The Other Tribeca: Immigrant Work and Incorporation amid Affluence

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THE OTHER TRIBECA:
IMMIGRANT WORK AND INCORPORATION AMID AFFLUENCE

by

ELIZABETH A. MILLER

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

2014
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ABSTRACT

THE OTHER TRIBECA: IMMIGRANT WORK AND INCORPORATION AMID AFFLUENCE

by

ELIZABETH A. MILLER
Advisor: Nancy Foner

Tribeca, a small, affluent neighborhood in the lower west side of Manhattan, is a microcosm of the service-and-information-based economic structure that characterizes many communities in other American cities today, and thus provides an opportunity to study the effects of this system. Tribeca residents are predominantly wealthy and work in high-end service-oriented professions, so they consume low-end personal services produced locally. Many of the people who provide these personal services in the neighborhood are foreign born. Although they share space and have regular interactions, conventional assumptions might suggest that Tribeca residents and immigrant service workers lack much in common, and have little meaningful interpersonal contact with one another. This study explores the actual nature of intergroup contact and how the people in Tribeca navigate the symbolic and social boundaries between them.

In order to understand these processes of contact and boundary navigation, I collected extensive ethnographic and interview data from 66 participants. The perspectives of both immigrant workers and Tribeca residents—as well as Tribeca’s local history, identity, and culture—are taken into account to clarify how their perceptions of the neighborhood and of one another influence their interactions, their feelings of belonging, and their criteria for inclusion in the community.
Although intergroup contact between residents and immigrants fails to alter the host of boundaries that separate them, they are still able to interpersonally connect in ways that are meaningful to them. They do this by bridging, or overlooking, the significance of symbolic and social boundaries. Because of these interpersonal interactions that go beyond service transactions, the local community is defined in a way that incorporates the immigrants who work in the neighborhood in a social way. Tribeca has become an inclusive and unexpected community—to borrow a term from Hochschild (1973)—one in which residents and workers from varying backgrounds are considered an integral and social part.
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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>List of Tables</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Tribeca’s History and People</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Tribeca is Being Botoxed: Perceptions of the Neighborhood</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The Hand Has Five Fingers, Every One is Different: Interactions</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. The Unexpected Community: Defining Belonging in Tribeca</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Conclusion</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methods</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A: Photographs of Tribeca</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix B: Informants’ Characteristics</td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Immigrant informants’ characteristics  {192}

Table 2: Resident informants’ characteristics  {193}
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Tribeca’s location in Manhattan  {22
Figure 2: Tribeca’s boundaries  {23
Figure 3: Tribeca’s location in relation to surrounding neighborhoods  {31
Figure 4: Change in personal services in Tribeca  {45
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Tribeca, one of New York City’s wealthiest neighborhoods, is known for its restaurants, galleries, film festival, celebrity-spotting, and astronomically-priced real estate. But of all the neighborhood’s invaluable assets, the working immigrant population rarely makes the list. While most immigrants who work in Tribeca do not live there, and commute in from all over the city, they are a vital part of the neighborhood’s everyday operation. Without Tribeca’s immigrant workforce, sidewalks would go uncleaned, children would be unattended, beds would remain unmade, luxury units would fall into disrepair, and meals would go unprepared. They are the people who make Tribeca the neighborhood that we think of when we hear the (rather geometrically inaccurate) acronym for Triangle Below Canal.

The goal of this study is to understand how people interact in this diverse environment. I investigate the nature of contact between immigrants who work in service jobs in Tribeca and local residents, how interpersonal intergroup contact arises in this particular context, and how intergroup contact changes the way Tribeca residents and immigrant workers\(^{1}\) perceive and navigate the myriad boundaries between them. In short, I build on our understanding of the effects of intergroup contact on boundaries by exploring whether boundaries are broken down, upheld, or bridged between Tribecans and immigrant workers. Ultimately, I look at how belonging and community are defined by all social actors in Tribeca.

