

# Ethnic identity, bounded solidarity and the formation of immigrant networks of care

Author: Johanna Shih

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**Ethnic Identity, Bounded Solidarity,  
and the Formation of Immigrant  
Networks of Care**

*Johanna Shih\**

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\*Johanna Shih is a post-doctoral researcher at the Center for Working Families, University of California, Berkeley.

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## **Abstract**

Asian immigrants, particularly those from China, India, and Taiwan, have formed both residential and occupational concentrations in Silicon Valley, California. I show how the extent and shape of Asian immigration contributes to constructing particular forms of immigrant networks that have the potential to facilitate informal care arrangements. I document differences in household structures and labor force participation among white and Asian families using both 1990 and 2000 census data. These data show that Asian families are more likely to have both parents working fulltime in the labor force and underline the importance for this group of finding alternative (non parent) child care. The fact that both parents are often in the workforce fulltime also suggests that immigrant children might frequently be left in a deficit of care. This paper then draws upon interviews and participant observation to investigate network construction, identities, and norms among Asian immigrants in the Silicon Valley and their consequences of access to child care.

As increasing numbers of women with young children enter the labor force, concern has been growing over the “crisis of care” and the inadequacy of government or market-based services designed to meet this care shortage (England and Folbre, 2001). A key component of this care crisis is that informal resources that have historically been central to the process of caring for children, such as kinship, friendship, and community-based networks, are increasingly unavailable to parents. A potential countertrend to this pattern is discernible in immigrant communities, where use of extended family and co-ethnics to aid in child care continues to be common (Uttal, 1999). This paper focuses on this phenomenon in asking how the experience of immigration contributes to the formation of “cultures and networks of care” (Hansen, 2002) by fostering networks where personal exchanges are normative, or where informal arrangements are facilitated.

Immigrant networks have received considerable attention from social scientists in the past 15 years. As immigrant communities have rapidly formed in the post-1965 era, they have been characterized as densely networked (Portes, 1995) social spaces, where kinship and ethnicity-based ties contribute to the economic survival of the neighborhood. These multiple, woven ties are partly shaped by the process of chain migration (Massey, 1990) and provide important sources of social capital (Zhou, 2000) that sometimes enable even those immigrants with few material resources to find the shelter and employment necessary to support their families. Although immigrant networks may certainly be exploitative, especially in class-stratified ethnic communities, or limited in the amount of resources and assistance available, most research suggests that they tend to serve important and beneficial functions within immigrant communities.

However, the primary focus of these studies is the relationship between ethnic networks and the economic trajectories of in-group members, and little attention has been directed towards how the process of network construction among immigrants might contribute to providing the aid necessary to caring for children and other dependents. Indeed, little is known about whether these networks, which are focused on economic survival, incorporate family and child care aid at all. This is presumably an important issue because immigrants, as well as non-white women in general, have historically had higher labor force participation rates than other groups of women

(Glenn, 1992). Here, I focus on a concept stemming from the research on immigration, “bounded solidarity,” to investigate how the experience of immigration, the patterns of geographical settlement, and the creation of economic niches among immigrants might contribute to the formation of a sense of “we-ness” and ethnic identity. This identity, which is formed in part around a particular logic or morality of reconstituted families (seeing ethnicity as a form of kinship) and which defines itself in contrast to the values and belief systems of “Americans,” may facilitate informal care arrangements by overcoming the “problem of trust” embedded in the search for appropriate child care.

The window from which I look at this phenomenon is within the context of highly skilled Asian immigrant workers in Silicon Valley, a region that has experienced considerable Asian immigration in the past four decades. The data are primarily 33 in-depth interviews with Asian immigrant high-tech, high-skilled workers (almost all of whom are of either Chinese or Indian descent, the two largest Asian ethnic groups in the region). These are a part of a broader research study conducted between 1999 and 2002 that also included interviews of white, U.S.-born high-tech workers and participant observation of workplaces and networking meetings in Silicon Valley. In-depth, open-ended interviews and participant observation allow for a more nuanced understanding of how individuals construct and understand their own networks than can be attained by survey research.

