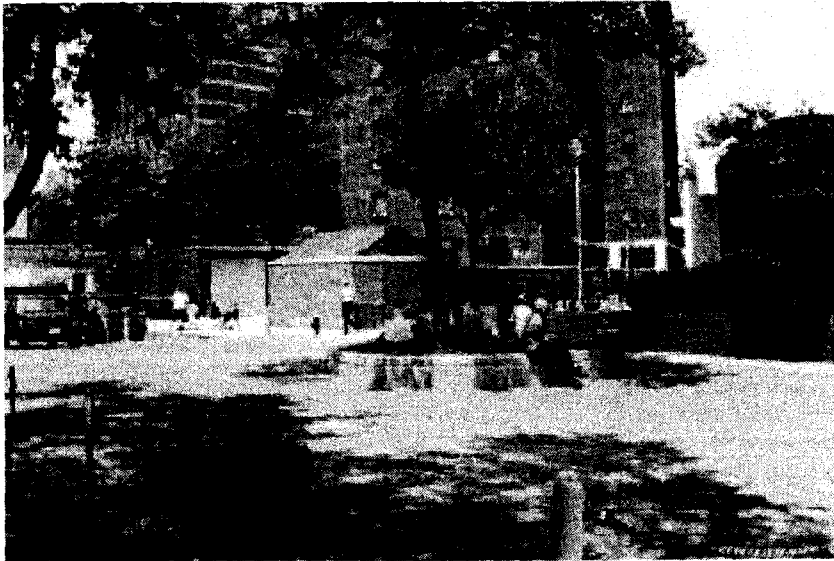


Figure 45: The Isaacs "super block", c. 2000



Source: Pamela Wridt

Figure 46: Inside the Isaacs's public space, "the circle," c. 2000



Source: Pamela Wridt

In her seminal book, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Jane Jacobs attacks urban planners for designing “super blocks” because she considers them to be a threat to the safety of children who would have in the past played on smaller blocks “under the eyes of a high numerical ratio of adults” (Jacobs, 1992[1961], p. 77). Jacobs was concerned that public housing developments served to erode the sense of community experienced on street blocks because they lacked opportunities for encounters with a wide range of individuals. As a result super-blocks created a new condition of isolation under which city children would learn and develop. “Super-block projects are apt to have all the disabilities of long blocks...[their] streets [promenades and malls] are meaningless because there is seldom any active reason for a good cross-section of people to use them” (Jacobs, 1992[1961], p. 186).

Coupled with its physical magnitude (e.g., the Isaacs is comprised of five, 25-story buildings), residents of super blocks also have to contend with public housing policies that often serve to erode, rather than foster social relations. For instance, instead of capitalizing upon their social and familial networks from the homeland (as residents did on street blocks in the 1940s), residents of public housing typically come from other communities in the greater New York City area and are subjected to the rules and regulations of the New York City Housing Authority’s (NYCHA). One such regulation is the computerized Tenant Selection and Assignment Plan (TSAP), which impartially chooses the next applicant for an apartment based upon a range of factors such as the applicant’s borough choice, economic need, apartment size required, and housing priority (New York City Housing Authority, <http://www.nyc.gov/html/nycha/html/publichousing.html>, 2003). As a result, ethnic, geographic, or extended familial solidarity on the block is

generally not as pronounced at the time of settlement, given that families are often pulled from different neighborhoods at random in which there are no previously existing social ties or relations (Venkatesh, 2000).

It is precisely these public policies and urban designs that led Jacobs to argue that the sheer size and area comprising a public housing development does not lend it to extemporaneous social encounters in comparison to a relatively small street lined with six-story tenements (Jacobs, 1992[1961]). However, it is more often the case that a sense of community flourishes in public housing developments despite these obstacles, in part, because of “block people” and the relationships that develop on “the block” (something that is echoed in the work of Williams and Kornblum, 1994). This is in part a function of families typically residing in public housing for extended periods of time, which serves to create a sense of belonging to the community (e.g., according to NYCHA statistics in 1992, the average tenure of the Isaacs ranged from 11-14.8 years). Community based organizations located within public housing developments also promote a sense of belonging to “the block.” For instance, block solidarity is manufactured and reinforced when young people participate in formal events, such as dance or basketball competitions organized by community workers, in which one block is in competition with another. It may also be the case that when Jacobs wrote her book in the 1960s, the streets were perceived as safer. Now, the super blocks offer a kind of retreat that is safer than the streets that Jacobs described as a more social/democratic option (Gaster, 1991).

The Isaacs Houses/Holmes Towers were unique from most public housing developments when they opened their doors in 1964 because individuals living in Yorkville were able to secure residencies in the project despite NYCHA’s rules and

regulations. This fact served to create a sense of belonging for those who moved from the immediate area. When faced with eviction notices from the city or private developers in the early 1960s, families living in tenement buildings in Yorkville turned to local churches for help in finding a new place to live. The clergy were particularly powerful in lobbying NYCHA to give working class families from Yorkville priority in the development. As a result, the racial composition of the Isaacs Houses/Holmes Towers has historically been comprised of a large white population with Irish, Italian, German and Hungarian ancestry. On the other hand, Puerto Rican and African American families from the Bronx, East Harlem and other areas in New York City were assigned to the development through NYCHA's established computerized process.

Today the population of the Isaacs Houses/Holmes Towers is much like it was in the 1960s when families first moved in (with the exception an increasing Asian population). According to NYCHA statistics in 1992, 49.2 percent of the residents are white, 19.1 percent are black, 22.7 percent are Puerto Rican, and 9.0 percent are classified as other (which includes Chinese, Indian and other Asian populations). Among the white population is an over representation of seniors (those who are 62 years or older = 63.1%), while those under the age of 21 are more likely from minority families (Puerto Rican = 37.4%, Black = 25.2%, Other = 10.9%). Racial diversity is one of the many variables to consider when analyzing young people's experience on the block from the 1970s until 2000s.

On a typical summer day at the Isaacs in 2002, one might see young children playing on playgrounds while their caregivers sit on benches and talk, teenagers playing games or hanging out on benches, chess tables, or cement walls, settlement house

workers bustling to and from meetings, NYCHA maintenance and tenant patrol officers tending to their duties, and the neighborhood drunkard loafing on a bench. Senior citizens, sometimes referred to residents as “grandmas” or “benchwarmers,” are also prominent on the social landscape. These different social groups create a rich tapestry of relationships that a young person must learn to negotiate on “the block.” Differences among populations are expressed in spatial terms, for example, in sub-territories within the block demarcated by factors such as race, age, and gender. Benches, playgrounds, parking lots and other public spaces are often appropriated by different groups depending on the power dynamics between them (e.g., boys versus girls, adults versus young people), the time of day, and their functional utility.

Within the Isaacs Houses/Holmes Towers in 2002, some benches inhabited by seniors during the day become hang out spots for children and youth during the evening hours. Boys and girls often claim different benches as their territories in somewhat secluded areas, or areas where they can see others, but not be seen themselves. Seniors often congregate on benches immediately adjacent to their homes because it is physically easier for them to walk shorter distances. Among the benches available on the block, some are more desirable gathering spots given their location. Some benches are situated in prime viewing areas, or places where an individual can see great distances in multiple directions, thus giving you an advantage in watching the social scene of “the block” unfold. Other benches are located in areas that receive sunlight a majority of the day. These benches are generally more desirable than those located under trees (except when it’s exceptionally warm) where pigeons congregate and leave their feces.

A similar social ecology occurs today in the playgrounds/parks and parking lots scattered throughout the development. Some parking lots are occupied by cars during the day but become staging grounds for skateboarders and rollerbladers after 6:00pm, when staff from the community center and NYCHA maintenance leave for the day and remove their cars from this space. A popular gathering spot is what residents refer to as the “405 playground,” which is a public space comprised of playground equipment, chess tables and benches immediately adjacent to building 405. This playground is a popular place for all ages, and is an important intergenerational space within the development. Residents from other buildings such as 419 and 1780 gather in this location, in addition to those who live in 405. Seniors, adults and young people alike enjoy the “405 playground” because it located adjacent to 93rd Street, creating a sense of openness and a place to watch life pass by. The playground also affords different opportunities for each age group. Seniors enjoy sitting on the benches and gossiping about their friends and the happenings of the neighborhood. Adults and young people enjoy the chess tables, where they more often eat food than play a game of checkers. Young children take advantage of the playground equipment to play games, climb, slide and run around. The social atmosphere created in the “405 playground” is desirable to most caregivers who feel comfortable allowing their children to play in this space even in their absence.

In comparison, another playground known by the locals as “Batman Park,” is not as desirable of a gathering spot during the day, but often comes to life at night. The playground equipment in “Batman Park” caters to children under 10 years of age, and therefore, during the day this space is often inhabited by mothers and their children. Because “Batman Park” is wedged between three of the five buildings, one can easily get

the sense of thousands of pairs of eyeballs watching your every move. When the sun goes down “Batman Park” becomes more inhabited by young people and adults, in part, because the park becomes more sheltered from a neighbor’s gaze (although the recent upgrades in lighting make it seem like daytime in some respects). However, “Batman Park” was not always a popular hang out spot, particularly if you were a minority growing up in the 1970s and 1980s. According to one African American male, “Batman Park” was known as “the Irish path” because many of the young white males from the development occupied this territory and often threatened to beat up minorities with golf clubs if they dared to enter what they perceived to be their turf. These tenuous racial relationships are one example of young people’s interactions with their peers on the block and how different groups exercise power over a space or sub-territory within this area.

Given their prominence in the public housing development, senior citizens have historically played an important role in monitoring young people’s behaviors on the super block (similar to what Venkatesh (2000) witnessed of the “mama mafia” in a public housing development in Chicago). Much like the experience of young people growing up in the 1930s and 1940s, neighbors living in the Isaacs in the 1970s and 1980s often took on the role of extended family members by showing young people how to play softball, helping them with their homework, or keeping a watchful eye on their behaviors.

According to Jay, a 38-year-old African-American father of three, he was often “verbally chastised” by seniors and told on more than one occasion, “Junior, you’re messing up.” Jay couldn’t get away with anything mischievous on “the block” when he was younger because seniors would take him to his parents and tattle on him. For instance, when Jay tried to skip school, he knew better than to “come around here, [because] that’s asking to

be hung.” Jay’s experiences with senior citizens and with neighbors were common among young people growing up at the Isaacs in the 1970s and 1980s. It was not unusual for young people who were primarily African American and Puerto Rican to think of their neighbors as “second mothers,” who were most often older white, Italian and Irish women from the Yorkville of yesteryears.

In general, today’s young people and their parents have less contact with their neighbors and elders on “the block,” in part because there was a great turnover among the long time residents living in the Isaacs in the 1980s (e.g., through death and white flight), but also because of larger social changes in everyday life (e.g., “terror talk” in the media, (Katz, 1998). When asked if they knew their neighbors and communicated with them, it was not uncommon for young people in 2002 to reply, “I don’t know them.” As a consequence, when seniors attempt to reprimand a young person, there is less credibility attached to their commands, given that they do not carry any threat of serious punishment. When young people do articulate knowledge of their neighbors or of people on the block, these relationships can be characterized as more extemporaneous than purposeful (e.g., saying hello in the lobby or recognizing someone because they frequent a particular playground). As a result, young people today are less able to articulate the names of their neighbors when compared to the detailed accounts provided by those who grew up in the public housing development or on face blocks in earlier times.

Young people today are, however, highly cognizant of their relationships with peers. Young people roam from one end of the block to the next, pausing at benches, playgrounds, and sitting areas such as “the circle” (a round cement ledge with a tree and

grass planted inside of it) to chat, hang out, watch others, play games and listen to music. As in previous decades, boys and girls play games with one another delimiting the block as the territorial boundaries in which one can hide. Peer to peer relationships take on added importance in this space because a young person's reputation, e.g., how they act and with whom they associate, is the most significant factor in determining their acceptance in social groups on "the block." A young person's reputation is largely constructed in relation to gendered and racialized norms and practices characteristic of a particular time period (such as a girl's sexuality, a boy's physical abilities, what it means to be Dominican in a largely Puerto Rican residential area).

As an African American, Jay expressed some of the racial tensions he experienced growing up on the block in the 1970s. "As far as playing sports," Jay chuckled, "sometimes after the games it became another thing, like an East Side - West Side story." Jay is describing what he referred to as "altercations" that took place between boys on "the block." Jay stated that it was not uncommon for white, black and Hispanic boys to play a pick up game of football together in some of the green spaces on "the block." At some point during the game there would be a dispute about the perceived fairness of a rule or call. As Jay put it, this dispute would escalate from a "bad call" to "racial slurs" and eventually "something like a gunfight at OK Corral...like you got Wyatt Erp and his guys, you got the classy gang over here, and everyone's just starring each other down." Boys like Jay learned how to fight at a young age to defend themselves on the block, even though most would argue that they preferred not to get into confrontations with their peers. "I've always been the type," Jay confessed, "the type to try and walk away. You know, you touch me, you touch me. You push me, you push

me. It's when you came to the face or sometimes saying something about my mother, I might have gotten a little boiled up about it."

Girls also have to negotiate their reputation on "the block," which is most often tied to their relationships with boys and their sexuality. One day I noticed Shaquena, an outgoing 13-year-old African American girl, sitting with her friends on a nearby bench. Shaquena and her friends were having a heated discussion about something, or so I assumed, given that their hands were flying through the air as if they were directing a chorus. Later Shaquena told me that she and her friends were talking about a girl from "the block" who lives part of the year down south with her father. "She's gonna get it when she gets back," Shaquena declared, "because she did some real bad things." I did not know the girl Shaquena was talking about and asked her to elaborate. "She talked about girls behind their backs and did things with their boyfriends." These two acts represented a serious violation of unwritten rules for "the block." While girls are less likely than boys to engage in acts of physical violence towards one another (although my research suggests this phenomenon has increased over time), they are very skilled at making another girl's life miserable on "the block" through social exclusion.

Despite the trials and tribulations of everyday life on "the block," most adults and young people expressed a sense of belonging to the territory comprised of the public housing development. Part of this sense of belonging can be attributed to the positive relationships young people develop with their peers and with their "cousins," a common term applied to a very close friend from the "the block." Once someone is considered family (either through biological or social means), a young person will, without question, defend their family member's reputation on "the block." For instance, I often witnessed

girls or boys getting into fights with other girls and boys because they “talked bad” about a family member. To express their fondness for close friends, young people develop nicknames for one another. “My friends call me either ‘mellow yellow’ because I look like a girl on a Gap commercial when that song is playing,” laughed Shaquena, “or they call me ‘Ms. Iverson’ because I love Alan Iverson [the basketball player].” Nicknames embody intimate knowledge of a friend’s desires, interests and experiences from growing up together on “the block.” “We tight,” Shaquena echoed. Young people challenge this “tightness” when they enter into someone else’s block, which often serves to provoke a sense of solidarity among young people and for their block, even if there is existing turmoil in peer relationships.