Existing studies of intergroup contact in diverse settings have come up with wildly different conclusions about individuals’ propensity to be able to make significant social connections. Some theories state that shared space does not automatically make for frequent, interpersonal interaction (Abrahamson 1996) or a sense of community (Zorbaugh 1929), and that

\(^{1}\) I use the term immigrant worker(s) to distinguish immigrant service workers from Tribeca residents who are foreign-born.
individuals within diverse neighborhoods or institutions may lead very separate lives from one another (Bach 1993; Foner and Fredrickson 2004). Extreme social distance, as Harvey Warren Zorbaugh (1929) pointed out in his study of Chicago’s Near North Side, makes it particularly difficult to build an all-inclusive community. More recently, Robert Putnam’s (2007) quantitative study exemplified this, as he found that individuals lack trust in one another and “hunker down,” or engage in few kinds of cooperative or community interaction in diverse neighborhoods.

However, other scholars argue that shared space allows for the possibility for social boundaries to be challenged through routine interactions; repeated interactions at the micro level can change ideas of what constitutes difference, as social distance widens or narrows depending upon the extent to which individuals see themselves as similar or distinct (Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Alba and Nee 2003; van Tubergen, Maas, and Flap 2004). Jane Jacobs (1961), for example, noted in her observations of the West Village’s Hudson Street in New York City that informal relations between people on the street can create a common identity, and that those categorized as different from one another can still forge meaningful ties. In his study of street vendors in Greenwich Village, Mitchell Duneier (1999) found that social barriers between the black vendors and panhandlers and affluent white residents were often weakened as a result of interaction. William Kornblum (1974) also found that the steel mills in south Chicago were an important place for social barriers to be broken down between some members of the racially and ethnically heterogeneous workforce. Integration can challenge ethnoracial boundaries (Kim and White 2010), as in the case Elmhurst, Queens, which went from being 98 percent non-Hispanic white in 1960 to one of the most diverse neighborhoods in the country over the course of 30 years. There, residents have been able to overcome racial, ethnic, cultural, and other boundaries
through involvement in local politics, community festivals, and everyday interactions in the neighborhood (Sanjek 1998). In other words, it is precisely because of the presence of a diverse population and the occurrence of intergroup contact that boundary changes may occur.

Intergroup and interpersonal dynamics are far more complex and produce more varied outcomes than numbers are able to portray. I, therefore, take a qualitative approach to doing a community-based study of intergroup contact and relation(ship)s. By focusing on immigrants’ work in Tribeca, I talked with immigrants and residents, witnessed interactions, and actively participated in Tribeca life, allowing me to capture and better understand how individuals are incorporated into and/or excluded from belonging in the community based on boundaries of real and/or perceived difference. To get a clearer picture of how neighborhood residents and immigrant workers interact and view each other and the neighborhood, I included both groups in my study. This multi-sided, qualitative approach helps to illuminate the complex relations that develop in diverse settings involving immigrants and wealthy, native-born individuals. My study is modeled partly on Duneier’s (1999) and Bearman’s (2005) micro-level studies of work, social distance, and interaction that examine the effects of macro forces, including race, class, and the labor market structure on individual people. I apply these approaches to examine the experiences of immigrant workers in Tribeca.

WHY IMMIGRANTS IN TRIBECA?

While place-based studies of immigrants tend to focus on where they live (Massey and Denton 1993), this study investigates neighborhood-level and occupational contexts where immigrants work. It is important to focus on intergroup contact, incorporation, and boundaries of exclusion in workplace contexts, as work is often more significant in shaping identity than place of residence (Park et al. 1925; Zorbaugh 1929). Many immigrant service workers also
spend far more of their waking hours at work than where they live. Additionally, primary contacts are made and community is often built around work (Zorbaugh 1929), and, for some immigrants, the workplace is one of the only spaces that brings them into contact with individuals from backgrounds different from their own (Lamphere, Grenier, and Stepick 1994). Indeed, immigrant laborers and very wealthy people have few encounters in contemporary society outside service transactions, so immigrants who work in neighborhoods that are home to well-off, native-born people are exposed to and get an up-close, personal view of an America that is very different from their own.