Examining immigrants who are professionals provides a useful perspective, because research typically focuses on low-skilled, working-class or poor women, where the assumption is that class or economic necessity is the underlying motive in shaping networks of care (Nelson, 2000; Stack, 1974). That is, informal kin or community-based child care arrangements are seen to represent an economic survival strategy. By looking at a community of middle-class immigrants with material resources, it is possible to focus more closely on how the experience of immigration itself shapes a logic or morality of networks that may be conducive to shared child rearing.

## **Silicon Valley and Asian Immigration**

Silicon Valley, or more precisely, Santa Clara County, is a region that encompasses more than 1,300 square miles and 15 cities. Its current population of almost 1.7 million people makes it the fourth most populated county in California, and it is the largest county in the Bay Area. Bounded by Palo Alto in the north, Milpitas in the east, and Gilroy in the south, it is home to cities well known for high-tech development such as Cupertino, Sunnyvale, and Santa Clara. Santa Clara County is at the heart of Silicon Valley, but development has also spread into the neighboring counties of Alameda and San Mateo.

In the past four decades, Silicon Valley has increasingly become famous for its rapid development as a center of technological innovation and production, expanding the markets for integrated circuits, personal computing, and the internet (Henton, 2000; Hossfeld, 1988; Larsen and Rogers, 1984; Saxenian, 1994). In Santa Clara County, the major county in the region, the population has grown accordingly, increasing more than two and a half times since 1960. In comparison, during the same time period, California, which has also experienced a substantial population growth, has grown by 116%.<sup>1</sup>

The population growth represents the migration of highly skilled workers to the region. Those who live in Silicon Valley are likely to have advanced levels of education. Over 80% of those living in the San Jose Metropolitan Area have a high school degree, and a third have a bachelor's degree.<sup>2</sup> Asians in Silicon Valley tend to have even higher educational attainment than the region's general population. Forty percent of Asians in the San Jose Metropolitan Area have bachelor's degrees, and the percentages for Chinese and Asian Indians in particular are even higher: almost 56% of Chinese in this area have bachelor's degrees, and over 66% of Indians have bachelor's degrees.<sup>3</sup> Educational attainment appears to be well compensated in the region: average yearly income in Silicon Valley is the highest in the nation. Even without accounting for the lucrative stock options that have become ubiquitous, the average salary in Santa Clara county was 50% greater than in California overall.<sup>4</sup> Median household salaries are also significantly higher. Whereas the median household income in 1997 in California was \$39,595, the median in Santa Clara County was \$59,639.<sup>5</sup> For occupations in clusters such as

software and semiconductor/equipment, average salaries were even higher: \$90,380 for those in software, \$83,690 for those in semiconductor/equipment manufacturing.<sup>6</sup>

Aside from the rapid economic development of the region, perhaps what is most notable about Silicon Valley is the demographic change wrought by Asian immigration. Santa Clara County is home to the fourth largest concentration of Asians (after Los Angeles County, Honolulu County, and Orange County) in the country. By the 2000 census, Asians accounted for more than a quarter of the population in Santa Clara County, in comparison to less than 11% in California overall (and 4% in the U.S.).<sup>7</sup> This immigration is noted for its large share of high-skilled workers who came to join the high-tech industry and who have advanced levels of educational attainment.

This racial composition is recent and the product of rapid demographic changes. More than half of the foreign-born population in Santa Clara County, as of 1990, arrived between 1980 and 1990.<sup>8</sup> There has been an even greater change in the last decade. From 1990 to 2000, Santa Clara County experienced a 65% increase in the Asian population, in comparison to California overall, which has experienced a 30% increase in the numbers of those of Asian descent.<sup>9</sup> No other racial categories have changed to this degree in Santa Clara County, except for the “other” category, which is likely to be a function of a change in census classification.<sup>10</sup> This increase in immigration is directly linked to the high-tech industry—Asian immigrants are overconcentrated in high-tech, representing up to a third of the industry’s labor force (Saxenian, 1998), and at least half of recent H-1b temporary visa holders (who are often able to convert their temporary visas into permanent green cards) are from India and China and enter through computer programming or software occupations (Lowell, 1999).