Negotiating other people’s blocks

By analyzing what happens when young people roam off their block into other people’s blocks, we are able to understand how the concept of “the block” is reinforced and/or challenged through interactions with their peers. When a young person leaves his or her block and enters into someone else’s block, they are venturing into a foreign territory comprised of its own unique social actors and system of power relationships. Individuals from every age group or historical period (seniors, adults, and young people) described strikingly common experiences when roaming off “the block,” suggesting that the concept of “the block” and its importance as a young person’s territory has transcended time (although there are subtle differences that appear over time). Their narratives describe a set of unwritten and tacit rules about block life, namely, how power over a territory is earned, enforced, maintained and challenged. Much like everyday life on “the block,” the type of experience a young person encounters when entering into a

foreign territory depends in large part on their gender and race. These experiences are often emotionally taxing or violent, ranging from demeaning looks to racial slurs, and in some cases, physical aggression.

Unlike the 1940s, young people growing up in the 1970s and present time often left the safety of their own block to venture into the larger community to pick up younger siblings, to hang out with friends or relatives, to go shopping, or to play sports. Inevitably this required young people to pass through or enter into someone else's block. Much like experiences on "the block," gendered norms and practices were the key source of conflict between girls (girl to girl conflict) and boys (boy to boy conflict) when going to someone else's block. While both girls and boys got into skirmishes with their peers over their sexual practices (such as romantic relationships), girls were more likely to encounter problems with their peers in relation to their body image and appearance, while boys were more likely to enter into altercations in relation to their physical capabilities, such as their ability to play sports. Girls and boys both struggled to earn and defend their reputations in relation to their gendered identity (to look and act a certain way or to be strong and physically aggressive) as they moved in and out of other people's blocks.

Shaquena's experiences reflect contemporary struggles over gendered norms and practices within "the block" of public housing developments. Shaquena often leaves her block in Yorkville for another block in East Harlem because she has to pick up her younger stepsister from daycare. "The girls are just jealous, they're always rollin' their eyes." Shaquena imitated them in a way that was not flattering, "Oooo, what she doin' with nobody?" The girls verbally chastised Shaquena when she entered their block. "They don't like anybody from outside this block basically, from any block other than

their own.” I wondered what was really at issue here, and then Shaquena added, “but the boys over there like me.” Shaquena imitated these girls, “Oh, she got the new Jordans on, she thinks she’s cute.” Shaquena deflected their criticism, which I found hard to believe given their slurs about her body image, “Oh her pants don’t even look right on her.”

Boy to boy conflict is typically related to disputes over sports (such as the perceived fairness of a particular call on a basketball game when two blocks play each other), racial identity, a boy’s own reputation or that of his girlfriend’s, and the defense of “the block.” Defense of “the block” against outsiders was a common action taken by boys in groups of two or more individuals, in which there was a loose or informal social structure (e.g., a leader of the block), much like that described by William F. Whyte in his book *Street Corner Society* (Whyte, 1955) and by others (Anderson, 1999; Klein, 1995). Even if boys were quarreling on their own block, when someone entered into their territory, the quarreling was put temporarily on hold, and the boys came together to defend their space. This was true of Jay’s experience on “the block.” According to Jay, “Even though we was going at each other, if somebody else from another block tried to come over here and really mess with somebody, whether they was white or whatever, we would stick together, because it’s our community.” “You see,” Jay declared, “these guys were coming from Timbuktu and their coming into our group, you know, trying to cause trouble, we’re not gonna have that.” Thus, any racial problems between boys on the block dissolved when outsiders threatened their space. “When we needed to do it [defend the space] together, we did.” This suggests there is an ephemeral quality to block politics

– under certain circumstances intragroup conflicts are temporarily suspended for superordinate goals associated with intergroup conflicts (Sherif, 1962, 1966).

Young people develop strategies, what might be thought of as spatial tactics, that help them cope with these social situations (Cahill, 2000). Simply passing through another person's block ushers a call to arms, as Terrance, a 13-year-old African American living at the Isaacs explained, "people don't like other people in their projects." In general, these strategies do not involve adults (e.g., telling a parent or caregiver about a situation), but rather, rely upon young people's own social networks and individual or collective resources. Some common strategies adopted by young people representing all time periods included: avoiding the area in question, talking your way out of a situation, running away from a situation, joining a group such as a club, gang or crew to help protect you from harm, or engaging in an act of violence with the intent of never having to do it again after you have proven yourself.

In some cases young people made allies such as "associates" or "ghetto celebs." "No, they're not my friends," Alecia, a 13-year-old Dominican girl declared, "they're my associates." One of Alecia's tactics, (whether she was conscious of it as a deliberate strategy could be questioned), was to make allies with girls on a block she liked to visit. "You can tell your friends a lot of things. You can trust they're your friends. You don't trust your associates, but you work with them, [even though] you're not that close." An "associate" is someone that you may have been fighting with on a previous occasion, but have since learned how to co-exist without necessarily engaging in threatening behavior. A "ghetto celeb" is another form of an ally, one that acts as an ambassador on your behalf when entering a foreign block. "A 'ghetto celeb' is someone that everyone knows."

Reggie laughed, "I used to hang out with one of them a lot. He used to protect me and defend me and stuff because he was cool with me." As an ambassador, "associates" or "ghetto celebs" have the role of introducing you to others on a foreign block and by association, you become less of a threat to their social order.

While young people rely upon allies to negotiate foreign territory, it is often the case that they are alone in this space. Traveling alone could be considered a strategy for your defense, because if you are alone, you are less likely to be perceived by others as a threat. When alone, young people must rely upon their own faculties to negotiate their interactions with peers on another block. A common response in these circumstances is to ignore individuals, run away, or try to talk your way out of a situation. If a young person runs away, they risk being chastised and having their reputations scarred. "I was a non-violent person," Reggie stated, "I walked away from fights. That didn't help my reputation too much either because I was known to be a sucker, a punk." In this context, it is understandable why it would take an exceptionally self-confident young person to disregard peer pressure and to avoid participation in violent acts to protect their image or reputation.

Another strategy for maintaining your reputation as a young person is to join a group that can defend you and support you in a time of crisis. Such groups could be thought of as a version of a street gang, such as those described by William F. Whyte in his book *Street Corner Society* (1955). Street gangs are often comprised of pals from the block in which there is a loose or ephemeral social structure (Whyte, 1955). The primary purpose of such a group is the defense of a territory, in this case the block, or a group member. Street gangs exemplify a more structured equivalent of boys on the block

coming to the defense of a peer, in which there is an established name and reputation to which the group identifies, and to which the larger community recognizes or is knowledgeable of (Klein, 1995). In the case of my interviewees, young people, in particular boys, had some degree of interaction or experience with these groups both on and off the block, referred to as “clubs” in the 1940s, “gangs” in the 1970s, and “crews” in the 2000s.

“There was the Copians, and the Socialistic Dudes,” Tommy explained, “they were [some] of the most terrifying.” In the 1940s Tommy was aware of the street gangs, which he called “clubs,” in and around his block on 118th Street in East Harlem, but chose not to join them. “You know, they want you to be bad [tough], or else you gotta join with them, but I never joined no club.” Tommy recalled how these groups would act as guardians of the block, “See if you join a club, fly into one block, go outta your block, the fightin’ started cause they get real protective if anybody bothered you. They just know the block who they agree to have a fight with.”

At the Isaacs in the 1970s and 1980s, most young people who grew up there knew something about “the Budweisers” an Irish and Italian “gang” that circled the block and often occupied a nearby park to drink. “They would just buy kegs of beer and sort of park it right outside the park,” Jay explained. Both Reggie and Jay attested that the Budweisers also threatened minority boys who dared walk through their territory. “Me and a couple of other African Americans,” Reggie stated, “if we went through the wrong area, they would literally like try to harm us. You’d just hear the insults, the bottles being thrown at you and rocks, things like that.” Whether construed as drinking buddies or

racists, the Budweisers exerted some degree of power or control over boys on the block during this time period.

“Graf crews” are a popular form of a street gang for some boys growing up in the Isaacs in the 2000s. “Graf” refers to graffiti, and “crews” to a group of boys who gain notoriety by tagging or marking territories on the block, such as lampposts, garbage cans, and walls. “I started my own crew,” Andy declared, “called ASP, which stands for Assaulting Stupid People.” Andy is a 13-year-old Hungarian skateboarder who spends most of his free time performing tricks in a parking lot of the Isaacs. According to Andy, “stupid people” are those who “tag” [mark] an object with their crew’s name or their own “tag name” in a location that can be easily “buffed” or covered by another person’s tag. Tag names, such as “Viper,” are alias names for crewmembers that identify who they are and what they’re interested in, in this case a snake.

While graf crews are principally involved with and organized around tagging, they do perform a role in protecting their own members on and off the block. “Like some person can say some stupid thing, and another person could say it back,” Andy explained, “and they just start pushing and shoving and then the crews start getting into it and it’s like one crew versus another crew.” According to Andy, these confrontations are called “scrap yard battles,” in which different crews create “pieces” or artwork to demonstrate their artistic and graffing skills. “Sometimes it’s fist fighting too,” Andy admitted, “like if someone buffs me, and it was like a big thing to me and someone just came over and painted over it with spray paint, that would make me mad and I would want to fight them, but not a scrap yard, a fist fight.”

While participating in street gangs was not a common practice among the individuals I interviewed (especially among girls, although research suggests the opposite to be true (Horowitz, 1983; Klein, 1995), it is important to discuss their role in block politics and intergroup relationships in a given territory. More typically, young people ignore situations, run or walk away from confrontations, or talk their way out of problematic encounters with their peers. These skills are often learned or acquired through the act of challenging or defending peers and protecting yourself within a given block. These peer-to-peer confrontations represent a cultural system of shared values, norms and practices – some tacit, others overt – which serve to promote the construction of “the block” as an important territory in the everyday lives of young people.

Blockism

*Don't be fooled by the rocks that I got
I'm still, I'm still Jenny from the block
Used to have a little, now I have a lot
No matter where I go I know where I came from*

(Excerpts from a song by Jennifer Lopez, entitled “Jenny from the block”)

In the preceding sections of this chapter I described how young people have historically experienced everyday life on “the block” along the border of Yorkville and East Harlem. The commonality in young people’s constructions of scale – that of “the block,” regardless of the time period in which they grew up, or the block’s physical form (i.e., street/“face block” or public housing development/ “super block”), suggests that larger social structures are contributing to the consistency and legacy of block politics (Anderson, 1999; Dargan & Zeitlin, 1990; Hunter, 1974). For many New Yorkers “the block” is *the* fundamental unit of urban geography. It defines community. The block is

home. The block is family. The block is where you are from. The block, therefore, becomes a kind of metaphor for childhood and evokes a profound sense of *blockism* among young people that is carried with them into adulthood. Blockism is the sense that one comes from, belongs to, and represents a particular block. How one comes to feel a sense of attachment to the block is an outcome of young people's everyday interactions with their peers and other social actors in this space. Blockism is then validated and reinforced when young people enter into other people's blocks and challenge its network of social relations, norms and practices.

Blockism could be considered a classic case of what social psychologists refer to as intergroup relations, or the many ways in which different groups form friendships or adversaries and promote cooperation or competition (Sherif, 1962, 1966). But a psychological approach to understanding inclusionary/exclusionary practices must also take into consideration the wider social relations, power structures and spatiality of young people's behaviors (Sibley, 1995). In my research, young people formed groups based primarily on gendered or racialized norms and values indicative of a particular block and larger social expectations. Distinction between those in the "in-group" and those in the "out-group" is generated, maintained or challenged through the interaction and social performance between groups (e.g., entering someone else's block) (Sherif, 1962). When there is a perceived threat to a group, members act upon and make decisions to deal with this threat (e.g., boys coming to the defense of someone on their block). Oftentimes a leader emerges in the group who is able to withstand the strains imposed by the conflict, and who is skilled or talented in some capacity to deal with the situation (e.g., "ghetto celeb").

What determines the positive or negative interaction between groups depends upon their reciprocal interests (making friends, dating) and their degree of significance in the everyday life of the group's structure and politics. The issues may be a real or imagined threat to the safety of the group (e.g., stealing all the good men, more competition on the block in sports). In the case of block politics, young people experience and must learn to negotiate both intra-group relationships (i.e., relations with their peers *within one block*: boy-boy, girl-girl, black-white) and inter-group relationships (i.e., relations with peers *from block to block*: boy-boy, girl-girl, gang-gang, team-team). Defense of a group is often, as Smith articulates it, "the conflation of several scales at which identity is constructed," (e.g., not just the defense of the block against boys from other blocks – the scale of the home, but also the defense of the body) (Smith, 1992).

In such relationships, young people are struggling to develop and defend their reputation on and off the block. A young person's reputation is based up gendered and racialized norms, such a girl's sexual practices and body image and a boy's physical capabilities and dominance (Horowitz, 1983). Because gendered and racialized values and norms have changed over time, so have their meaning in intergroup relations. For example, in the past authority was gained when a young girl was perceived as virginal (something that was gained by not being seen with boys in public), while today a young girl's reputation is more likely to be based on her ability to appear chaste while being seen with boys in public spaces and engaging in sexual intercourse in private spaces (Horowitz, 1983). On the other hand, boys have historically gained notoriety for being strong and physically able to play sports and to defend the block. A boy's reputation and honor is achieved through his ability to command respect from his peers, something that

is often supported by physical aggression to prove his claim to dominance and independence (Horowitz, 1983). Young people's reputations are vexed by these larger gendered and racial social conditions and are expressed in the space of the block through force, manipulation, persuasion and the creation of consensus, social exclusion and spatial control and regulation.

The constellation of social actors on and off the block and the potential range of experiences a young person may have in this context depend in large part on their opportunity to play and hang out in public space. These opportunities are shaped in many ways by a caregiver's perception about the safety of the block, its degree of social cohesion and sense of community (this observation is noted repeatedly by many authors, e.g., Aitken, 1994; Anderson, 1990; Skelton & Valentine, 1998; Suttles, 1972; Valentine, 1997a). While there is some evidence that there is a decline in the sense of community in the super-block (e.g., young people in 2000s know less about their neighbors), this seems less a case against the design of the public housing development (Williams & Kornblum, 1994) and more an indication of larger social processes (e.g., "terror talk" in the media, see Katz, 1998) and public policies (e.g., the *Quality of Life Campaign*, which enables police to closely scrutinize and penalize an individual's use of public space, see McArdle & Erzen, 2001).

Nonetheless, many young people and adults in my study were able to experience public life and to develop a sense of blockism. Much of this depends upon both informal and formal social networks communities develop to help raise children and youth in environments that often present serious challenges to their livelihood. Block people, by virtue of being ever present on the social landscape, serve to create a safe environment

for young people on the super-block, reminiscent of social relationships that typified small blocks in the 1930s and 1940s. Women have historically played an important role in producing a sense of blockism, either through their persistent presence on the landscape as mothers or as older women concerned for the safety of children (as ad-hoc grandmothers). This role play is important regardless of racial identity.