Although immigrants settle all over New York City, their residential distribution is not entirely even\(^i\); while an area may be home to relatively few immigrant residents, many may funnel in from other parts of the city to work. Because of the low wages that many immigrants earn, those in service work are severely constrained in terms of where they can live in the city. Immigrant service workers are, therefore, especially likely to be commuters (Bearman 2005). In neighborhoods like Tribeca, immigrants, though a small proportion of the residential population, fill high-demand jobs in retail, health care and social assistance, accommodation and food services, and other private sector services, which make up about one-fifth of Tribeca’s jobs\(^ii\).

Tribeca is an excellent environment in which to gather insights into the social processes and dynamics of intergroup contact, social boundaries, and immigrants’ incorporation or exclusion through work because it is such an extreme case of wealth. In addition, Tribeca is heavily residential, so immigrants are working where the wealthy live, as opposed to an area like Midtown Manhattan which has a large workforce and socioeconomic diversity, but few

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\(^i\) For example, the borough of Queens’ population is 47.8 percent foreign-born compared to 20.9 percent of Staten Island according to the U.S. Census Bureau’s 2007-2011 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

\(^ii\) Labor data come from the U.S. Census Bureau, Center for Economic Studies, Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics Program, available at http://onthemap.ces.census.gov/
residents. Because the jobs that predominate in Tribeca today are largely service-related, their structures do not lend themselves to the kind of work culture and interaction that develop among coworkers in large factories or on hospital floors. Instead, immigrants who work in Tribeca often have a significant amount of contact with people who live in the neighborhood.

This intergroup contact is more common in the context of work than at home, since people are far less segregated where they work than where they live (Ellis, Wright, and Parks 2004), so as in other similarly diverse environments, boundaries of inclusion and exclusion are shaped between neighborhood social actors through contact in public spaces (Ruddick 1996). These interactions between Tribeca’s residents and immigrant service workers are at the heart of this research.

Tribeca, while unique, is part of a wider pattern of inequality in cities and, increasingly, suburbs in the U.S. in which well-off residents and service workers—who often earn low wages—share the same space. It is a neighborhood-level example of the inequality that Saskia Sassen (1996) describes as developing in post-industrial nations, and especially global cities, which has yet to be empirically studied. Although a growing literature examines this concentration of the haves and the have-nots in major cities (Sassen 1996) and increasing socioeconomic inequality in the U.S. (Morris and Western 1999; Perlmann 2005), few scholars have investigated how these phenomena affect the individuals involved, their contact with other groups, and their resulting concepts of boundaries and belonging.

How the upper and working classes, as well as native and foreign born, share space is especially important in the case of immigrants, since work is a major determinant of their economic mobility and social incorporation. A focus on interactions between residents (the client/customer) and immigrant service workers, rather than interactions among the service
workers themselves, is therefore ideal for a place like Tribeca where most jobs are structured in a way that narrows the spatial gap between affluent natives and immigrant service workers.

**IMMIGRATION AND STRATIFICATION**

In order to have a basis for understanding immigrants’ work and their interactions with residents in Tribeca, I will provide a background on immigrants in New York City, the local labor market, and service work in general. I build on the existing literature by arguing that the neighborhood, as a place where most immigrants’ significant micro-level interactions occur, is just as, if not more, important and influential in their lives in the host society as larger factors and structures.