Like immigrants before them, Asians in Silicon Valley are forming ethnic pockets and ethnic communities. For example, Asians are unevenly dispersed in Santa Clara County, accounting for 25.6% of the county population, but almost 52% of the population of Milpitas and 44.4% of Cupertino. Similarly, they represent 37% of those in Fremont and 43% of those in Union City, neighboring cities in the county of Alameda (where Asians comprise 20% of the overall population). Specific ethnic groups also form concentrations. For example, Chinese represent 6.9% of those in Santa Clara County, but they account for 23.8% of the population in

Cupertino (a city within Santa Clara County), 14.4% of those who live in Fremont, and 13% of those who live in Milpitas. Similarly, Asian Indians account for only 4% of Santa Clara County, but represent 10% of those who live in Sunnyvale, almost 9% of those who live in Santa Clara and Cupertino cities, and over 10% of those who live in Fremont.<sup>11</sup> What is notable about these communities is that most are decidedly middle class, with average homes in some ethnic neighborhoods hovering at \$450,000 to \$500,000, representing the segment of post-1965 immigrants with significant human and material capital. These concentrations have also led to visible changes. Neighborhoods within these cities and counties are filled with services, retail stores, and religious institutions that are tailored to specific ethnic tastes and needs, many of which, like the Ranch 99 chain of Chinese grocery centers, serve also as gathering and socializing places.

### **Labor Force Participation and Asian Immigrant Families**

The question of child care is presumably important in immigrant communities because immigrant women with children have historically been more likely than white, middle-class women to work in the labor market. These higher labor force participation rates are typically understood as a response to the lower wages, greater instability, and higher unemployment rates of immigrant and nonwhite men and are thus seen as an important strategy of family survival. Contemporary research has documented, for example, how working-class Asian and Cuban immigrant women's labor force participation is critical to their family's survival as a unit and to the mobility of the second generation (Ferree, 1979; Zhou, 1995).

Immigrant women's higher labor force participation rates are reflected in Silicon Valley, where Asian women (and men) are both more likely than their white counterparts to be married, and these families are more likely to have two full-time workers even when young children are in the household. This difference in labor force participation is especially striking given the fact that median and average incomes of white and Asian households do not differ significantly in the cities of Santa Clara County (with the exception of Palo Alto).<sup>12</sup>

Table 1 examines selected cities in Santa Clara County and the percentages of Asians and whites who are married. In all five cities, both Asian men and women were more likely than

white men and women to be married. Because over 90% of Asians in Santa Clara County are immigrants, this situation is likely to reflect the fact that wives and husbands immigrated together, as a household unit.

**Table 1: Percent Married by Selected Cities in Silicon Valley, 1990 Census of Population and Housing**

	Cupertino	Palo Alto	San Jose City	Santa Clara City	Sunnyvale
White Men	56%	53%	52%	46%	51%
Asian Men	71%	56%	58%	56%	61%
White Women	55%	52%	47%	45%	49%
Asian Women	71%	56%	58%	56%	61%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1990.

There are also differences in the proportion of (racially endogamous) white and Asian families who have children under the age of 18 living in the household. As indicated by Table 2, 48% of white families have children under the age of 18 in the home, in comparison to 59% of Asian families. In addition, Asian families also have a slightly higher average number of children.

**Table 2: Family Demographics in San Jose, CA PMSA, 1990 Census**

	% with Children <18	Avg # of Children	Total Number of Families
White	48%	1.84	359,677
Asian	59%	1.94	56,395

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1990.