Blocks also acquire reputations based upon their unique social landscape and location in the larger urban fabric of New York City. For example, the Isaacs is often considered to be a block in which young people are considered not as “bad,” or as “tough” as young people who reside on blocks located within East Harlem, which is perceived as a “rougher” place to grow up, because, as one 12 year old African American boy described it, “their block is in a black community” or “the ghetto.” In other words, young people living in “white neighborhoods” are perceived as being “less genuine” or “legitimate” when compared to other young people from “black neighborhoods,” even though they may have similar racial and economic backgrounds. Such racial, cultural and economic identities are then associated with particular blocks, and young people make assumptions about their peers based upon these perceptions. For instance, one of the first things a young person will ask a new acquaintance is, “Where are you from?” The response is always, “I’m from 94th Street,” or “I’m from the Isaacs,” thus revealing particular identities and behaviors of such individuals based upon the socially constructed identity of their block.

Popular hip hop and rhythm and blues artists such as Jennifer Lopez try to capitalize upon their experience growing up on “the block” in an effort to try and identify and to appear “legitimate” with the young people who buy their records. In *Jenny from*

the block, Jennifer Lopez is reacting to many young people's opinions that she has "sold out," or has forgotten what it is like to live in a poor and/or minority community that struggles with racial and economic oppression. By stating, "don't be fooled by the rocks that I got, I'm still Jenny from the block," Jennifer Lopez is attempting to re-affirm her "block" identity, or her "legitimate" identity as a poor minority from a "tight" and "bad" urban community. In this capacity, blockism transcends the confines of New York City through the hip-hop industry and is re-produced and manufactured as a legitimate cultural and political struggle of poor and/or minority urban communities in the United States. For example, Scarface's hit entitled *My block*, reflects all of the social struggles described by the young people in my research and by Jennifer Lopez, but "his block" is in Houston, Texas.

In this chapter, I have demonstrated a relationship between place, scale and young people's identity construction. Namely, block politics is an expression of young people's gendered and racialized identities and social struggle to spatially differentiate themselves from one another using "the block" as a group signifier. The block identity also does this differentiation work for young people, i.e., they are born to a block. Additionally, block politics is symptomatic of larger social processes of exclusion/inclusion based upon a young person's social, economic, sexual and racial marginalization. And yet most New Yorkers who have had the opportunity to experience the trials and tribulations of the block could attest to its importance in helping them develop social skills and street literacy (Cahill, 2000), an important asset to a young person's well being in this urban environment. Those who have experienced the block profess their connection to it and what it represents socially, culturally and personally. It is clearly an important territory in

the everyday lives of young people that should be nurtured and developed and viewed as a potential site for transforming exclusionary practices.

Block politics represents one of the many ways in which young people express and articulate their sense of social and spatial inclusion/exclusion, something that has transcended both time and space in urban communities in the United States. While I recognize there is a potentially threatening quality to life on and off the block, (e.g., the initiation of the “new kid on the block”), it is also the case that young people come to understand what it means to be from a place and from a family or community through these experiences. Such paradoxical experiences are important to a young person’s participation in public life and development as citizens of the urban world in which they reside.

Chapter 6

Playin' and Hangin'

“Damn...!” I heard gasps and commotion coming from the hallways of the Center when I was working teen night in late autumn. “Look at him,” another voice said. Stepping into the corridor and surrounded by young people from the community who were trying to see what was going on, I noticed a 13 or 14 year old boy holding a cloth to his forehead that had turned bloody. “What happened?” I asked the boy. He shied away and didn’t want to say. Then Darnel, a witty 14 year old from the community I came to know and sometimes loathe, admitted to me, “We were playing USA versus Afghanistan, and I won, USA won.” I immediately recalled my observation that evening of a pile of rock and rubble outside the Center, a mound of potential “play materials” resulting from the construction of a new parking lot. Apparently Darnel and his friend were using the rocks to throw at each other as a game in a faux, yet paradoxically real, war.

Such scenes are typical of how young people use their environment and adopt social practices and events of a particular time period in play and in leisure. As Colin Ward succinctly puts it, “children will play everywhere and with anything, [and] a city that is really concerned with the needs of its young people will make the whole environment accessible to them, because, whether invited to or not, they are going to use the whole environment” (Ward, 1990, p. 86). How do young people play and hang out in Yorkville and East Harlem, and how has this changed over time and space? For instance, how has young people’s access to public space, playgrounds and parks changed over time and space? When analyzing young people’s use of the city and the quality of urban life,

such public spaces are an obvious area of inquiry. My intention in this chapter is to describe and analyze the social and spatial evolution of outdoor play and recreation in New York City from the 1940s until present time (although some of the processes began much earlier than 1940). While play and recreation are, of course, a broad range of activities that occur in multiple settings and under various forms of supervision, the focus of this chapter is upon the role of the streets, public parks and playgrounds in children's everyday lives (indoor play was discussed in Chapter 3, *Everyday geographies*).

I focus primarily upon the stories of Victoria (age 60), Reggie (age 31) and Noel (age 13), as well as archival materials from the *New York Times*, *Community District Needs Statements*, local newspapers and websites, to demonstrate how their experiences in Yorkville and East Harlem are representative of larger social, economic and cultural changes that have impacted play and leisure activities in many cities around the developed world. These changes include a decrease in young people's access and use of streets, playgrounds and parks due to process of urbanization and gentrification, public disinvestment in these spaces, a parallel investment in the commercialization and privatization of playtime activities fueled by a middle class discourse about the meaning of play, and a media that sensationalizes danger in the public environment. Of primary importance in my analysis is the relationship between changes in children's access to play and recreation space, how children negotiate their lived experiences in these spaces, and how these spaces reflect differing representations of childhood over time.

From the streets to the playgrounds

Victoria is an Italian-American woman who grew up in a six-story tenement dwelling (walk-up) on 96th Street and Second Avenue during the 1940s and 1950s. She

was 60 years old when I interviewed her, and resided in “the Isaacs,” located several blocks from her childhood home. Victoria is a giving and warm person. She welcomed me in her home and insisted on feeding me sweets and serving me coffee. She represents the Italian sensibility of giving very well to say the least. When Victoria was 12 years old, she spent a significant amount of time playing on the street in front of her building, referred to by most New Yorkers as “my block.” She loved thinking about her time playing on the streets, and she had a warm smile on her face when she described her childhood community of Irish, Italian, German and Hungarian working class families and her play experiences with the children from her block. According to Victoria, “the whole block was full of kids. Almost all the activity was done outdoors (Figure 47). We didn’t have any kind of toys like computers that they have today. So what you did was you went outside and on the sidewalk you drew [with chalk] a potsie, those little squares where you used to play jacks, [and] bottle tops.”

As Victoria’s childhood experiences suggest, the streets were an important play space for children growing up in New York City in the early to middle decades of the 20th Century (Nasaw, 1985). The overcrowded tenements didn’t offer much space to play indoors, and the hot weather during the summer months coupled with minimal ventilation was a natural deterrent to life indoors. The street was a space for enjoyment, adventure and independence for both young children, older youth and adults (Opie & Opie, 1969; Ward, 1990). Mothers allowed their children to play on the streets until late in the evening, as they knew neighbors, if not themselves, who were keeping a watchful eye on their sons and daughters. Parents could also keep an eye on their children with great ease by peering out their tenement windows.

Figure 47: Young people playing along 94th Street, c. 1960



Source: Photograph provided by the family of Debbie

Of course playing on the streets created problems and opportunities for the children as well, for they had to share the streets with adults, vendors, policemen, and a growing number of automobiles. While children were skilled at maneuvering in and out of traffic during their playtime activities, when automobiles became more prevalent in the cities, the number of child deaths also increased dramatically. The growing number of traffic-related child deaths prompted settlement house workers and reformers (sometimes referred to as “child savers”) to campaign in the newspapers and within political organizations to lobby for the creation of “safe” play environments, such as playgrounds and after school programs (Nasaw, 1985; “Smith Makes Plea for Playgrounds,” October 13, 1930; Tranter & Doyle, 1996).

One such organization was the City Club of New York, which conducted a detailed study of traffic-related child deaths by school district in 1929 (“Playground Appeal Cites ‘Murder Map’,” July 21, 1930). In this study, a map dubbed “The Murder

Map” demonstrated the spatial relationship between the presence and absence of playgrounds in particular districts and the number of child deaths related to traffic accidents. Those districts with more playgrounds had less child fatalities; those with fewer playgrounds reported more child fatalities. In this study, the City Club cited 340 deaths and almost 14,000 injuries directly related to playing in the streets (jumping on the back of trucks, playing games in the roadway and bicycle riding). The creation of parks and playgrounds was therefore viewed as a way to protect the children from physical injury and harm that accompanied everyday playtime in the streets (“Ask Mayor to Clear Streets of Children,” May 6, 1910).

There were other arguments for the development of safe play environments, one of which was to prevent juvenile delinquency. This argument resonated with middle and upper income populations who viewed the street as a breeding ground for immorality among poorer immigrant populations (Goodman, 1979). Prominent organizations such as the Children’s Aid Society and the City Club invested large sums of money into the development of other play spaces, as a means of both protecting children and curtailing the “gang spirit” among boys and girls.

We are planning, in a large and very definite way, what we call the ‘spare time approach.’ Hundreds of our minors, boys and girls both, are ‘playing’ their way into trouble. Every boy is gregarious. He does not want to play alone. In him the gang spirit is strong. If left to himself – and home influences are every day growing weaker – he is liable to find expression of this instinct in the street corner and back alley gang, where delinquency breeds. It is our purpose to provide, for boy and girl alike, clubs and playgrounds where they may exercise their gregarious play instinct under wholesome conditions (“Child Aid Society to Open Playfields,” June 1, 1930).

This argument was supported by the passage of curfews and street laws prohibiting begging, roaming around, loitering, blocking sidewalks and playing street games (Goodman, 1979). Here we see the street not as a playground but as a place of physical danger as well as a breeding ground for immoral behaviors (e.g., sex and illegal activities), and as such a place in which to control children's and adults behaviors through legislation. In this context, parks and playgrounds represented a safer (although confining) space in which parents (usually mothers) could allow their children to play without fear of the demoralizing effects of street life and the dangers of traffic and other hazards. Reformers recognized that play was how children learned and made sense of the world. Yet to have beneficial effects, they thought play had to be organized and supervised (street play, self-directed play was seen as unimaginative and unproductive). Reformers wanted to ensure that children played the "proper way," which was based upon their own middle class values and constructions of play and of childhood.

Tactics such as the "Murder Map" and lobbying from private organizations such as the Children's Aid Society and "child savers" (e.g., Jacob Riis and his 1890 publication of *How the Other Half Lives* (Riis, 1997) eventually moved city officials to embark on the creation of additional parks and playgrounds ("17,197,000 Asked to Increase Parks," August 19, 1930; "Asks New City Parks to Cost \$20,000,000," February 26, 1930). In the mid-1930s and early 1940s, there was an unprecedented growth in public play spaces within New York City. Under the first six years of Robert Moses' tenure as Parks Commissioner, New York City witnessed a 100% increase in parks, a 225% increase in playgrounds, and a 1,000% increase in swimming pools ("Moses Defends High Park Costs," January 20, 1940). By 1940, New York City boasted over

410 public playgrounds, 25 athletic fields and 40 pools ("3 Playgrounds Open Today," September 14, 1940; "56 More Community Centers," November 16, 1940; "Schools Expand Summer Play Plan," June 2, 1940). These city-based public works projects were supported by federal policies of President Roosevelt's New Deal era in which the Works Project Administration (WPA) hired unemployed men as construction workers (Caro, 1975).

Most of the land on which parks and playgrounds were built had to be purchased, taken over by the city, or received through private donations. Corruption and institutionalized racism within the city government and pressure from private interest groups created a spatial concentration of parks and playgrounds in wealthier neighborhoods. Wealthier communities were given priority over the less politically active communities located in slum neighborhoods (such as East Harlem), which were predominantly inhabited by African Americans and Puerto Ricans. For example, during the 1930s Robert Moses built 255 neighborhood playgrounds, only one of which was located in Harlem (Caro, 1975).

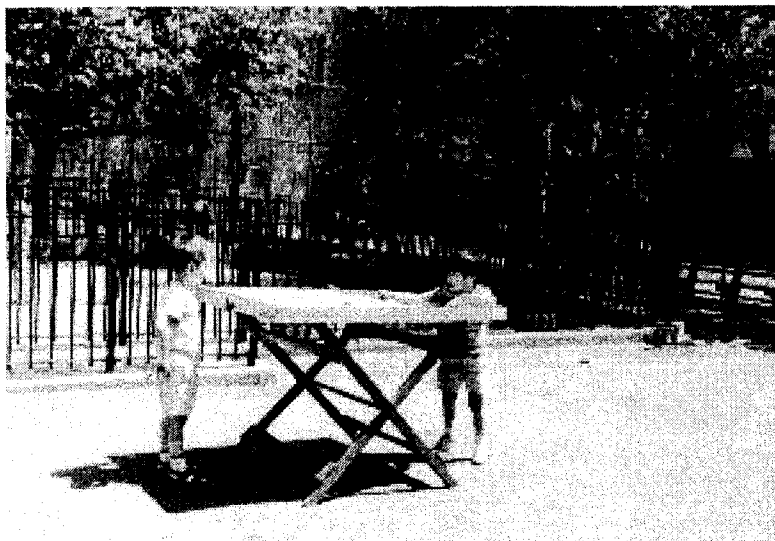
Despite the city's investment in public play and recreation, it took more than merely the physical space of the playground to remove children from the streets effectively. From early on, there was a concern that organized play activities would be required to lure children from the streets into the playgrounds, and that adults should supervise these activities ("20 Play Centers Will Open Today," July 10, 1950). Initially federal WPA workers served the function of play leaders, later to be replaced by City Parks Department employees ("Playgrounds: City's 526 Fun Playgrounds," July 4, 1950).

These play leaders provided an important role in the maintenance, supervision and policing of playgrounds (Caro, 1975).

Growing up in Yorkville, Victoria had access to a playground where she had fond memories of a play leader named “Whitie (Figure 48).” “We used to play in this park, which had a lot of activities. We used to have a park man. He would play games. He used to have crafts out there for you to do. He worked for the city, but he used to do that himself. He used to get us crayons, checkers...we used to have contests of Chinese checkers. And the city supplied all the toys in those days. He made it his park. We’d always say, ‘You going to Whitie’s Park?’ He was a firm believer of having children off the streets and in his park. I used to swing around his flagpole. He used to say, ‘Get off that flag pole!’ And if we got hurt, he always had a [first aid] kit inside to take care of you, your wounds and whatever.”