Immigrants’ experiences and incorporation are strongly influenced by their context of reception not only at the national, but also at the state and city, level. Macro-level factors, like immigration policy and the economy, set basic parameters for immigrant incorporation (Waldinger 1999), but local-level factors, including labor market structure and needs, the presence, size, resources within, and structure of immigrant communities, laws and law enforcement, sentiments toward immigrants (Portes and Rumbaut 2006), history of immigration, characteristics of racial or ethnic populations, patterns of intergroup relations, and nature of local politics all determine, among other outcomes, the kinds of jobs immigrants get, where they live, who they come into contact and form relationships with, and the resources available to them (Brettell 2003). Individual factors, such as immigrants’ human capital (Raijman and Tienda 1999) and race or ethnicity (Alba 1999; Gans 1999) can also aid or hinder their incorporation. In short, the more favorable the reception of and resources available to immigrants, the more likely they are to be able to selectively acculturate and become fully and successfully incorporated (Keogan 2002; Portes and Rumbaut 2006).
Although social scientists have been paying increased attention to immigrants who settle in non-traditional receiving areas (see Massey 2008), the vast majority of immigrants today remain concentrated in a handful of states (Portes and Rumbaut 2006), cities within those states (Waldinger 1999), and even neighborhoods within those cities (Alba and Nee 2003). Immigrants’ propensity to settle in urban areas and specific states is largely a result of the social process of migration whereby immigrants settle near family, friends, or acquaintances because of the economic, emotional, or informational support they have to offer (Waldinger 1999, 2001).

New York City is one of the country’s major immigrant destinations (Kraly and Miyares 2001; Waldinger 2001). Throughout the 20th century the foreign-born proportion of the city’s population was always, with the exception of one census year (1940), at least twenty percent (Foner 2007). In 2011, 37 percent of the city’s population was foreign born, compared to 12.9 percent nationally. As a result of New York City’s long history of immigration and racial and ethnic diversity, it has many public and private institutions to aid immigrants in their settlement. The local government is structured in ways that provide opportunities for immigrant groups to have their voices heard in politics, and municipal laws protect the rights of those who are undocumented. Public festivals and parades represent the city’s myriad nationalities and ethnic groups, and even native-born New Yorkers, many of whom are second or third generation themselves, are from diverse backgrounds (Foner 2007). As New York City’s immigrants come from all corners of the world, no group or groups numerically dominate the immigrant or native-born populations (Clark 1996; Foner 2007).

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v About a quarter of all immigrants in the U.S. live in the Los Angeles and New York City metropolitan areas.
vi Nativity data come from the U.S. Census Bureau 2009-2011 American Community Survey 3-Year Estimates.
vii Executive Order 124 ensures undocumented immigrants' safety and the right to receive public services such as education and emergency room care without having to disclose legal status. This protects them from being reported to the Department of Homeland Security or Immigration and Customs Enforcement.
New York City’s immigrants are also diverse in that they possess varying levels of human capital (Foner 2007), with about equal proportions of high- and low-skilled individuals (Waldinger and Lee 2001); about 26 percent of immigrants 25 and older in New York City are college graduates, while about 28 percent have not finished high school (Lobo and Salvo 2013). Immigrants in the New York metropolitan area are about equally divided between higher-wage and lower-wage jobs; immigrant employment is almost evenly split between managerial and professional specialty occupations, including financial managers, executives, doctors and engineers; technical and sales occupations, both high and low-wage, and administrative support; services, such as food and building service; and blue-collar occupations, including construction and production (Kallick 2010a). New York City’s sizable light manufacturing and informal sectors (Sassen 1988) also create economic opportunity for immigrants with less marketable skill (Sassen 1994; Valenzuela 2003).

Because many immigrants settle in New York with the intention of working, they have high labor force participation rates and are overrepresented in the city’s labor market (Kallick 2010b). New York City’s immigrant labor force has also grown markedly in the past two decades from 23.7 percent of the city’s labor force in 1990 to 35.4 percent in 2008 (Kallick 2010a). In New York State in 2005, immigrants accounted for 21 percent of the population and 22.4 percent of the GDP, or $229 billion (Kallick 2007). Immigrants, therefore, are vital contributors to the local economy (Kallick 2010b).

The contemporary inflow of immigrants to New York City coincides with economic restructuring that has changed the distribution of opportunity in the U.S. over the past several decades (Lamphere, Grenier, and Stepick 1994). Since the 1970s, the national economy has undergone a shift from an industrial structure based on domestic, often unionized, manufacturing
and production to a post-industrial economy that produces services and information (Sassen 1994). Many manufacturing jobs and various forms of back-office work have been decentralized to the global periphery while global corporate management and high-level services, such as information processing, communications, and financial markets, have been concentrated in large urban centers, or “global cities,” like New York City (Sassen 1988, 1996; Waldinger 1996).