Census 2000 figures for Santa Clara County also indicate that Asian households (the number of people living in a house) and families (the number of kin-related people in a household) tend to be larger than white households. The fact that the difference in the average number of children between Asian and white families is significantly smaller than the differences

in household and family size suggests that Asian households and families might be more likely to contain extended family members.

**Table 3: Average Household and Family Size, Santa Clara County, 2000 Census**

	Average Household Size	Average Family Size
White, Non-Hispanic Only	2.40	2.94
Asian Only	3.35	3.67

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000.

Examination of white and Asian two-parent families indicates differences in women’s labor force participation rates. Table 4, which looks at two-parent families with children under the age of six, in the San Jose PMSA area, indicates that although Asian women are more likely to have children under the age of six, their households are also more likely to have both parents in the labor force and much more likely to have both parents working full-time (defined by working in the labor market 35 or more hours per week).

**Table 4: Labor Force Characteristics of White and Asian Two-Parent Families with Children Under the Age of Six, San Jose Metro Area, 1990 Census**

	% with Children < 6	Both Parents in Labor Force with Children < 6	Both Working 35+ Hours per Week	Total Number of Families with Children <17
White Women	14%	55%	28%	417,023
Asian Women	21%	61%	44%	97,762

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1990.

Table 5, which looks at the labor force characteristics of families with children between the ages of 6 and 17, shows that although Asian and white households are about as likely to have both parents in the labor force, Asian families are still more likely to have two full-time workers.

**Table 5: Labor Force Characteristics of White and Asian 2-Parent Families with Children Between the Ages of 6 and 17, San Jose Metro Area, 1990 Census**

	% with Children Between 6 and 17	Both Parents in Labor Force	Both Working 35+ Hours per Week	Total Number of Families with Children <17
White Women	24%	65%	35%	417,023
Asian Women	38%	63%	46%	97,762

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1990.

These patterns of higher labor force participation by Asian women with young children in the household are an important difference to note because they underline the question of how Asian immigrant families are managing to find care arrangements for their children. Indeed, if almost half of Asian families with young children have both parents working full-time, the issue of care must be of central importance. The remainder of this paper examines one angle of this question, by exploring how the experience of immigration, and the structural conditions faced by immigrants, might shape an identity and “bounded solidarity” that facilitates the construction of networks of care and the brokering of informal care arrangements with co-ethnics.

### **Ethnic Communities and Networks: Concepts from the Sociology of Immigration**

The patterns of immigration, geographic settlement, household structures and employment among Asian immigrants in Silicon Valley reflect the post-1965 era. These trends have been the subject of recent immigration scholarship, which has increasingly focused on the presence and function of ethnic networks on migration, settlement, and the economic mobility of in-group members.

In terms of migration and settlement, research has noted that processes of migration are highly network dependent (Massey, 1990). For example, pioneering migrants who represent a core anchor and a social tie may aid other migrants to the new country, thus initiating chain migrations through social networks. The parameters of migration are shaped both by the family reunification strategies predicated by the 1965 Hart-Cellar Act (which allocated 80% of visas for the extended family of U.S. citizens and the immediate family of permanent residents) and the Immigration Act of 1990 (which increased by threefold the number of immigrants admitted

through skills).<sup>13</sup> The 1990 Immigration Act was particularly important in shaping migration to Silicon Valley because it prioritized professionals with advanced degrees and skilled workers, allowing for a rise in the numbers of high-tech, high-skilled workers. Of all scientists and engineers admitted in these visa categories in 1993, almost 58% were from Asian countries, the People's Republic of China contributing 20% and India another 17% (Streeter, 1993). Regardless of whether immigrants came through family reunification or employment categories, however, chain migration through ethnic ties often precipitated their entry into the U.S.