Play leaders were necessary to convince parents to allow their children to play in playgrounds and parks, which were located out of their eyesight from the tenement window. The once informal supervision of children on the streets by adults from the block had almost entirely been replaced by city-sponsored, supervised play and recreation in designated spaces. A significant level of discourse in the local media about children’s safety was also important in creating a concern amongst the public about the dangers of the streets. For example, a police department advertisement in a July issue of the New York Times in 1940 listed “Vacation Don’ts,” including “Don’t play games in the roadway. Don’t hitch on trucks, cars and other vehicles. Don’t weave in and out of traffic while riding your bicycle. Don’t ride on the handlebars. Don’t pass red lights” (“Supervised Playing Urged by La Guardia,” July 14, 1940). These types of

Figure 48: Whitie's park, c. 1960



Source: Photograph provided by the family of Debbie

advertisements would often be accompanied by suggestions that parents bring their children to playgrounds for safe and adult supervised playtime activities.

By the late 1950s, while children like Victoria were still playing on the streets, more and more of their play activities were taking place in supervised settings such as neighborhood parks, playgrounds and boys and girls clubs. Over the course of several decades, the street lost its prominence as the place of children's daily lives and everyday play activities. The streets were now considered dangerous play spaces and a breeding ground for immoral behaviors. The development of playgrounds and the middle-class discourses of danger that accompanied them were among the many social transformations that have led to the diminished presence of childhood from street life, and thus, community life in general.

Clearing the streets of children was also a necessary action to promote the flow of goods and services in a modernizing city (Goodman, 1979). Tranter noted a similar

historical process in describing children's loss of the street as a play space in Canberra, Australia, and suggested, "little has been done to counter this belief and to withdraw the threats [automobiles] from the children, instead of withdrawing the children from the threats and hence from the streets."

While in the past, children simply learned how to deal with traffic while playing on the street, ultimately, the automobile has reigned as the supreme "owner" of the street. Consider Jay's experience playing on the streets in Yorkville in the 1970s. "The cars back then were a lot more considerate than they are today. If they saw kids playing they would honk their horn way ahead of time, and we'd have time to get out of the way. Or it was our job, those of us at this end looking up the avenue, 'Hey, this car's coming this way.' And we'd just move out the way." Jay's reflection of street play emphasizes a point that Tranter (1996) and Cunningham et al. (1996) describe as a major barrier to reclaiming the streets for young people – the willingness of adults to rethink previously held priorities about the function of the street. While Jay's experience suggests motorists were sensitive and even accepting of children playing on the streets, this does not reflect the psyche of most motorists today.

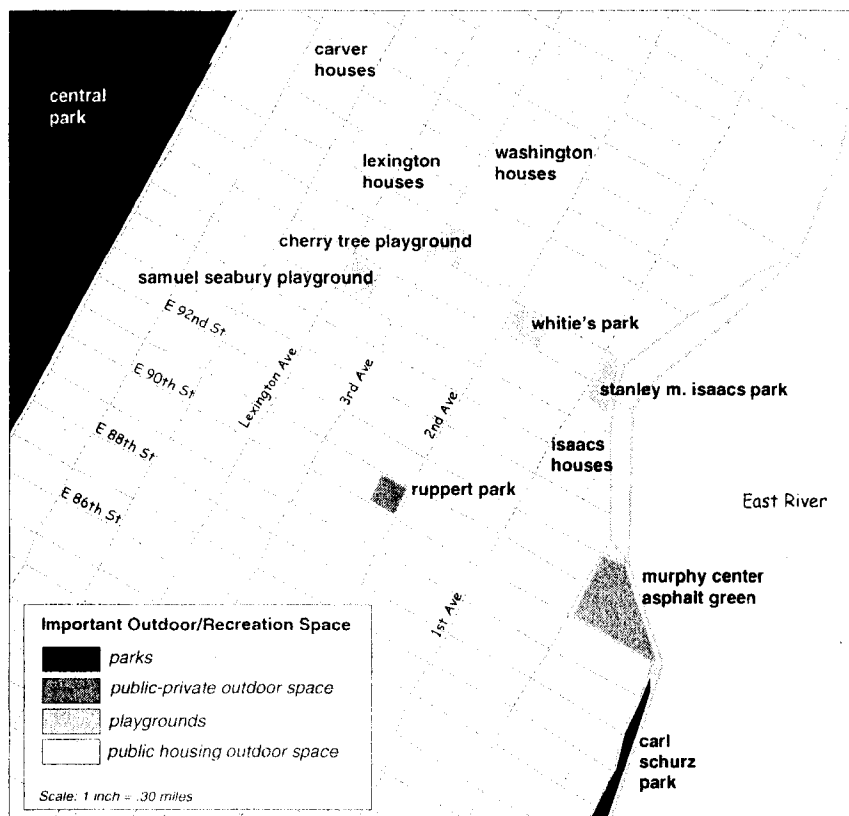
The deterioration of parks and playgrounds

Given that streets have declined in their function as an outdoor play space, the role of parks, playgrounds, schoolyards and other public spaces has become more important in young people's everyday lives. Young people growing up on the border of Yorkville and East Harlem, especially poorer young people, have limited access to such types of places for a number of reasons. Presently there are 4 playgrounds (Samuel Seabury Playground, Cherry Tree Playground, the Stanley M. Isaacs Park, and "Whitie's

Park), 2 parks (Carl Schurz Park and Central Park), 4 public housing plazas with outdoor space (the Isaacs, Washington Houses, Lexington Houses and Carver Houses), and 2 public-private outdoor spaces (Asphalt Green and Ruppert Park) available to young people in the immediate neighborhood of the Isaacs (Figure 49). These spaces, while technically available to young people, offer different obstacles to those who wish to play outdoors. For instance, Central Park is seen as too far from the Isaacs, which is on First Avenue. As we saw in the last chapter, within public housing spaces young people must contend with potential social hazards associated with block politics (see Chapter 5). Parks and playgrounds began to deteriorate in the early 1960s, further contributing to a loss of outdoor play spaces. Consider the case of Reggie.

Reggie grew up in the Isaacs public housing development where Victoria currently lives. Reggie was 31 years old when I interviewed him and had been living in the Isaacs since he was 5 years old. Reggie has quick wit and the ability to feel comfortable in almost any environmental and with people from all walks of life, skills I admired. As an African American man growing up in the 1970s, Reggie's childhood play experiences are ripe with stories of racially based confrontations with his peers. Reggie was stabbed and almost died in a nearby park and tells stories of being threatened by a gang of white boys, known as "the Budweisers" because they drank Budweiser beer, who carried golf clubs with the intention of beating and terrorizing African Americans and Hispanics walking through a neighborhood park. By day the parks in Reggie's neighborhood were relatively safe places for children to congregate, by night they often became sites of terror for Blacks and Hispanics.

Figure 49: Important outdoor/recreation spaces along the border of Yorkville and East Harlem



Reggie's experiences reflect a shift in young people's access and use of parks and playgrounds in New York City. The creation and maintenance of parks and playgrounds in New York City required a significant financial investment from the city. By the 1970s, the fiscal crisis all but eliminated funding for basic public works projects such as the city's parks and playgrounds (Goodwin & Quindlen, October 13, 1980). Public disinvestment in parks and playgrounds meant that the city could no longer afford to employ play leaders and 'parkees' such as Whitie to the degree it had in the 1950s, let alone provide funding for the general maintenance and upkeep of these spaces.

As a result of this disinvestment and neglect, parks and playgrounds became run down and taken over by social deviants. Increased drug trafficking in the 1960s and 1970s and the sale of crack cocaine in the 1980s set the stage for a new use of the city's parks and playgrounds (Passant, April 5, 1960). Reggie recalls that marijuana was grown in what he and his friends referred to as the "broken down park," a neighborhood park that was partially demolished by the city and left in ruins instead of being renovated. The Budweiser gang used to have parties there in the evening hours with kegs of beer. Therefore, children who wished to play in the parks had to deal with drug dealers and drug addicts who congregated in these public spaces, especially at night, as well with a variety of uses that might pose a danger to young people.

Drugs were just one aspect of the immorality of street life invading the parks and playgrounds during this time period. Reports of gang activity and violence between children and youth were also topping the headlines (Dotwin, January 11, 1970). Violence between children and youth can be attributed in part to race relations in New York City (and the nation) during the 1960s and 1970s (Robertson, December 19, 1970). Confrontations in neighborhood parks were a reflection of the social tensions of this time period. Reggie recalls numerous experiences in which his racial identity was a factor in his everyday life. These experiences were particularly intense for Reggie given that he was a bi-racial child living along the border of East Harlem and Yorkville, with all their differences in race, class and social norms. Reggie was often referred to as "nigger Reg" by his white friends. "They didn't realize that's very offensive," Reggie remarked. "Black people back then were called niggers, it's that simple." Reggie was "feared" by his white peers in Yorkville and was not considered "black enough" in East Harlem.

A young person's racial identity was a common source of tension among peers growing up along the Yorkville-East Harlem border that would often result in verbal exchanges or physical violence in parks or playgrounds where there was less adult supervision. "I couldn't walk through the areas in which the Budweisers hung out. There were a couple other African Americans that lived in the neighborhood and if we went through the wrong area, they would like literally try to harm us. They mostly hung out in Carl Schultz Park [and] fortunately I ran pretty fast. You'd just hear the insults, bottles being thrown at you and rocks and stuff, and you know being chased. And, fortunately I was never caught. Who knows what would have happened if I would have got caught!"

As Reggie's narrative suggests, these types of violent acts often occurred between groups of young teenagers. Police would often threaten to "crackdown on hoodlums, teenage gangs and derelicts if they try to take over the city's parks and recreational areas" (Passant, April 5, 1960). This type of everyday discourse further perpetuated the middle class argument that poorer children and youth did not have adequate supervision in their playtime activities (Holloway, September 19, 1992). Private and non-profit organizations continued to lobby for the improvement of recreational facilities, which they felt would "replace conditions that make for juvenile delinquency with an environment promoting juvenile decency" (Lissner, April 24, 1960). These programs were often targeted at minority children and youth, who were increasingly becoming labeled, along with the parks themselves, as the source of societal problems ("City Arranging Youth Programs," May 10, 1970). As one *New York Times* article reports, "Nine out of 10 times, what people mean when they say the park is lousy is not only that it's not clean, but that there are kids smoking dope and there are graffiti and there are blacks and Hispanics where

there were once Italians and Jews” (“City Hoping for Private Operations of Parks,” October 15, 1980).

In Yorkville, arguments about the “prevention of anti-social criminal behavior” among young people led Community District 8 to create a Youth Board and to give it “Number 1 Expense Budget Priority” in 1986, “even higher than increased police manpower” (Community District Needs, 1986, p. 97). Unlike public discourse at the city level, the Board recognized “the needs of all youths,” and that “non-poor kids who are truants, delinquents and have problems are not recognized” (Community District Needs, 1986, p. 97). Despite such concerns for the diversity of youth residing in Yorkville, Reggie’s experiences clearly indicate race was an important factor in a young person’s use of public space. While not overtly targeting minority youth, the implication of such programs as “outreach workers” proposed by the Youth Board suggests the opposite to be true. “Youths need not while away unproductive hours on the street. And workers are needed especially to reach those who drink and take drugs in the streets and who instill fear in senior citizens and other residents as they congregate near building entrances, under windows and at the edge of parks” (Community District Needs, 1985, p. 97).

While Reggie had difficulties in his everyday play experience in neighborhood parks, it is important to note that these spaces were also a source of great pleasure for him, in particular within East Harlem. He often traveled uptown to participate in outdoor dances he called “open jams.” During the 1970s, playgrounds located in public housing developments became one of the public spaces in which the hip-hop culture in New York City evolved (Fricke & Ahearn, 2002; Ogg & Upshal, 2001). Reggie would go from playground to playground to participate in these parties, which contrary to some

contemporary hip-hop culture, were an attempt by African-American youth to stop gang violence and to construct new methods for gaining respect through art rather than with weapons. “People brought their equipment outside, plugged it up to a light post, closed off the area and just had a party in the playgrounds and streets, and that’s where hip hop came from.”

It was on these playgrounds that Reggie found another reality, one that celebrated his African American identity. To this day, Reggie attributes his love for music and his career as a DJ (disc jockey) to his experiences in these playgrounds. Open jams in neighborhood playgrounds were a source of escape, where young people could lose themselves in the music and dancing, and often drugs and drinking as well. But these open jams symbolized more than just a release from the racial and other social tensions of the 1970s - they represented young people’s creative use and appropriation of a public setting to suit their own needs and desires, much like the playtime activities on the streets in earlier decades.

Reggie’s play experiences demonstrate a time period in New York City’s history in which public disinvestments in parks and playgrounds led to the deterioration of these sites as safe play environments for children and youth. Over time, these vandalized, run down, and drug infested parks and playgrounds transformed children’s (and adults’) use and image of these spaces as play and recreation settings. Parents too became wary of allowing their children to play in parks and playgrounds, eventually restricting them from these spaces. Families with greater economic resources began considering different places to take their children for play and recreation, while poorer (and often minority) families were left with derelict parks and playgrounds. Increasingly the Parks

Department sought out private-public partnerships in which individuals and organizations would share the costs for the maintenance of parks ("City Hoping for Private Operations of Parks," October 15, 1980).

The gentrification of play

The gentrification of Yorkville includes a transformation of public spaces that offer its residents leisure opportunities. To whom these spaces are delegated by private developers and how they are transformed to meet the needs of wealthier residents is an important issue to consider. There are a number of ways in which the gentrification of Yorkville has influenced the experience poorer young people have in public spaces, parks and playgrounds –in terms of access to other young people and to places for public leisure and play.

First and most obvious is the impact of the changing demographic structure of the population on children's access to friends their age in the local community. As stated in Chapter 2, *A tale of two neighborhoods*, the average family size has decreased dramatically, thus decreasing the pool of potential playmates. In relation to this, the process of gentrification has displaced many working class families in favor of "swinging singles" and other young professionals, thus creating a population that tends to be childless. In addition, wealthier families who reside in Yorkville tend to adopt different social practices than working class families who reside in the Isaacs (e.g., different groups, schools and community organizations). Their differences tends to create a void in play spaces and interaction among poor and rich children in the community.

The second way gentrification affects the play and leisure experiences of young people in Yorkville is the manner in which parks and playgrounds are transformed from

abandoned lots and other public spaces into private or quasi public-private spaces, thereby *displacing* poorer, often minority young people in favor of activities and spaces that cater to wealthier, often white young people. The greening of Asphalt Green provides an excellent example of this process.

Case study: the greening of Asphalt Green

Asphalt Green is a non-profit sports and fitness complex located on 5.5 acres of an abandoned New York City municipal asphalt plant in Yorkville. Located between 90th and 92nd Streets, from York Avenue to the FDR Drive, Asphalt Green is wedged in between Gracie Mansion, the mayor's official residence, to the south and the Isaacs public housing development to the north. At the nexus of these divergent residential communities, the founders of Asphalt Green recognized the organization's role in fostering exchanges among populations that live worlds apart, despite their geographic proximity to one another. In fact, Asphalt Green's bylaws specifically state a mission "to foster the skills and benefits that it brings to its users to help combat community deterioration, mitigate neighborhood tensions, and help eliminate prejudice and discrimination through its programs" (NYC Parks Department, <http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/home.html>, 2002). Such a position is rooted in the historical evolution of Asphalt Green, after community residents spent years battling different interests groups with a stake in the development of the property.