Growth in information and high-end service industries in U.S. cities has created jobs requiring advanced educational and skill attainment that pay high salaries (Waldinger 1996). In turn, high earners’ propensity to consume personal services, including, among dozens of other things, domestic, food, health-related, and retail, produces a local market for jobs that require little, if any, skill, training, or education (Sassen 1988, 1994). The decline in regulation by businesses and government (Bernhardt, Dresser, and Hatton 2003) and in union membership has sharply decreased wage growth and increased demand for part-time, temporary, informal, and other contingent labor in low-skill jobs (Sassen 1994; Morris and Western 1999; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001; Valenzuela 2003), especially services (Lamphere, Grenier, and Stepick 1994). As a result, job opportunities in global cities are increasingly concentrated at either end of a bifurcated skill and income spectrum (Sassen 1988). These interdependent, polarized service sectors (Valenzuela 2003), which concentrate very high-salary and low-wage workers in close spatial proximity to one another (Bach 1993), are found disproportionately in major cities (Sassen 1996).

Socioeconomic inequality in the U.S. has grown markedly since the 1970s (Sassen 1988; Waldinger 2001). The widening gap in earnings has been due largely to sharp increases in compensation at the top without corresponding growth in the middle and bottom (Bailey and Waldinger 1991; Sassen 1996). Exacerbating the negative effects of this inequality is the
relatively anemic U.S. social welfare state, which does little to redistribute wealth or adequately subsidize health care, childcare, or housing (Ehrenreich 2001). As a result, the U.S. has one of the highest levels of post-tax and transfer income inequality of any developed capitalist nation (Wright 1989), and the poor are more likely to be working than not (Newman 1999).

These phenomena are magnified in New York (Wright and Ellis 2001) precisely because it is a key hub for high-end service industries (Sassen 1996). The shift from production of goods to services occurred earlier in New York than in the rest of the nation, beginning in the 1950s (Waldinger 1996) with significant growth in white-collar industries (Sassen 1994; Morris and Western 1999; Wright and Ellis 2001; Valenzuela 2003) such as international trade, finance, investment, and management (Sassen 1996). Since then, New York City has experienced an increase in high-paying jobs with accompanying expansion of services that pay very little (Portes and Rumbaut 2006)—so the growth in high-skill industries has created job opportunities for immigrants with both high and low human capital even during periods of job loss, and despite shrinking manufacturing industries (Waldinger 1996; Waldinger and Lee 2001). New York City has one of the widest wage gaps in the country (Reitz 1998; Ellis 2001) and New York State has the largest income gaps between the rich and the poor as well as the rich and the middle class (Foner 2000). Since 1990, the bottom 96 percent of New York State residents have seen very slow, even stagnating or negative, income growth while the top four percent of earners have absorbed two-thirds of income gains (Fiscal Policy Institute 2009).

Immigrants are especially vulnerable in this atmosphere of growing inequality (Perlmann 2005). In New York City, natives’ earnings are higher than the national average while immigrants earn roughly the same wages as their counterparts elsewhere in the country (Waldinger 2001). The wage gap between immigrants and natives has widened despite near
comparable labor force participation rates, and unskilled immigrants, in particular, have seen little, if any, wage mobility since the mid-1970s (Raijman and Tienda 1999). Even earnings for immigrants with high human capital are often substantially affected by the stigma attached to immigrant status or nation-of-origin and/or inability to transfer credentials (Portes and Rumbaut 2001). After controlling for educational attainment, immigrants in the U.S. earn 78 cents on native-born whites’ dollar (Perlmann 2005).