This “channeled” migration tends to encourage the formation and revitalization of ethnic communities such as the Indian, Chinese, and Taiwanese communities that have developed in Silicon Valley, whose social structure contains multiple ties of family and friendship. Once an initial group of immigrants settles, networks increase exponentially, drawing diverse sets of ties into a community, often recasting them through the language of kinship, and thereby creating multiple woven, dense ties. These ethnic networks are integral in garnering resources and increasing economic opportunities for their members. To the extent that ethnic ties can be turned into social capital, ethnic enclaves and economies have potentially beneficial effects, creating a “bounded solidarity” (Portes, 1995) that facilitates the reciprocation of aid and enforces norms that work towards the communal good. Although some research has documented the limitations of ethnic ties as resources in poorer communities (Menjivar, 2000), the middle-class communities of Silicon Valley have significant resources to share. The effect of geographical concentration, density of ties, and presence of resources is further enforced in Silicon Valley because of the occupational concentration of Asian immigrants in high-tech.

“Bounded solidarity,” or a belief in the collective fate of a group, can be understood as the mechanism by which network ties are turned into sources of social capital and subsequently the means by which network resources can be accessed by in-group members. That is, a sense of “we-ness,” or emergent ethnic identity, is an important factor in the willingness of network members to exchange favors and share resources. Portes (1995:15) notes that bounded solidarity is observed among co-ethnics, that the motivation is “altruistic” and results in “transferring resources to others because of identification with in-group needs and goals.” In addition, the

residential proximity stemming from geographic concentration and density of ties leads to an “enforceable trust,” acting as protection against malfeasance, and ensuring reciprocity.

The concepts of bounded solidarity, enforceable trust, and social capital were used specifically to explain the potential effect of ethnic networks on the economic mobility of in-group members, but the question that has remained unasked is whether they contribute to the formation of networks where personal exchanges and favors, such as aiding each others’ families, including child rearing and care for elderly are normative. Do labor-related networks simultaneously function as care networks, that is, are the forms of social capital that are useful for work similarly useful for finding care? Does the development of a sense of ethnic identity, based on the perception of a shared belief system and commonality of experience, also foster a necessary sense of trust, which is integral in facilitating informal care arrangements with co-ethnics?

The processes by which immigrants shape a bounded solidarity can be observed among Asian immigrants in Silicon Valley. I begin by sketching one meeting I had with a group of immigrants, who describe to me the networks they are a part of and the logic of how their network was constructed. Their description is characteristic of the way in which immigrants described their networks to me, as reconstructed “families,” and as a form of ethnic identity that is based on a perception of a common belief system and shared experience.

### **Immigrant Networks and the Reconstruction of Families**

It is Saturday late morning as I drive into the sparsely filled parking lot of Cross Roads, a start-up software services company that has been widely successful in the boom years of the late 1990s and was rapidly developing into a mid-sized company. Cross Roads, this morning, is the meeting place for an Indian engineers’ networking association. These networking associations are common in Silicon Valley and form a part of many people’s relationships. As I approach the entrance, several groups of three or four members trickle out, laughing and catching up, obviously at ease with each other. I am here to meet four members of this association, three men and one woman, who have agreed to talk with me about their experiences in Silicon Valley and

the networks they are a part of. All immigrated to the U.S. more than 15 years ago and have “grown up” with the region.

As I speak with them for the next two hours, I am struck by how members of this group characterize their networks. I had, up until then, been interviewing mostly white, U.S.-born engineers in the region, and when asked to describe their various networks, almost everyone had referred to them in terms of their professional function or described networks of people with whom they shared a common hobby or interest, such as skiing or wine tasting. These networks were composed of individuals, in the sense that they did not engage and incorporate families. This does not seem atypical in Silicon Valley, where professional networking is seen both as a norm and an imperative, where there is a large proportion of single adults, and where a spirit of individualism is pervasive.