In 1968, the city officially closed the municipal asphalt plant, after more than 50 years of mixing sand and gravel dredged from the East River into pavement. Much of the plant was then demolished, except for an arch-shaped cement structure dubbed by New York City's Parks Commissioner Robert Moses as "the most hideous waterfront structure

ever inflicted on a city,” and hailed by the Museum of Modern Art as “a masterpiece of functional design” (NYC Parks Department, <http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/home.html>, 2002). The remaining land was covered with dirt and the perimeter of the lot was fenced while the city, the Parks Department, real estate developers and the community argued over the future of the site.

In the meantime, young people had their own ideas for the vacant lot. “When I was a child, it [the arch-shaped cement structure that remained on the site] was just a shell.” Raul can provide first hand accounts of the evolution of Asphalt Green. As a young person growing up on 91st Street in the 1970s and 80s, Raul played frequently on the vacant lot. Raul’s life revolved around sports in the community, so much so that he is a current employee of Asphalt Green. “Usually we played sports against other kids or we would play against some of the adults that were out there [on the abandoned asphalt site], when they would let us play of course. They were mostly all pick up games up until when I got a little older about 12 or so. Then one day after school I just sort of stumbled upon the Director of Youth Services from the Stanley M. Isaacs Neighborhood Center. He asked me to play with one of the [Isaacs] teams, so I decided to play and we kind of formed our own team – me, Tommy and a couple of other kids from the neighborhood. Somebody decided that they would form a team also, so it was kind of like a little neighborhood league.”

Jay, a 38-year-old African American who grew up in the Isaacs, echoed Raul’s experiences. “There were like a couple of fathers who used to always get together and teach us how to play baseball. We used to get together at what is now known as Asphalt Green, ‘cause back then there was nothing but a dirt lot. And that’s where we played

football and our softball games, and a lot of the sports.” Raul and Jay’s account demonstrate how young people and people from the community appropriated the space for informal pick up games, i.e. spontaneously organizing a baseball or soccer with whomever was hanging around the neighborhood. Capitalizing upon this organic phenomenon, adults from the community and from the Isaacs Center organized sports training for young people and a neighborhood league. While boys were the primary participants in the neighborhood league, some girls also played on co-ed teams, while others gathered to watch games and participated in this manner.

Ignoring how young people and the community were using the vacant Asphalt lot, a consortium of public and private agencies proposed a plan to construct two 45-story apartment buildings and a school in the area comprising the former asphalt plant. The proposal was sponsored by the New York Educational Construction Fund, a public authority established by the state to construct schools at minimal or no cost to the city by selling “air rights” over the school, i.e., an apartment building. The plan also included commercial space and a landscaped public park and recreation space for the buildings’ residents above a public parking garage. While there was great demand for affordable housing in the rapidly gentrifying community of Yorkville, residents of the adjacent luxury apartments were opposed to the plan, which called for 300 units of state-financed Mitchell-Lama moderate-income housing. According to the *New York Post* article in 1971, residents “fear that the 300 low-cost units will bring low-income people to the neighborhood.”

On the other hand, residents who were being displaced from their nearby tenements argued against the 900 units of middle-income housing stating, “We are

oversaturated with luxury buildings. Community residents can't afford them. Where are these people going to go?" Over 200 residents attended regular meetings about the future of the site, held in neighborhood churches and in City Hall. Controversy ensued and the New York Educational Construction Fund dropped the proposal, in large part, because it was unable to secure funds in the 1974-75 Capital Budget due to legal regulations, bankruptcy in New York City and locational constraints imposed upon the construction of a new school.

Seizing upon the new opportunity, Robert Moses, then Parks Commissioner for the city, proposed a new site plan for the vacant lot. Instead of building two 45-story luxury apartments on the former asphalt plant site, Robert Moses proposed instead to construct two 31-story apartment buildings on the location of the adjacent De Kovats Park, a school on the east end of the former asphalt plant site, with the remainder of the land devoted for recreation. According to Moses in a 1974 *Park East* article, "The existing De Kovats Park north of 91st Street is in ugly disrepair. The present confused usage would be replaced by a new park and apartment buildings." Referring to the park as "abandoned," "ugly" and in "confused usage," Moses negated the validity of young people's current use of the park as an important place to play paddleball, tennis and to hang out with friends.

Both proposals by the New York Educational Construction Fund and the Parks Department had to contend with yet another vision for the vacant asphalt plant site. According to the adults I interviewed who grew up during this time period, Dr. George E. Murphy, a resident of Yorkville, lived near the site and took notice of the young people playing there. Some remembered him taking photographs of young people playing

softball or soccer and asking young people about their use of the dirty lot. Dr. Murphy, concerned that the asphalt site be developed into a recreation and park for the community, formed a coalition with the Director of Youth Services of the Stanley M. Isaacs Neighborhood Center. With his and other community support, Dr. Murphy founded the Neighborhood Committee on the Asphalt Project in 1972 with the intention of opposing the new construction proposed by the Educational Construction Fund and pressing the need for recreation space. According to a 1973 *New York Times* article, Community District 8 had only “28 acres of recreation space for its population of 200,189.” That equates to a ratio of 1 acre per 7,150 residents.

While plans for the site were being debated, in 1972 the Neighborhood Committee on the Asphalt Project (NCAP) leased the area from the city for \$1 on a monthly basis, part of the city’s program to allow community residents to temporarily green vacant lots to suit their needs. NCAP received a \$60,000 grant from the Vincent Astor Foundation, a \$15,000 grant from the Heckscher Foundation and over \$20,000 of donations from community residents through public benefits and campaigns. These monies were used to plant grass, pine trees, bushes, shrubs and flowers along the borders of the field. According to a 1975 *New York Times* article, “Volunteers did the watering and raking, put up goal posts, chalked out the white lines on the turf and by September 1973, Asphalt Green opened with two Yorkville football teams playing host in a double header.” NCAP hired a full time supervisor to monitor the field, lend equipment and organize community leagues. According to Raul, “there was a guy, his name was Phil. He would open up like a storage cage and sometimes he would give out equipment and

stuff to kids, and he was sort of the caretaker of the area, of the entire field, but he would like rent us things, but usually we had our own stuff.”

NCAP's proposal to the city included 1,000 units of housing for middle-income elderly populations west of the abandoned lot on York Avenue. The abandoned asphalt site itself would be entirely devoted to recreation needs as a multi-purpose neighborhood park, with indoor facilities in the cement arch, and a bridge over the FDR Drive connecting the site with Carl Schurz Park. The proposal also called for banning traffic on East 91st Street, which eventually would be greened from York Avenue to Fifth Avenue to provide a pedestrian walkway connecting to Central Park. To deal with the overcrowding of neighborhood schools, the NCAP proposal suggested the expansion of PS 151, an existing school in the community located on First Avenue.

In 1974, the city granted NCAP's proposal to devote the entire asphalt site to recreational use. Residents suggested that Dr. Murphy was “connected to important people” in city government in reasoning why NCAP's proposal was accepted. Since the initial approval, Asphalt Green has worked in collaboration with city agencies such as the Parks Department and with private organizations such as the Carl Schurz Park Association to raise monies for the continued operation of the facility. In 1984, the cement arch opened as an indoor gymnasium, art, graphics and photography studio with a 100-seat theatre. In 1988, the grassy field was replaced with astro turf with a perimeter running track. In 1993, a state of the art swim and recreation center opened on the site of the adjacent De Kovatz Park with support of \$4 million from the city and \$17 million from private donations.

NCAP used two arguments to support their proposal for the site, the lack of recreation space on the Upper East Side, touted as the most densely populated neighborhood in the city, and the ability for a neighborhood park to bring together the diversity of populations residing in Yorkville. According to a 1975 *New York Times* article, Mayor Became was cited as stating, “The nicest thing about Asphalt Green was the way it had brought together all those Yorkvilles – rich, middle and poor.” While public discourse reported such social integration, and while Asphalt Green was based upon the notion of providing recreation access to all populations residing in Yorkville, some question the reality of such claims.

Consider the opinion of Jay, who used the dirt lot as a child to play baseball and now enrolls his son in Asphalt Green programs. “I mean it's great what they did. I mean they put astro turf over there, they really reorganized the place and made it nice where the teams would go, and everybody was from the communities. But, it seemed to kind of like cater to those that were a little more financially stable. And, basically, since the high rises were going up, we have to give something for these people here too. These are people that normally go to racket clubs and sports clubs.” Jay’s statements embody all the contradictions of a low-income resident struggling to cope with the impact of gentrification on everyday life. “It's not a bad thing. It's a good thing. I'm not saying they don't have programs for those that are not as privileged as others, but, it just seems like it's more catered towards them, and not as much as here.”

Jay felt that some of Asphalt Green’s policies were exclusionary, or difficult for a low-income resident to negotiate. “If you're not in the right price bracket, let's say, if you're not middle class or better, it can be detrimental. I know that my son has been

fortunate to be on the basketball team at Asphalt Green and he didn't have to pay. But other children that were not as privileged or had that opportunity, say a teacher making a recommendation or things of that nature, may have to pay. Maybe they [Asphalt Green] should be more considerate about everybody, the common folk, you know, those that are not doing well, those that perhaps need assistance or don't have financial stability. Their kids need places that they can always just run into. They shouldn't have to go up to the Boys and Girls Club of Harlem or anything like that. They should be able to just go right there to play sports and have a place they like to hang out."

As the Director of Asphalt Green's Community Partnerships and someone who grew up playing on the field when it was a dirt lot, Raul tried to explain opinions like Jay's as "misunderstandings." "I'm an advocate for the community and for the sort of working, lower class of the area, because I do draw from the Isaacs Center and I do draw from East Harlem into this facility. I think that our, I know that my vision is to provide services for people who can't afford to use the facilities. We've had our problems in the past always, where the two just, not that they don't mix, it's just that there's confusion, there's misunderstandings. I know that when Asphalt Green just opened, a couple of years into it there were problems because it was supposed to be a neighborhood place; it was supposed to be a community center."

"I guess in people's opinions, we became more of a rental facility, more like Central Park – just use it and leave it kind of attitude. So we started changing to a more program sort of model where you come to us for programs, get something out of us that has a purpose, that has meaning and you'll get something out of it. A lot of people didn't like that. There were some football leagues that had played on our field for a really long

time and didn't pay any money and expected the same thing with our new Astroturf field. There were some tensions. I've always felt that this place has the best resources for people in need, for people that can't really afford the quality we have to offer. But you know, an Olympic size pool, basketball courts, it's just not available to everyone. You can only make it available to people. If they take advantage of it great, if not, then you have to be proactive, you have to sort of make it enticing."

Asphalt Green has different ways in which it reaches out to individuals with limited incomes as part of its "Community Partnership Programs," directed by Raul. According to its brochure, "You may use Asphalt Green facilities and programs for free, or at a reduced rate by applying for the Community Sports Leagues, through your school or agency program at Asphalt Green, by applying for a scholarship to an Asphalt Green class or program, or by utilizing the public spaces and parks at Asphalt Green." Nonetheless, to most of the residents that I interacted with at the Isaacs, they felt excluded, some even said betrayed, by the current facility.

Today, most young people I interviewed have very minimal interaction with the facilities of Asphalt Green. In general, young people gain access to Asphalt Green by participating in the Isaacs Center's programs. For example, Asphalt Green awarded the Isaacs Center a pass allowing 6-10 young people and an adult mentor access to their Olympic size swimming pool one night a week. In the past the pool pass was awarded and then revoked because, according to one Isaacs Center employee, "the kids were acting too ghetto" (intimating that they were being too loud while having fun for the "white people" using the facility). Such perceptions or "misunderstandings" as Raul suggested reflect the contemporary tension between the rich and poor in Yorkville, which

is often layered with racial prejudice and negative attitudes towards young people. Young people like 11-year-old Carlos are aware of such racialized class tensions, “It’s a public park, but when there’s a soccer league, a soccer tournament, we can’t go in.”

The commercialization of play

The commercialization of play is of course interrelated with the concept of the gentrification of play, but I wanted to present them as distinct concepts for two reasons. First, I want to emphasize how the process of gentrification *displaces* poorer, often minority young people from public play and leisure spaces (often abandoned prior to gentrification) in favor of activities and spaces that cater to wealthier, often white young people. Second, I want to isolate how the concept of play has changed in relation to a *middle class discourse* that values the commoditization of such activities, and in turn, how these social processes change young people’s interactions in public space. Noel’s story exemplifies my second point.

Noel is currently 13 years old and lives in the same public housing development (“the Isaacs”) where Reggie grew up, and where her grandmother, Victoria, currently lives. Noel’s family is of Italian American ancestry, a remnant of the Yorkville of yesteryears. Noel’s family moved into the public housing development before she was born, when high rental costs resulting from the process of gentrification forced them to leave their nearby tenement apartment. Noel is articulate and well grounded, something that makes you believe she is wise beyond her years, that is, until she receives a text message on her phone and giggles like only a young teenager does when they are gossiping with a friend.

Noel's play experiences in the neighborhood parks and playgrounds are very different than the childhood experiences of the 1950s and 1970s – in fact, she doesn't really play there at all. Noel's parents are extremely protective of her, primarily because she is a girl, and invest an enormous amount of energy monitoring her everyday life. Although Noel used to play in Batman Park (a playground in the Isaacs) when she was younger, her parents forbid her from visiting other parks in the neighborhood because they (and Noel herself) consider these places to be sites of violence and drugs. "I don't go to the park on 96th," Noel remarked. "Whitie's Park...it's a dirty park. It's just you don't want to go there. There's drugs and stuff like that going on over there, so we just don't go over there. And I don't really go to Central Park, except for when we like go to the museum. You can get mugged and, it's just too much stuff going on over there."

While Whitie's Park held fond memories for Victoria as a child, this playground and other parks are no longer viable options as play settings for Noel because of their perceived danger. Instead of spending time in neighborhood parks, Noel visits local clothing and music stores with her friends to have fun and window shop. 86th Street is the commercial heart of Yorkville and is an important area for young teens growing up there today. According to Noel, "whenever my friends and I get together we always go to the movies. We hang around 86th and Third. After school sometimes we go to HMV (a music store), or we go to Staples (an office supply store), you know, just to see what's there. We'll go there a lot to buy CD's." Noel's trips to 86th Street are rare because her family restricts her daily travels out of fear for her safety. "My dad hasn't let go completely yet. No, he hasn't cut the cord yet." As a result, Noel spends a considerable amount of time talking and visiting with her friends in other ways. "I'm always on the

Internet, instant messaging...not as much email, but instant messaging. The television is always on, and the computer is always on too. I text message on my cell phone.”