Part of this inequality can be attributed to the numerous barriers that immigrants face in getting jobs that offer adequate wages and working conditions. To begin, lack of language skills or adequate credentials limit options, so many immigrants turn to their networks to find a job (Foner 2000; Waldinger and Lichter 2003). However, networks often lead immigrants to employment in an ethnic niche (Foner 2000) or the ethnic economy which can give them access to work, but often not mobility (Wilson 1999)—especially in devalued, “immigrant” jobs (Colen 1990). Some employers also rely on employees’ networks for hiring, especially in low-skill jobs (Foner 2000), resulting in a labor market heavily segmented by gender, nationality, and race (Waldinger and Lichter 2003). Employers’ stereotypes about (Bach 1993) and preferences for particular ethnic and racial groups (Reskin 2001) guide their hiring, in some cases based on perceived exploitability (Zatz 2008). Additionally, stereotypes of immigrants as “compliant” and “docile” increase their risk of being exploited, especially in jobs where most employees are foreign born (Waters and Eschbach 1995).

Continuing racial inequality in the U.S. has also exacerbated the income inequality created by the bifurcated economic structure. Since the overwhelming majority of immigrants today are categorized as non-white, they are at an additional economic disadvantage (Waters and Eschbach 1995). Employers are more likely to cut the wages and benefits and increase the
working hours of immigrants than they are of native-born workers, and since immigrants often lack the economic and political power to improve their workplace conditions, they are often subject to threats if they attempt to unionize (Appelbaum, Bernhardt, and Murnane 2003). Lack of legal status compounds the risk of being exploited for many immigrants (Perlmann 2005). Additionally, U.S. immigration policies, reduction of social safety nets, and lack of enforcement of labor laws by the federal government create a large population of vulnerable workers (Bernhardt et al. 2008) who are who go largely unprotected and are denied adequate wages, benefits, bargaining power, and employment and financial security, and are often exposed to unsafe work environments (Gammage 2008). The beneficiaries of this inequality are middle- and upper-class individuals who receive affordable, convenient consumer services and products as a result of their proximity to low-wage, immigrant labor (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001).

Personal service work in particular draws heavily on immigrant labor, especially in positions that have sub-standard working conditions and require long, undesirable hours (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001) that most natives reject (Waldinger 2001). Immigrants take these jobs because they possess a dual frame of reference (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001), comparing the work and wages to what is available at home (Waldinger and Lichter 2003). Many also, especially at the outset of their time in the U.S., see their migration as temporary (Foner 2000), making it easier to endure difficult conditions.

Foreign-born, low-end service workers have far less social and political power than their more socioeconomically advantaged counterparts (Sassen 1996; Ehrenreich 2001). The affluent are more easily able to navigate the law and mobilize it in their favor, so they not only have more control over the development of their communities (Abrahamson 1996) and access to the best resources, but are also “more sensitized to the maintenance of what they have and to the

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viii In New York City, an estimated half a million immigrants were undocumented in 2010 (Lobo and Salvo 2013).
acquisition of more” (Janowitz 1980 [1952]:139). Their political influence makes their complaints and requests more audible to local and state governments than those of the less privileged (Ehrenreich 2001).

BOUNDARIES AND INTERGROUP CONTACT

Personal services require spatial proximity, so although there is often significant economic and social distance between immigrant laborers and affluent consumers, they commonly share both public and private space (Zorbaugh 1929; Newman 1999; Ehrenreich 2001). Spaces that bring individuals of different backgrounds together are inevitably host to intergroup contact, which opens up the possibility for informal relationships (Oldenburg 1999). Indeed, there are many instances of mutual acknowledgement, amicability, and, on rare occasions, friendships that develop between immigrant service workers and local residents in Tribeca as a result of their contact. Nonetheless, the people on both sides must first determine how to respond to the boundaries that exist between them.

All societies have concepts of boundaries based on (sometimes arbitrary) social constructions and categorizations (Suttles 1973). Michèle Lamont and Virág Molnár (2002) note that boundaries begin as symbolic, referring to the ways people categorize or divide others into groups. Symbolic, or subjective, boundaries evolve into social boundaries when they result in widespread objective inequalities in access to resources or opportunities within the society. Even after social boundaries develop, the symbolic boundaries remain, legitimizing social inequalities.