This group of Indian immigrants, however, talked about how their networks led to their business accomplishments (and indeed, two of them were very successful repeat entrepreneurs and a third had just secured venture capital to start her own business), yet also spoke of these same networks in terms of “family.” In fact, their own families were incorporated in them, that is, they described their own networks as going beyond mere professional networks, to an integration of both professional and family lives. Indeed, what was repeated throughout my conversations with immigrants was their characterization of their networks as their reconstituted kin in the U.S., representing the core of their social relationships. They say, for instance, that even though they have networks that have non immigrants, “there was *always* the Indian network,” that these networks are “very important,” and that while they could function in places with few immigrants, “I cannot imagine a place like that to be a long term environment for me, I think there is a lot more interaction [between immigrants] than usual.”

They described very regular interaction patterns, saying that although they didn’t necessarily know each other before immigration, they were now “a very close group for a long time, and we all like each others’ families and kids and everything” and that “we’ve grown like a family.” These close relationships seemed consciously built, in part because they viewed themselves as “transplants,” who needed networks to double as a form of reconstituted kinship.

These comments reminded me of the concept of “emergent ethnicity” (Conzen et al 1992), that is, an ethnic identity that emerges in response to the host society, and not one that is simply transported from the homeland. Immigrants describe shared experiences and pointedly contrast their own views and their own networks with what they called “American” values and norms, which they often saw as substantively different. Those I spoke with believed that the Americans with whom they worked had much more professional relationships, that “they tend to have lots more friends at the work place,” more “formal colleague relationships that are not deep,” and that these relationships did not translate back into their homes.<sup>14</sup> One Indian immigrant, for instance, said,

I mean the thing that is...that I find that immigrants tend to have more deeper networks [makes gesture with hands to indicate deeper], they tend to stay in touch with larger numbers of people... Here the interaction is a lot richer... I mean here, we meet every weekend for the (networking association's) basis. We also have our hike that we do that someone else arranges every month, socially also we meet, but the key difference I see is ...we also talk about whatever is of interest to us, investments, kids' activities. It's a very rich interaction.

The distinction drawn between “us” and “Americans” suggests the formation of a sense of “we-ness” and a belief in a similarity of experience. This sense of identity, which is not simply an “ethnic” identity, but is also an “immigrant” one, shapes a “networking logic” within which personal exchanges and aid in terms of helping families settle into Silicon Valley, finding social support systems, gaining employment, and caring for children and elderly become quite normative. For instance, all the members I spoke with that morning mentioned helping new Indian families settle into the region, helping them move in, helping with their children, and making their spouses comfortable. That is, the actual experience of immigration, and the aid that is offered by other immigrants, incorporates the norm of integrating and supporting families. In fact, one of the members who walked me to my car mentioned that he was on his way to meet a friend and his family with whom he had not had contact for over 20 years because he was going to help him and his family move into their new home in Silicon Valley. This conflation of both professional and personal ties and the regularity of interaction are reinforced by the settlement patterns of Asian immigrants in Silicon Valley, mentioned earlier. The problems of reciprocity

(Hansen, 2002) faced in other care networks are less of an issue in this population because of the relative uniformity of class and occupational status among both Indians and Chinese in Silicon Valley.

### **Kinship Identity and Informal Care Arrangements: Finding “Grandmas” and “Aunties”**

The logic of these networks, and the identity around which they coalesce, helped the immigrants I spoke with call upon network resources to access help in raising families in Silicon Valley, a norm that did not seem to be readily apparent in non immigrant networks. The capacity to access resources is important because one cannot take for granted the ability to convert network resources into practical help in child care. There is a further aspect, however, of the adherence to an ethnic identity, or to a network logic of reconstituted families, which allows finding regular child care through informal means. Specifically, the belief in ethnicity as a form of kinship leads to the establishment of trust in people who would otherwise be strangers.<sup>15</sup> Whereas parents may typically be concerned with the screening of informal care takers who are not affiliated with institutions (take for instance the publicity and interest surrounding nanny-cams and nanny “scandals”), the belief in a “we-ness” or a similarity of belief system sometimes works to overcome this problem of trust.