Noel's everyday life is representative of a larger transformation in the commercialization of play and recreation (Pristin, November 15, 2001). Accompanying this change is a retreat indoors into private spaces of play and recreation, in which technological mediums of entertainment replace playtime activities in neighborhood parks (discussed in greater length in Chapter 3, *Everyday geographies*) (Scott, November 15, 1995). “Some of the most popular baby sitters in the city are named Nintendo, Bugs Bunny and the Brady Bunch” (Quindlen, July 8, 1990). Outdoor play is gradually being replaced by what some might consider to be less creative activities: watching television, playing video games and, for the middle class, going to private pay for play spaces like “the Discovery Zone” (Leimbach, June 29, 1995; Quindlen, July 8, 1990). The privatization and commercialization of play and recreation is also accompanied by an increase in structured playtime activities. While wealthy parents can fill their children's free time with expensive, organized activities, poorer parents must rely upon the city's community centers and after school programs (Sexton, June 25, 1995).

Noel's narrative suggests parents are cautious about letting their children outdoors in unsupervised play spaces such as parks and playgrounds (Brown, May 11, 1995). While locking children up indoors can be attributed to the perceived and real violence in these spaces, the city's disinvestment in parks and playgrounds that began in the 1960s continues to erode the quality of these spaces today (Katz 1994, 1998). For instance, some reports suggest that budget cuts within the Parks Department have resulted in an 80 percent reduction in departmental staff, from a high of 80,000 in the 1940s to 2,600

employees in 1995 (Gaster, May 9, 1990). On the contrary, the city continues to provide incentives to global media, entertainment and fashion industries that offer seductive alternatives for leisure activities.

The deterioration of parks coupled with violence in the streets have led many educators and community leaders to lobby for increased spending in after school programs and indoor play settings to protect children from the “immoral” and “dangerous” elements in public parks (Quindlen, July 8, 1990). While children do continue to play games on the streets, their numbers are few and their options for play opportunities are many, especially in wealthier families. The social imagery of parks and playgrounds as dangerous play environments, coupled with the lure of technological mediums of entertainment have in many ways removed children from the public spaces of the community and into structured, and often private, indoor spaces.

The future of outdoor play

The biographies of Victoria, Reggie and Noel, the case study of Asphalt Green and the archival materials suggest young people’s access to public play spaces has declined since the 1940s. For over a century, young people living in New York City spent most of their leisure time playing in the streets. Progressive Era politicians, “child savers” and middle class discourse about the meaning of play served to erode young people’s relationship with the street in the early 1900s by creating new public spaces like playgrounds where children could play under more “wholesome” conditions.

Over time, beginning around the 1960s, parks and playgrounds have become less of an emancipatory space to protect children from harm and more of a dangerous space to be avoided to achieve the same goal. The analysis presented here suggests that

representations of childhood as “innocent” and in need of protection, as well as “deviant” in need of saving have both played a role in the creation of public parks and playgrounds. It is a recursive argument based upon middle class notions of play and of childhood that suggests children and youth, if left to their own devices, will be exposed to the immoral behaviors found on city streets and public playgrounds.

The decline in children’s access to public play spaces has led to a spatial change in the location of children’s playtime activities: from the streets, to the playgrounds, to indoor play spaces such as the home, community centers and private pay for play commercial centers. This spatial change is accompanied by a social change in the form of supervision of playtime activities: from an informal, watchful eye of neighbors on the block, to park employees known as play leaders, and finally, to individual caretakers, the personal computer, video games and Bugs Bunny.

It is important, however, to recognize that these social and spatial changes in young people’s play activities are historical trends, and as such, there is a tendency to generalize patterns to present a coherent argument. However, there are always young people who will exhibit behaviors contrary to social norms, even though the historical, cultural and material conditions of everyday life have changed. It is equally important to discuss and analyze exceptions to general patterns. As Colin Ward points out, “every generation assumes that the street games of its youth have been destroyed by the modern city. Yet they survive, changing their form in innumerable adaptations to exploit environmental changes” (Ward, 1990, p. 89). Ward is accurate to emphasize how older generations have the tendency to romanticize their childhood experiences in relation to contemporary social conditions. Children still *do* play in the streets and in parks and

playgrounds. But there is also some validity to an older generation's claims. Today's children are generally *playing differently in different spaces* and have *less free time* than when older adults and seniors were young.

The question is then, what social and material conditions in which *outdoor play* in public places occurs have changed, which ones have remained the same, and how does this affect the resiliency or deterioration of play activities? The data I collected suggests the following: outdoor play and leisure activities that require little space and are located adjacent to the home, which are child-initiated and require few if any materials from the environment are likely to be found in each generation; however, activities that require spaces other than immediately adjacent to the home must contend with process of urbanization and social evolution, and therefore, are more susceptible to change.

While many children and youth continue to use neighborhood parks and playgrounds in their everyday lives, the degree to which they can enjoy these spaces without becoming subjects of violence or objects of adult concern is highly questionable. In particular, poorer (and often minority) children have significantly less access to both public playgrounds and parks, and privatized spaces such as the pay for play facilities afforded by wealthier families. Young people also have more options for play than in the past, including technological and commercial mediums that offer seductive alternatives to playing tag on the block. The erosion of children's participation in public life raises serious questions about the quality of children's playtime activities, their rights to the city, their sense of community, and general well being (Bartlett et. al, 1999; Hart, 2000).

Chapter 7

Childhood then and now

Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.

☞ French proverb

To speak of childhood then and now requires analyzing changes in society and in young people's relationship to place. The classic French proverb, "the more things change, the more they stay the same" eloquently captures a general finding of this dissertation – that is, there are many aspects of childhood that have *not* changed in the last 50 years, despite what we may think and feel as adults who have witnessed major changes in our lived realities. Our ability to reflect upon changes in childhood, particularly as older adults, is often clouded by our own values and ideas about the world. In particular, adults and seniors often think that a "good" childhood has to be like "their" childhood, and as a result, they tend to impose their values and ideologies of childhood upon contemporary young people. While there is no question that the neighborhoods of Yorkville and East Harlem have changed and that the experience of childhood in 2000 is qualitatively different than the experience of childhood in 1970 and 1940, what I argue in this final chapter is that the manner in which adults and seniors (and many academics) process these changes is in relation to their own childhood, rather than in relation to the ways in which young people today are experiencing place.

In fact, while many adults tend to think, and many childhood authors tend to write of their own childhood as ideal, it was probably less than ideal in many ways. For instance, those growing up in the 1940s had no access to technologies that provide comfort and increased access to important information (such as an air conditioner or a

computer, both of which young people today consider an essential component of their everyday life). In this chapter I will both summarize and interrogate differences in childhood then and now in relation to our perspectives as adults. In thinking about how to analyze the changes witnessed in young people's everyday lives in Yorkville and East Harlem, I turned to the residents of these communities to gather their own speculations and theories about how and why the experience and meaning of childhood has changed. In a community forum organized in collaboration with the Isaacs Center entitled, *Changing Communities, Changing Childhoods: Bringing Generations Together*, residents both young and old, politicians, community activists and academics converged to discuss this topic (see Chapter 1, *Community research and collaboration* to review more details about the forum).

In this chapter I rely upon the dialogue from the community forum to frame my analysis of changes in children's geographies. I first provide a summary of the findings regarding young people's geographic territories and leisure time activities, their identity construction in relation to place, their attachment to place, and their changing access to public spaces such as streets, parks and playgrounds. I also summarize the processes of urbanization and gentrification in Yorkville and East Harlem. I then demonstrate how these findings are related to the production of children's geographies by returning to the overall theoretical framework of this dissertation, which analyzes the relationship between spaces of childhood, children's lived spaces and representations of childhood. Finally, I conclude with directions for future research and possible policy implications of my dissertation findings.

Summary of major findings

Urbanization, gentrification and landscape change

The urban historical geography of Yorkville and East Harlem demonstrates an evolution of two neighborhoods that are marked by extreme polar opposites in terms of social class, racial and cultural groups, population density and housing types and public imagery. Yorkville's history is one of investment by private investors, thus fueling a relentless process of gentrification since the early 1960s. East Harlem's history is one of disinvestment by private investors and neglect by the state, particularly the City of New York, which is the largest property owner in the neighborhood, through slum clearance and urban renewal projects and through the abandonment of property by private owners. The polarization of rich and poor in Yorkville and East Harlem has created a distinct border between the communities, a reflection of larger patterns of spatial concentration of wealth in certain areas of the city over others that are less favorable to consumption driven activities and development. Some reports suggest that racial politics, in addition to the proximity of Yorkville to the city center and its potential real estate value contributed to its gentrification over East Harlem.

The identity of place has been remade and changed in both communities, leaving some residents to feel like outsiders in a once familiar landscape, contributing to a feeling of placelessness, marginality and alienation. Yorkville once housed primarily German and other Eastern European working class families who resided in 4-6 story tenement buildings, while today Yorkville houses upwardly mobile professionals in 50 story luxury apartments. East Harlem's Italian population fled the neighborhood when increasing numbers of Puerto Ricans and African Americans began to crowd into new public

housing developments and the remaining tenements, which increasingly are inhabited by Mexicans, Ecuadorians and other Latin American and Asian populations.

Because the border distinguishing Yorkville and East Harlem is so distinct in New York City in terms of class and race, its psychology and geographical imagination is felt in everyday life by residents of both communities. This is particularly true for my interviewees, who grew up in and around 96th Street, the dividing line between Yorkville and East Harlem. In recent times, the 96th Street border has been eroding due to new investments by private developers in the corridor from 96th Street to 98th Street, from Lexington to First Avenue. My interviewees have been able to maintain their place in Yorkville unlike many other residents who were displaced through the gentrification process. Nonetheless, the effects of gentrification and neighborhood change can be witnessed among the poorer populations still residing in Yorkville, in terms of how and where young people hang out, their access to public space, and in their relationships with peers and adults in the community.

Geographic territories and leisure time activities

Young people's geographic territories have expanded over time, both literally and virtually through the invention of mobile technologies and the Internet. In particular, girls have been able to use technology to their advantage to negotiate increased access to their environment. At the same time, increased concern among parents and/or caretakers for their children's safety in public space (from both real and perceived threats by strangers), the deterioration in a sense of community, and urban policies that foster surveillance of young people's activities in public space have made it more challenging for young people to participate in the public sphere of everyday life. These findings vary

by gender, race, class and parenting norms, which are historically the most influential in describing young people's geographic territories.

Young people have different opportunities for leisure time activities than in the past, for example, from primarily child-initiated autonomous play outdoors to a range of commercialized and digital forms of entertainment. In general, young people in my sample did not have access to new technologies and had to adopt strategies to participate in these new forms of entertainment, such as going to friend's homes to play video games. The increased institutionalization of childhood in adult-supervised environments particularly, after school programs, results in less time for child-initiated leisure time activities and autonomous play and places greater emphasis on acquiring cognitive skills to pass high stakes exams and to compete in an increasingly competitive global economy.

Place, identity and social worlds

The block has historically been an important setting in which young people test and express their identities in relation to space, creating a sense of "blockism" or the significance of coming from, belonging to, and representing a particular block. Block politics is an expression of young people's gendered and racialized identities and social struggle to spatially differentiate themselves from one another using "the block" as a group signifier. For instance, a girl's reputation on the block is based upon her sexual practices and body politics while a boy's reputation tends to focus upon their physical capabilities and dominance in activities such as sports.

Young people develop a sense of who they are in relation to other individuals, but *also* in relation to the identity of other neighborhoods and places. Place identity is as much a factor as social relations and networks in shaping the perceptions young people

hold towards one another. In other words, where a young person comes from (e.g., which block or neighborhood) is an important social label that affects the way young people develop and form relations with each other in the community. In general, girls are more likely than boys to consider males and females and friends, regardless of the time period in which they grew up. In general, both males and females tend to develop friendships with individuals from diverse racial backgrounds similar and different than their own. However, in earlier time periods, males and females tended to have friends from racial backgrounds similar to their own, and this was largely a function of the demographic and cultural characteristics of a particular neighborhood. For example, today Yorkville and East Harlem, at least where my interviewees grew up, is much more culturally/racially diverse than in the past. Nonetheless, racism tends to come to the forefront, particularly among boys, when relations between groups are strained, such as a disagreement about a rule while playing sports.

Changing access to outdoor play places

The street was historically the most important outdoor play setting for young people growing up in Yorkville and East Harlem from the 1940s well into the 1960s. “Child savers” and reformers were the most influential in transforming young people’s relationship to the street, which they deemed to be a negative environment that promoted immoral behaviors and traffic-related child deaths. As a result of their lobbying, the city invested in the creation of playgrounds and parks to create new forms of public space in which children could play under “wholesome” conditions. Since the 1960s, young people’s access to public space, playgrounds and streets has declined, primarily due to public disinvestment in these spaces and a parallel investment in the commercialization

and privatization of playtime activities (e.g. video games, the computer, privatized play environments such as Mc Donald's).

In addition, poorer young people in Yorkville have been displaced from certain outdoor play spaces, most notably the Asphalt Green recreation center, through the gentrification process. Finally, the diversification of programmed play and leisure opportunities over time has contributed to a general trend in the removal of young people from outdoor public spaces where they participated in informal, unsupervised activities. Today, an increasing number of young people spend more time in formal settings supervised by adults or participate in commercialized forms of play indoors (e.g., video games).

Place, placelessness and childhood

I now turn to an analysis of these findings in relation to the theoretical framework established in the introductory chapter of this dissertation. This theoretical framework draws primarily from Lefebvre (1991) and his work on the production of space (Lefebvre, 1991). Adopting this approach, I identified three interrelated concepts that contribute to the production of children's geographies: 1) spaces of childhood, or the quality, distribution and nature of spaces used by and designed for young people, 2) children's lived spaces, or how young people negotiate the social, physical and psychological factors that shape their spatial practices, in some cases to imagine and produce new spaces to suit their own needs, and 3) representations of childhood, or how the social construction of children and youth is inscribed on the landscape.

In order to understand the relationship of these variables over time and space, I have developed a matrix to explore transitions in childhood, which I classify as “childhood then” and “childhood now” (Table 7). Childhood “then” represents roughly the time period between the 1940s to the 1970s, and childhood “now” represents the time period from the 1970s to the 2000s. My decision to break the discussion of then and now in the 1970s is directly related to changes in the political economy from an industrial to a service economy, triggering major changes in relations of production, consumption and social reproduction (recall the graphics in Chapter 2, *A tale of two neighborhoods* that demonstrate marked differences in family income and median rent beginning in 1970) (Harvey, 1990). While this table is purposefully designed to demonstrate a dichotomous relationship between childhood then and now for simplicity of analysis, the picture is much messier and more complex than this table leads one to believe. In fact the two worlds presented in Table 7 co-exist; their co-existence is explained in greater detail in the text that follows.