Boundaries may arise out of several processes: through the use of symbols or markers that indicate difference, discrimination in access to resources or opportunity, political mobilization, and force (Wimmer 2013). Interactions further build and reinforce identities and concepts of difference (Sanders 2002). Those boundaries, in turn, influence how individuals
interact (Barth 1969; Gramling and Forsyth 1987; Lamont and Fournier 1992; Ruddick 1996; Tilly 2003; van Tubergen, Maas, and Flap 2004; Alba 2005). Racializing, gendering, and other forms of “othering” are part of a process of power relations that affects the way individuals participate in public life, shapes and maintains their identity (Ruddick 1996), and is a strong determinant of their social integration (Rich 2009), thus being a key element in the reproduction of existing social inequalities (Tilly 2003).

Because boundaries are subjective and based on the way people within a society think about difference, objective difference does not necessarily constitute a boundary (Barth 1969; Cohen 1985). Like many subjective ideas, these concepts of difference can change. According to Aristide Zolberg and Long Litt Woon (1999), boundary change occurs in three ways: by the crossing of individuals from one side to another, the blurring of the boundary as its significance is reduced, and the shifting of the boundary in such a way that an entire group’s membership changes (see also Alba and Nee 2003). Andreas Wimmer (2008, 2013) expands on this taxonomy, adding that boundaries can also be expanded or contracted, becoming more or less inclusive. Boundaries’ stratification can also be challenged through transvaluation, when the social hierarchy is reversed or when groups seek equal status (Wimmer 2008, 2013). When boundaries and social constructions of difference change, the dynamics of interaction are thus altered (Foner and Fredrickson 2004).

Boundary construction, maintenance, and redefinition, are, therefore, continuous processes, especially in diverse neighborhoods like Tribeca. One of the most effective modes to shift or blur boundaries is through positive intergroup contact. While sociologists have studied intergroup contact in various contexts, theories of intergroup contact are far more developed in the fields of psychology and social psychology. In his influential volume on the effects of
Intergroup contact Gordon Allport (1958) asserted his “contact hypothesis,” the idea that contact between different racial and ethnic groups over an extended period of time can improve intergroup relations and reduce prejudice. Since the publication of his book, myriad studies have tested his hypothesis (see meta-analyses by Pettigrew and Tropp 2006; 2008) and have found that prejudice is, indeed, reduced through intergroup contact (Pettigrew and Tropp 2008), relations and perceptions improve over time (Ellison, Shin, and Leal 2011), and the term “intergroup” can also include social categorizations other than race and ethnicity (Pettigrew and Tropp 2006).

Intergroup contact can improve relations in three ways: 1) as Allport (1958) hypothesized, members of each group learn more unbiased information about the other group through their interactions over time, leading to 2) a reduction in anxiety and 3) development of the ability to empathize with the other group (Pettigrew and Tropp 2008). Intergroup contact is also effective in building trust (Hewstone and Swart 2011) and improving perceptions (Pettigrew and Tropp 2006) between different groups. Limited contact with the “other,” on the other hand, has the reverse effect, emphasizing the differences people assume they have and maintaining groups’ ignorance and stereotypes about one another (Sanders 2002).

Allport (1958) suggested that the positive effects of intergroup contact are greatest when interlocutors are of roughly equal status. However, in cases in which statuses are stratified there are still positive outcomes of intergroup contact; members of the majority, or dominant, group are especially likely to be positively influenced by intergroup contact, as their prejudices can be considerably reduced (Pettigrew and Tropp 2008). Allport also suggested that lack of competition facilitates the positive effects of intergroup contact on perceptions, which I will discuss in the case of Tribeca residents and immigrant workers in Chapter 5.
Positive intergroup contact is also easiest to achieve when people are in a context in which they are cooperating, have common goals, feel supported in having positive intergroup contact by the society at large (Allport 1958), and are engaged in mutually meaningful activities or interests (Valentine 2008). Intergroup contact that is successful in overcoming boundaries “recategorizes” individuals into a more inclusive grouping (Dovidio, Gaertner, and Kawakami 2003); in other words, the boundaries shift to include people who were once considered the out-group.