Two examples illustrate this phenomenon. First is the case of Anu, an aerospace engineer who had come to the U.S. from India with her husband, where both of them obtained graduate degrees and then subsequently moved to Silicon Valley because of her husband’s job. Neither she nor her spouse had relatives in the area, but Anu described several core networks she had comprised of other Indians, whom she and her family regularly see. Despite the fact that she worked in a company with mostly “Americans,” she said she spent little time outside work socializing with her colleagues.

A soft-spoken, warm, and thoughtful woman, she tells me that when they first moved to Silicon Valley, she was expecting their first child, and so she decided to stay home for a while to assume primary care of their baby. Ten months later, when she decided that she wanted to go back to work, she simply approached an Indian family she had seen in the nearby park and asked the person she believed was an “aunt” in the family, whom she had previously seen caring for

two children, if she might be willing to babysit for her child as well. The “aunt” agreed (it turned out that she was also being paid to care for one of the children Anu saw her with), and thus Anu was able to go to work at an aerospace firm and was considering going into a start-up at the time I spoke with her. In this case, ethnicity was the tool by which an arrangement with a non family member could be made, because the language of kinship invoked in ethnic identity provided the language needed to make child care arrangements. On the other side, that is, the side of the caretaker “auntie,” ethnicity became the means by which she could enter into an entrepreneurial position, circumventing the screening that is typical when looking for clients.

A similar story and arrangement was described to me by Joyce, a Taiwanese woman who is a computer scientist and who immigrated to the U.S. with her husband, who also worked in high-tech. Joyce had initially been employed at Chinese-owned companies and eventually moved into a well-established hardware company where she has been for several years. Many of her and her husband’s family members (including seven siblings) are in the area and in the industry, having come through both the process of employment sponsorship and family reunification strategies, and these family members comprised their core network. During this time, she has had two children, now ages 14 and 16, and she said that finding a babysitter was no problem at all—like Anu, she relied on ethnic resources, saying that there were “a lot of Chinese families around in my area,” and that she currently has one of her neighbors, whom she describes as a “grandma type,” who has been picking up and staying with her children after school. Joyce lives in an area where Chinese are concentrated, which follows the pattern of Asian immigrant settlement both in Silicon Valley and in the U.S., and thus was easily able to find this “grandma.”

The cases of Anu and Joyce suggest to me that the belief in a similarity or “we-ness” based on ethnicity might facilitate the trust necessary to make arrangements for care, especially informal ones such as these. This, coupled with the “enforceable trust” present in communities with dense and overlapping ties, helped immigrant women find care for their children. The fact that they were willing to trust someone they met in the park or a neighbor who seemed kindly, and their description of these care-takers as a “grandma type” or an “aunt,” can be understood within the logic of ethnicity as a form of kinship, a reconstituted extended family. This is especially striking, given the publicity of the past few years over nannies who were abusive to

children and the more general concern over the lack of regulation in more informal child care arrangements. Although my intention here is not to over romanticize a primordial sense of ethnicity or a blind trust, I do think it is suggestive that neither of these women, nor others who had mentioned making informal arrangements with co-ethnics, seemed worried that those to whom they had trusted their children would turn out to be harmful.

### **Conclusion**

Informal care arrangements are becoming less typical in the U.S. in general as Americans increasingly turn to formal institutions such as day care and child care centers. At the same time, however, researchers have noted that racial ethnic women and immigrant women are more likely to use informal care, whether relative care or community-based care, (Anderson and Allen, 1984; Benson, 1994) and have more positive attitudes towards this type of care (Uttal, 1999). I looked at this phenomenon among middle-class, professional Asian immigrants in Silicon Valley. This provides a useful contrast to the majority of the literature on racial ethnic minorities and immigrants, which looks primarily at poor or working-class populations and thereby assumes that the use of informal child care is part of a strategy of economic survival.