As mentioned previously, the theoretical arguments I present in this chapter are as much a result of my own thinking about the findings of my dissertation as they are of those residents who attended the community forum and speculated about the changing nature of their neighborhoods and of childhood. My analysis of changes in childhood reflect three primary questions: 1) what are the sources of social change that influence the experience of childhood? 2) what are the resulting patterns in social structures and in the physical environment of childhood? and 3) what are the consequences of whatever changes we observe? The theoretical arguments I wish to make include the following:

Table 7: Theoretical perspectives on the historical construction of children's geographies*

	Childhood then (1940s to 1970s)	Childhood now (1970s to 2000s)
Time-space-society-being	Dissolving	General trend
	Modernism	Postmodernism
	Industrial economy	Global economy
	Production	Consumption
	Relative economic wealth	Polarization of rich and poor
	Borders	Borderless
	Place	Placelessness
Spaces of childhood	Integrated with adult society (e.g., streets)	Separated from adult society (e.g., playgrounds, after school programs)
	Outside, public	Indoor, private
	Social cohesion, lengthy time of residence, strong social networks	Social dispersion, demographic change, mobility, fear of others
	Historically and personally significant landscapes	Modern and personally insignificant landscapes
	Landscape longevity, permanence	Landscape change, gentrification, urban renewal
	Public investment in childhood spaces	Public disinvestment in childhood places, privatization
Representations of childhood	Idealized	Feared
	Utopian	Skepticism
	Romantic	Alarmist
	Empathetic	Ambivalent
	Able to control	Out of control
	Insidedness, sense of community	Outsidedness, no sense of community
	Rootedness, sense of place	Rootlessness, no sense of place
Children's lived spaces	Intimate interactions with place covering a small geographic territory	Dispersed/fractured interactions with place covering larger geographic territories, both real and virtual
	Unstructured	Structured, institutionalized
	Informally supervised	Formally supervised, surveillance
	Very few time demands, a lot of leisure time	Many time demands, not much leisure time
	Known or socially understood racial, gender roles and identities	Confused, blurred or socially changeable racial, gender roles and identities
	Creative, autonomous, free play, non-commercial	Passive, guided, commercialized play
	Adult-child roles clear, authoritarian	Adult-child roles blurred, democratic

*While this table is purposefully designed to demonstrate a dichotomous relationship between childhood "then" and "now" for simplicity of presentation, the picture is much messier and more complex than this visual display of information leads one to believe. The table should not be taken out of context with the written material in this chapter.

1. Macro level changes in *time-space-society-being*,¹⁰ triggered by changes in the political economy, as witnessed in the phases of capitalist development from an industrial (modern, production driven) to service oriented economy (postmodern, consumption driven), have dramatically altered the everyday physical and social reality of individuals in urban areas like Yorkville and East Harlem, thus creating new conditions for the experience of childhood.
2. These new conditions include changes in the urban design of Yorkville and East Harlem, changes in the spaces of childhood, in children's lived spaces and in representations of childhood. However, while these changes represent a general historical trend, they do not negate the fact that elements of the past continue to survive and resist change.
3. In general, adults are fearful of, and have a great degree of skepticism about, the new forms of *time-space-society-being* and often react in alarmist ways towards childhood and towards their experience in place with other social actors such as "the newcomers" or "gentry" in Yorkville. Instead, old ways of *time-space-society-being* are idealized and viewed by adults as utopian based upon romanticized notions of their own childhood of yesteryear and their memories of interactions with place and with society.

Changes in time-space-society-being

What are the major forces driving social change? From a meta-theoretical perspective, the primary factor mobilizing changes in society is the political economy and

¹⁰ Refers to an ontological position or meta-theory that takes into consideration those factors important to understanding what the world must be like in order for us to have knowledge of it (Soja, 1989, 1996).

changes in phases of capitalist development (Harvey, 1990; Relph, 1976; Smith, 1996).

While economic explanations are of paramount importance, they do not negate the significance of socio-cultural factors that contribute to our ways of being, such as the invention of information technologies (Castells, 1996; Smith & Williams, 1986; Williams & Smith, 1986). As a general summary of these changes, one can point to a number of characteristics of economic and socio-cultural factors that have contributed to the alteration of the geographical and social basis of our existence from the 1940s until 2000s.

Prior to the 1970s New York City was primarily based upon an industrial economy in which a significant portion of the labor force was engaged in manufacturing and industrial-based employment. Since the 1970s New York City has witnessed a dramatic decrease in the importance of industrial-based employment and a subsequent steady rise in service-oriented employment opportunities characteristic of a global economy. The transition from a modern, industrial economy to a postmodern, global economy has altered our relationship with production, consumption and social reproduction (Katz, 1994). For instance, there is a marked increase in the polarization of rich and poor in New York City such as that expressed by the socio-economic extremes between Yorkville and East Harlem. There has been investment in landscapes of consumption, such as those found in gentrified neighborhoods like Yorkville, and a parallel disinvestment in landscapes of social reproduction such as those witnessed by the many families with children in East Harlem, struggling to survive amidst funding cuts and services for the working poor.

In response to these economic changes and in the context of everyday life, there have been parallel changes in social relations, most notably in the family structure, which has increasingly relied upon two income earners, when they exist, and a low birth rate, in order to maintain a standard of living comparable to “the American dream” exhibited by post-war families of the 1950s. Technological innovations such as the invention of the Internet and the digitization of knowledge – all of which are designed to help society cope with the triumph of time over space – have tended to fuel psychological responses to place and to the local in which individuals attempt to simplify their lives by blocking out stimuli and reverting to images of the past (Harvey, 1990).

Harvey refers to a process of a *time-space compression*, in which transformations in the economy triggered urban development and social patterns characterized by ephemerality, volatility, disposability, instantaneity, temporariness, sensory overload and an accelerated pace of consumption in the form of services (Harvey, 1990). In contrast, modernism, with its emphasis on rationality, orderliness, and the triumph of science over the human condition dominated urban design and social life in post-war America of the 20th Century. According to Harvey, such changes to our geographical and social basis of existence leads many individuals to “withdraw into a kind of shell-shocked, blasé, or exhausted silence and to bow down before the overwhelming sense of how vast, intractable, and outside any individual or even collective control everything is. It is an attempt to carve out at least one knowable world from the infinity of possible worlds which are daily shown to us on the television screen” (Harvey, 1990, p. 350-51).

In other words, as a response to a feeling of placelessness, rootlessness and timelessness, individuals cling to the idea of community, of localism and of objects that

engender a sense of memory and of a self that lies outside the sensory overload endemic of time-space compression (Gergen, 1991; Harvey, 1990; Meyrowitz, 1985; Relph, 1976). “Place-identity, in this collage of superimposed spatial images that implode us, becomes an important issue, because everyone occupies a space of individuation (a body, a room, a home, a shaping community, a nation), and how we individuate ourselves shapes identity. Furthermore, if no one ‘knows their place’ in this shifting collage world, then how can a secure social order be fashioned or sustained?” (Harvey, 1990, p. 302). The abstraction of space and time leads to a reaffirming of both place and history on the part of the individual, however he/she can carve out such an existence. One way this carving occurs, based upon my observations and analysis of this research, is perhaps in our reflections of childhood and our attempts to reaffirm an idealized, localized and community based childhood in spite of erosions in social relations and in the physical landscape.

In reflecting upon their childhood experiences then and now, the adults (and some of the youth) who participated in the community forum continually reasserted their belief in the importance of place and history in the experience of childhood. In summary, their dialogue focused upon how a sense of place and community identity was strong in the past, while a sense of placelessness, alienation and erosion in a sense of community dominates today. For example, those who resided in Yorkville and East Harlem all their lives expressed a significant sense of loss in their connections with place and with other community residents, which has steadily eroded since the 1940s due to gentrification, slum clearance and a range of other social factors including technological innovations and changes in the demographic structure of our society. Placelessness, or the erosion of

the unique qualities of place, is accentuated in Yorkville and East Harlem because of gentrification, urban renewal and the subsequent changes in the social and cultural context of the communities (Relph, 1976).

Therefore, while adults often react negatively to the postmodern condition and the postmodern child (those characteristics listed in “childhood now” in Table 7), the previous chapters in this dissertation have highlighted an opposing reality, one in which young people are carving out their place in the world and one in which they show a remarkable degree of resilience and adaptation to the new geographical and social basis of existence. These contrasting narratives are explained in greater detail next.

Changes in spaces of childhood

The spaces of childhood, or those places that are designed specifically for children and/or used by children are the most susceptible to processes of urban development because they must compete with the needs and desires of adults and with capitalism. As a general trend, there has been a separation of spaces of adulthood and spaces of childhood in real space (i.e., public spaces such as streets) over time. For example, while children used to spend most of their time outdoors with adults and other young people, today they spend more time in after school programs and in other institutions and places that tend to be dominated by other young people.

Another trend is the public disinvestment in spaces of childhood, for example, in the maintenance of parks and playgrounds, and a parallel investment in private spaces of childhood geared towards consumption and a middle class notion of play and leisure. An Irish woman in her 60s noted this trend. “They’re not building anything for children. He’s [the mayor of New York] a politician with a load of money in his pocket and his

kids were raised in the best of schools, but he has no inkling what it is to live in a project. I know he rides the subway as the mayor, but let him come live with us just for a little while and see what it's like." As this quotation highlights, poorer families who have historically relied upon public services and the public environment as an arena for play are struggling to create new opportunities for their children's leisure pursuits. As one Hispanic woman in her 40s described her situation, "I as a parent with three boys, I don't have \$7,000 to give for a summer camp for three boys for just six weeks. If I did, I'd rather go to Cancun (Mexico) with them for the whole summer."

The privatization of childhood is intensified by the process of gentrification in Yorkville. As one 15-year-old male youth described it, "honestly there isn't much to do here. I mean all the parks, they're very child oriented or they're not there anymore. And this neighborhood well it's very expensive, it's way too expensive for the people who actually grow up in these projects." The destruction of childhood spaces due to gentrification was echoed by another white man in his 60s and a lifetime resident of Yorkville who stated, "we also had a big open play yard with basketball courts and people would play whiffle ball, people would hang out there, and now that was a big loss, now there is a 50 story building there." In their words, gentrification and development in general has destroyed important spaces of childhood that were historically and personally significant landscapes that represented a sense of permanence and continuity from past to present.

When childhood left the streets and the public arena so did adulthood. Through my observations in the neighborhood, it was obvious to me that adults are also spending more time in private spaces for leisure and entertainment. As a result of the removal of

childhood and adulthood from the public sphere, there is a marked sense of alienation of residents from place due to gentrification and changes in social norms and practices that have led to a declining sense of community and a fear of others. The fear of others has crept into the psyche of many adults today, in part because they don't know their neighbors (they don't interact with them in public on a regular basis or their neighbors are "newcomers" to the neighborhood through gentrification). There is also the general culture of fear that has slowly developed over time and invaded our homes through sensationalist media accounts of murder, rape, gang violence and drugs (Katz, 1998).

Katz points to the development of a phenomenon she refers to as "terror talk" as a major source of social anxiety that "mystifies the violence against children as it enacts its own" (Katz, 1998). Terror talk refers to a discourse of threat concerning violence against children in public space (e.g., murder, rape, molestation) that became commonplace in the 1970s through increasing sensationalized media reports (Katz, 1994). As Katz points out, the discourse of terror normalizes violence against children rather than identifying the true source of social anxiety – the public disinvestment in spaces of social reproduction (e.g., parks and playgrounds) (Katz, 1998). As a result, the desire to protect children from violence in the public realm "disciplines children literally and figuratively by keeping them indoors when unsupervised and keeps them surveilled when outdoors" (Katz, 1998, p. 15).

An Irish woman in her 60s described this phenomenon from her own perspective growing up in Yorkville. "I grew up in such a different atmosphere. I didn't know murder, I didn't know rape, I didn't know any of these things because it just didn't exist, you didn't hear of it. My mother never locked the door. We went up to Second Avenue

and I lived on York and First, but near York Avenue, we'd put a screen in the door and the cocker spaniel would sit there, the door would be wide open. You never expected anybody to come in. My kids grew up pretty good, but the point is they still didn't have the freedom I had. I was never afraid. I slept on the roof. We had like four girls come up and my mother would leave the door open, she'd come check us in the nighttime, we always had the door open in case we had to use the ladies room. And it was just free and it was just wonderful."

Fearing others and fearing the environment leads many parents to shelter their children from the public realm. The consequences of such actions were articulated by one African American resident in his 30s. "When I moved here there was a great sense of community where adults were in the street just as much as kids and it forced us to interact with adults as well. So a lot of these kids today, like I talk to a lot kids and I can tell they have no interaction with adults, like except their parents, and that takes away from a great deal of interaction skills that are very important in your development in growing up." As this quotation highlights, adults are very worried about the erosion of childhood spaces and how this loss influences the well being of young people and of society in general.

Changes in representations of childhood

While many scholars have pointed out the historically constructed nature of childhood, few have tried to analyze how these constructions are related specifically to place. As we saw in the introductory chapter traditional sociology has constructed adolescence as a time of deviance, while psychologists have tended to portray young people as a state of *becoming* rather than *being*. Recently children's rights activists and

sociologists have demonstrated that young people are active agents capable of making decisions for their own quality of life. Such conceptions of childhood influence how we see young people and how they in turn experience place, for example, young people are seen as “devils” that should not be allowed in public space because they will engage in “immoral” behaviors found on the streets (Valentine, 1996). So we need to ask, how have we constructed childhood in relation to place in New York City?

While research on the construction of childhood often speaks of “moral panics” as a source for an adult’s anxiety about childhood, in my research I witnessed “place panics” among the many adults I interviewed and who participated in the community forum. *Place panics* refers to an adult assumption that young people today do not care about their community, nor are young people deemed to have a sense of place. I suggest this phenomenon is related to a deep psychological response to the diminishing sense of control over place and sense of community that many adults feel. Adults tend to transfer their fears and skepticism about changes in *time-space-society-being* onto the contemporary experience of childhood and often react in alarmist ways in constructing their representations of children and youth.

As a social construction, childhood is, on the one hand, a representation of the cultural frontier. In other words, one can view the future in and through childhood. On the other hand, as adults we often circumscribe childhood to a more traditional representation through the process of projection of our own childhood experiences onto contemporary norms and practices. The question of projection includes how and why our emotional and mental state tends to cloud our perception of what is around us and how we attribute our own beliefs and values to *the other*, such as the experience of childhood.

In general, we may view projection as a defense mechanism for dealing with internal anxiety or a threat to an individual's sense of security (Freud, 1989).

As discussed previously, the postmodern condition is a great source of anxiety and fear for many adults, particularly in Yorkville and East Harlem where the landscape has changed dramatically. The sense of loss and frustration about not being able to control the development of the neighborhood is a psychological source of suffering. Through the process of projection, contemporary childhood is therefore emblematic of postmodernism and takes on its characteristics as being "out of control," "rootless" and "placeless," while the "modern" childhood they remember is viewed as a utopian and idealized way of being. Such notions as the "placeless child" or "uncontrollable" and "ambivalent child" are accentuated in landscapes like Yorkville, that have become increasingly placeless to longtime residents through the process of gentrification, or where the identity of the place has been dramatically altered over time. Instead, old ways of time-space-society-being are idealized and viewed as utopian based on romanticized notions of the childhood of yesteryear and memories of former ways of interacting with place and with society.

For example, almost all of the panelists discussed their childhood in relationship to loss – loss of a childhood environment that was important to them (the man's description of the destruction of a whiffle ball court he used to play on), and the loss in a sense of freedom to explore their environment (a white woman in her 40s stated, "I used to walk, roller skate or ride my bike all by myself, and now my friends who have children don't allow them to go by themselves almost anywhere."). But as we will see in the next section, there are many ways that young people have developed new ways of exploring

their environment and new ways of using space that are alien to adults. As a result, adults are often not aware that young people are actively creating their own sense of place and of community. It is an everyday life with many possibilities not known in the past, even though when judged by adults, it is often deemed to be less than or worse than the past.

Changes in children's lived spaces

It is in children's lived spaces that we see the greatest possibilities for young people to transform and adapt their environment in ways that suit their own needs and desires. In fact, while adults tend to think of their own childhood as ideal, young people have a tremendous capacity to adapt in rich and different ways to their existing environment. While adults often discuss their childhood in relationship to loss, young people are discussing their childhoods as a rewarding experience in which they have a connection to place and to community. Young people are making connections, but to a very different landscape, a physical and social setting that is in many ways alien to adults. While the overall assessment from adults is that changes in society and in the landscape are bad and that effects are destructive for the contemporary experience of childhood, there is another version to the story being told by young people. As this dissertation demonstrates throughout its chapters, young people create their own sense of place, identity and territory.

As Chapter 5 demonstrated, one of the most significant ways that young people develop a sense of place and community is on their block. This fact has not changed in the last 50 years despite the fact that the physical and social environment of the block has changed. To this day, one of the first things a young person will ask another young

person when they initially meet is, “where are you from?” The response is the name of the street or block you live on (such as 94th Street or the Isaacs), not the city’s official neighborhood labels (such as Yorkville or East Harlem). Asking where you are from is a young person’s equivalent of an adult asking “what do you do for a living?” Your response carries with it socially constructed notions of who you are based on where you are from, in the case of young people, or what you do, in the case of adults.

Young people also participate in community-based activities through the Isaacs Center’s programs. These activities, such as sporting tournaments, barbeques, fashion shows, theatrical performances, dances and community festivals foster a sense of community among those young people who choose to participate. Because many of the young people who participate in the Isaacs Center’s after school programs live in the immediate area, such programs contribute to friendship formations in the neighborhood that serve to connect young people to the community.

Such constructions of the self in relation to place and in relation to others are just one of the many ways in which young people have maintained a sense of place over time. Nonetheless, there is reason for a critical appraisal of environmental opportunities and constraints and their impact on the experience of contemporary childhood. In general young people are spending more time in structured institutionalized environments, such as after school programs, in which their behaviors are carefully monitored by adults. Young people also have a number of different options for play and leisure, and many are attracted to commercialized forms of play such as video games, the Internet and shopping. While young people have more options for play, they have less free time to do what they want, where they want. Such observations point to the need for continued

debate over public policies that serve to erode what we as a society deem to be important factors and characteristics in the context of childhood.

On the other hand, is it so bad that young people are attracted to the Internet as a medium of communication and of exploration of other worlds? In many ways the Internet and information technologies have enabled young people to encounter diverse interactions with place, both real and virtual, as opposed to the small space of the block where most activities took place in the past. While young people may not be spending a lot of time in virtual or real space, and while their experiences may be dispersed and fractured, they nonetheless are exposed to new worlds not possible in the past. What we are truly witnessing here are changes in the geographical basis of childhood. Young people are fashioning a global sense of place, one that has both the local and the global as a context of childhood, and one in which place and placelessness coexist in their everyday lives.

On a similar note, young people are able to experiment with their gender, racial and age identities to a greater degree than in the past. For example, there is a general trend towards the blurring of roles between adults and young people. While in the past adult-child roles were clear and authoritarian, today this is much less the case, and in many ways adult-child roles are more easily manipulated or controlled by young people today. Rose, a longtime resident of the Isaacs in her 60s, presented her experience with the blurring of adult-child roles to the audience of the community forum. "I don't know why it's [child-adult relations] changing. I know that I had a problem with young teenagers in speaking back and forth, and you know, you can't go to their parents anymore, you just can't, that's not the way it works anymore."

The sociologist Joshua Meyrowitz attributes the blurring of adult-child roles to a breakdown in public-private space and the exposure of other, once more private and secluded ways of being through the media (Meyrowitz, 1985; Postman, 1994).

According to Meyrowitz, distinctions in social status and among groups are maintained in part by separating people into different informational worlds. The electronic media, such as television and the Internet are reducing this separation – i.e., electronic media gives children direct access to adult information and it also provides access to other types of childhoods (e.g., rural, Russian, bisexual, etc.). Therefore, formerly distinct groups (e.g., age groups, racial groups, gender groups) not only share very similar information about society (if they have access to these technologies), but they also share more information about each other – information that once distinguished insiders from outsiders. As a consequence, traditional group bonds are weakened and borders and distinctions among groups become somewhat blurred and confused as new alliances are formed (Meyrowitz, 1985).

Today children speak more like adults, dress like adults, behave like adults and adults act more like children, dress like children and behave like children. In other words, there are more similarities in adult-child behaviors than in the past as a consequence of being exposed to different information technologies. As Meyrowitz suggests, “children are speaking more like adults and adults are speaking more like children. Perhaps even more significant, they are speaking this way in each other’s presence” (Meyrowitz, 1985, p. 227). An African American woman in her 30s belabored over such role reversals. “When I was growing up, anything I did out an about in the streets or anyone of my neighbors who saw me doing something bad, they would go right

back to my mother, or they would just reprimand me right there. And nowadays if you reprimand a child in the street or you go back to their parents, you have to be sort of careful of what they might say to you or what they might think.”

The confusion of adult-child roles is therefore contributing to an erosion of an adult’s ability to control young people’s use of and behaviors in public space. This leads many adults to conclude that young people do not care for their community and that they lack respect for elders. Given the alarmist and romantic notions adults transfer or project onto contemporary childhood experiences, we must be careful as academics to not impose such constructions into our own analysis. While there is some validity to the opinions expressed by adults in the community forum, young people are carving out their own existence, albeit in different ways.

Directions for future research

This dissertation analyzed changes in children’s geographies from the 1940s to 2000s within two diverse urban communities in New York City in order to think about the planning of better cities for young people. Understanding changes in children’s geographies is of paramount importance to the well being of young people and of society in general. It is important to understand what historical and social factors have contributed to the differing access young people have to leisure activities and to spaces of socialization with their peers and with adult society. Young people’s spatial *access* to places and the *quality* of these places is very important to their social, emotional, spiritual and moral well being and in developing a sense of community and of empowerment in directing their own quality of lives and environment.

The culture of fear exemplified in Katz (1998) concept of “terror talk” is an important area for future research. In this dissertation we have seen how “terror talk” serves to erode a parent’s confidence in allowing their son and/or daughter the freedom to hang out and play in public places, while in reality masking a lack of sustained investment on the part of the state in such places. The response from both policy makers and parents has tended to be keeping young people indoors and offering them educational programs, increasingly private ones. The goal (although often tacit) is to keep young people under surveillance, usually indoors, and in places where their behaviors can be closely monitored by adults (such as in after school programs). These reactions fail to acknowledge that young people are able to adapt to new environmental and social conditions of everyday living. Many of the young people in my study sample were able to make friends, use public space and test their identities, albeit under different time demands and social conditions. Future research should explore ways to deconstruct, dismantle and then reconstruct perceptions about urban public environments and their role in young people’s everyday lives.

The concept I refer to as *place panics* should also be explored in greater depth because it provokes certain conceptions about young people and their relationship to place that can be detrimental to child-adult interactions. Adults and seniors need to learn from young people themselves about the myriad of ways in which they experience a sense of community, belonging and of heritage so that perceptions of contemporary childhood as “placeless” and “rootless” can be transformed into a more informed understanding of young people’s everyday lives. Similarly, young people need to learn more from adults and seniors about the source of their anxiety, that is, why they feel a

sense of loss of community and why they are concerned that young people develop a sense of community and of place to begin with.

Breaking down stereotypes about young people's everyday lives is an important first step in making decisions about urban planning and community development. The findings of this dissertation have already filtered into the community, in particular, within the Isaacs Center's agenda in the training and development of their staff. For example, the model that was developed for the community forum was appropriated by the Center and adapted for a second forum dealing more explicitly with the quality of after school programs. At this second forum, I was only tangentially involved. In working on this dissertation I have therefore created a space or a venue for discussing topics (often difficult) of childhood and neighborhood change. In other words, I helped to start a tradition in my work with the Isaacs Center. Young people, as much as the adults and seniors involved with this project, demonstrated a high level of political consciousness and willingness to participate in matters that concern them. It is through such observations that we can continue to challenge legislators, educators and activists concerned with the well being of young people.

We must continue to promote public policies that invest in childhood spaces and in quality environments for young people. Throughout this dissertation I touch on a number of issues important for the improvement of young people's everyday lives (such as after school programming and investment/disinvestment in public places). What is the quality of after school care and how can we empower young people to utilize these spaces in ways that suit their own needs and desires? If young people had a choice to spend their free time somewhere else and under different conditions, which places would

they choose and why? The findings of this dissertation provide grounds to question neo-liberal economic policies and practices that serve to privatize or erode public spaces crucially important to a young person's development and society more broadly.

Finally, because my research did not involve participants from wealthier backgrounds, I am not able to speculate about the impact of class in young people's everyday lives. Are there class differences in young people's use of space and in their leisure pursuits? How are the everyday lives of young people residing in the luxury apartments across the street from the Isaacs different? Repeating this study with the wealthier families in Yorkville would perhaps reveal even greater knowledge of the changing conditions of childhood in urban areas in the United States. Such knowledge would be useful in assessing the impact of public disinvestment in childhood and how families with greater means are fashioning new environments for their children.

Appendix

Visualization Exercise

Sometimes remembering things from the past is a difficult task. To get started thinking about your childhood, I would like to ask you to close your eyes and listen to my voice.

Try to imagine and remember your childhood and visualize what I am asking you to think about.

You just finished eighth grade and you are going to enter high school next year. You are probably 13, or maybe 12. You have spent the last 2 or 3 years meeting friends, playing, socializing, going to school, and hanging out in your community. Think about what your childhood was like before you went to high school. Think about and try to picture what it was like to be 11, 12, and 13. Where were you living at that time in your life? What did your bedroom look like? What did your street look like? Who were your friends? What schools did you attend? What did you do for fun during your free time? Where did you go in your neighborhood? Where did you go in New York City? What did your neighborhood look like? Who lived there? What were the people like in terms of their race, culture, class?

Open your eyes....Describe to me what you saw and what you were thinking.

[as they share their images, use probes or follow up questions to delve deeper] What is your earliest memory of the community or neighborhood? How would you describe the community of your childhood? How does your image of the community compare to other communities in NYC?

Interview Questions

Note: Questions are often rephrased into the past tense when interviewing adults and seniors.

Sense of Place/Community

1. How do you describe the community of your childhood?
2. What is your earliest memory of the community or neighborhood?
3. How does your image of the community compare to other communities in NYC?
4. What does your neighborhood look like?
5. Who lives there (class, race, nationality, etc.)?
6. What do you think someone who is new to the neighborhood should know about it?
7. Where do/did you meet your friends? What race, gender, nationality are your friends?
8. What languages do you speak with your friends?
9. Do you know your neighbors? By name? By face? Do you do anything with them?
10. Do you know the storeowners in the neighborhood? By name? By face?

Leisure Time Activities

1. What do you like to do during your free time?
2. How often do you do these activities?
3. Do these activities mostly occur indoors or outdoors?
4. Do these activities vary by season? If so, how?
5. How do your leisure activities compare to your siblings or friends? Why do you think they are the same or different (gender, age, etc.)?
6. How much time do you spend doing homework, watching television, reading, doing chores, playing video games, playing board games, playing outside, etc.?
7. Describe a typical school day from start to finish.
8. Describe a typical Saturday from start to finish.

Personal Geographies

1. Where do you like to play and hang out?
2. Where do you like to be alone?
3. Where do you like to do nothing?
4. Where have you run into conflict in the neighborhood? What was the nature of the conflict? How was it resolved? Who was involved?
5. What places do you try to avoid? Why?
6. What places do your parents tell you to avoid? Why?
7. Did you ever go on an adventure? If so where, why, how?
8. What's the farthest you can travel from your home alone? With friends? With older siblings? With adults?
9. Have you traveled to other places in NYC? If so, where and why?
10. Have you traveled outside of NYC? If so, where and why?

11. If you've been away from the house for several hours, how often do you have to check in with your parent(s)/guardian(s)? In what way (phone, email, beeper)?
12. What is the punishment for going somewhere you shouldn't?
13. What is your curfew, or how late can you stay outside? Does this vary by season?
14. What is the quality of the places you play in?
15. How would you improve upon them?

Sense of Childhood, Adulthood

1. How do you think your childhood compares to the childhood of today?
2. What factors do you think contributed to these changes?
3. What do you think the outcome of implications of these changes are or will be?
4. What do you think these changes mean for the community, for society and for children's well being?
5. What changes have you seen in the community? What factors have led to these changes?
6. How do you think adults/seniors in your community think about children? Teenagers?
7. Why do you think adults/seniors think this way? Where does this perception come from?
8. When you grow up, how do you think your life as an adult will compare to that of your parents?
9. What factors do you think contributed to these changes?
10. How do you think your community will look when you become an adult?

Photograph Elicitation

1. Who are the people in these photographs?
2. Where were these pictures taken?
3. What was going on at this time in your life?
4. What is the significance of this place?
5. Why did you choose to take this picture?

Coding list

106th Street Playground
 405 playground
 42nd Street
 86th Street
 96th Street Park
 after school
 after school program
 Asphalt Green
 associates
 Batman Park
 block politics
 borders
 Carl Schultz
 carnival
 Central Park
 checking in
 chores
 church life
 class issues
 clubs and recreation centers
 commercial centers
 condition of parks, playgrounds
 construction of childhood
 curfew
 DeKovatz Park
 demographics
 doing nothing
 downtown
 drugs
 East River
 El train
 family life and relations
 fashion
 friends
 games
 gangs, crews, clubs
 gender politics
 gentrification and neighborhood change
 gentrification of play
 ghetto celebrities
 hanging out
 hazards
 historical references
 home range - alone
 home range - friends
 homework
 homosexuality
 informal sports and playing
 intergenerational communication
 Isaacs Center
 Jefferson Pool/Park
 John Jay Pool

latchkey children
library, reading
local businesses
luxury apartments
movies
museums
music, art
neighbors
NYC impressions
organized sports
parenting norms
pets
police issues
projects
punishment
racial and cultural politics
right of passage
rooftops and fire escapes
rules and regulations
Rupperts Park
Samuel Seabury Playground
school life
seasons
social relations, community life
space issues
Spanish Harlem
stoops
streets
teasing and bullying
technology
tenement life
territories
terrorism
travel outside greater NYC area
uptown
weekends
Whitie's Park
window views
work

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