Economic necessity was clearly not the primary motivation among those I interviewed, many of whom were very successful in the high-tech industry and all of whom were employed in engineering jobs or jobs that required an engineering background. I thus focused instead on how the experience of immigration, and the structural conditions (such as residential proximity and occupational concentration) immigrants face shaped an “enforceable trust,” a logic of networking, and an ethnic identity based on reconstituted kinship that had the potential to both make personal aid a norm and overcome the problem of trust in finding informal care.

In focusing on this, I suggest that the observations made in the sociology of immigration can be extended to understand the issue of child care in immigrant communities. How children are cared for is an important but overlooked subject in studies of ethnic communities, especially given the fact that nationwide, and in Silicon Valley, as I have shown, Asian families have high rates of two-parent, full-time labor force participation, despite having young children in the household. Certainly, part of the answer is that immigrants tend to live in larger households, and

there are likely to be extended relatives who might be able to help in child rearing. In the nuclear household that is held as the American “norm,” this is less likely to be the case.

However, an equally important part of the answer is that the experience of immigration and the geographic concentrations of ethnic communities create a sense of “we-ness” and “bounded solidarity” that interprets ethnicity as a form of kinship and shared values. This identity sees itself as different from “Americans” and “American values” of self-sufficiency and is contrasted also by the description of networks by non immigrants in the region as purely professional in function or as comprised of individuals. The consequence of this “emergent” ethnic identity is the creation and sustaining of networks where spouses and children are integrated and where personal and family aid thus becomes normative. A further result is that the belief in shared values and experiences coupled with geographic proximity helps overcome the “problem of trust” embedded in finding suitable, informal child care arrangements. These informal resources, garnered through ethnic networks, work to supplement or substitute for bought care services in the market, helping immigrants circumvent the “crisis of care.”

## Notes

1. U.S. Census Bureau, historical population counts and 2000 census.
2. 1990 Census of Population and Housing: census tracts and BNAs, San Jose, CA PMSA, U.S. Department of Commerce; Bureau of Census.
3. The higher educational attainment of the Asian population is even more striking when comparing advanced degrees: 18% of whites in Silicon Valley attained graduate degrees, 40% of Chinese and 55% of Indians had graduate degrees (Alarcon, 1999; Saxenian, 1998).
4. In addition to the higher than average income, Santa Clara County had the lowest unemployment rate in the nation in 1997. The rate was 3.1%, in comparison to 4.9% overall in the U.S (Phillips, 2001:1091).
5. 1997 census model-based estimate.
6. Statistics from Joint Venture Silicon Valley Report, 1999.
7. U.S. Census Bureau, geographic comparison table by race, 2000.
8. I calculated the time of immigration of the foreign born population in Santa Clara County from 1990 census data tables (n=339,010). Fifty-four percent of the population immigrated in 1980-1990, 28% came the preceding decade, and 21% came before 1970.
9. U.S. Census Bureau, geographic comparison table by race, and Hispanic or Latino, 2000.
10. Census 2000 differs from 1990 in racial categorization. The 2000 version has additional categories of "Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander," "Some Other Race," "Two or more races," and a separate counting of Hispanic/Latinos of any race. For purposes of comparison, I have combined these categories into the "other" designation from the 1990 census. The large percentage change in this "other" category is almost certainly a result of this change in categorization.
11. Percentages calculated from preliminary geographic data tables of the 2000 census.
12. 1990 Census Population and Housing: census tracts and BNAs, San Jose PMSA.
13. Whereas the 1965 Hart-Cellar Act allotted 34,000 possible slots on the basis of skill, the Immigration Act of 1990 allotted over 146,000 skill-based visas.
14. Indeed, other immigrants distinguished between the friends they had at work, who were mostly American and with whom they might have lunches or have occasional outings and their "real" networks, with whom they were deeply engaged.

15. In a broader context, economic sociologists have noted that the importance of social capital and social ties lies in the ability to overcome the “problem of trust” in economic transactions, lessening the risk of malfeasance.