But some boundaries are not easily altered or dissolved, and, as we will see in this study of immigrants in Tribeca, boundaries between groups may remain the same despite prolonged intergroup contact (Barth 1969). Fredrik Barth (1969) explained that boundaries remain in place when interactions are structured in ways that reinforce them. Indeed, the statuses that people hold dictate the kinds of interactions they can have with other people based on social norms of intergroup behavior (see also Ruddick 1996; Pettigrew 1998; Ellis, Wright and Parks 2004)—oftentimes in ways that prevent the deconstruction of boundaries of difference. In cases of very bright—or clear—boundaries (Alba 2005), interactions are even further restricted, making it all the more difficult to break them down.

BRIDGING BOUNDARIES: BUILDING ON THE CONTACT HYPOTHESIS

In Tribeca, symbolic and social boundaries, including race, ethnicity, nativity, language, socioeconomic status, service work, and more, are bright not only between residents and immigrant workers, but also—in terms of social class—among the residents themselves. The relationship between boundaries and intergroup contact is, one might say, dialectical: contact creates boundaries, boundaries influence the further contact that groups have with one another, but then interactions can call into question the boundaries’ legitimacy. The following chapters
explore the nature and outcomes of intergroup contact in the Tribeca context, shedding light on how immigrants are received in and incorporated into a predominantly wealthy, white, native neighborhood.

Chapter 2 discusses the history and context of Tribeca, both critical in understanding local social dynamics (Brettell 2003). Tribeca’s history as a wholesale commercial-turned-residential area and its rapid gentrification were key to bringing so many immigrants to Tribeca to work serving an increasingly affluent residential population. The process of gentrification shaped the local culture and identity, which, despite the neighborhood’s economic wealth, remains largely progressive and liberal. Gentrification has influenced how residents treat boundaries of difference when it comes to immigrants and other social out-groups present in the neighborhood.

Chapter 3 explores immigrant workers’ and Tribeca residents’ perceptions of the neighborhood, which, for both groups, are overwhelmingly positive. For immigrants, this partly has to do with the quality of the jobs available in Tribeca, which tend to be better than those found in immigrant neighborhoods. Immigrants also like Tribeca because of the privileged statuses of the people who live there. Working among native whites with high socioeconomic status is preferable to immigrant workers, regardless of their own race, ethnicity, or social class, than working in places with residents of lower social status. While one might assume that immigrants would feel out of place in a neighborhood like Tribeca, most do not feel this way. This has much to do with the lack of salience nativity has for Tribeca residents; they tend not to notice that most people working around them are foreign-born, making immigrants feel less like social outsiders among largely native residents.
This chapter is also where the boundaries among residents become apparent. As Tribeca has gentrified and become more affluent, a social divide has formed between the longtime, middle class residents and their wealthier, newer neighbors. The symbolic boundaries of cultural, lifestyle, and morality differences between residents influence their views of the most visible immigrant workers in the neighborhood, especially caregivers. Caregivers, who are employed mainly by newer, younger, wealthier residents, have become symbolic for many residents of the extreme wealth in their neighborhood and the strained relations they have with their neighbors.

In Chapter 4 I delve into the interactions that immigrant workers and Tribeca residents have with one another, and how that contact is shaped by the symbolic boundaries that divide them. Certain factors help residents and immigrants bridge boundaries, including contact over an extended period of time, having an investment in the neighborhood, speaking in languages other than English, and meeting in contexts outside of the workplace. The work that immigrants do is also important in their ability to bridge boundaries, as some occupations and workplaces provide immigrants opportunities to interact with residents in a more interpersonal way. While many immigrants and residents do successfully bridge boundaries and develop positive interpersonal relationships, the fact that those boundaries are still present also influences their contact. Indeed, many inequalities based on social boundaries are still embedded and reflected in the very contact that they have with one another.

Although symbolic boundaries are not broken down by positive interpersonal contact between immigrants and residents, their interactions do influence their sense of belonging and community in Tribeca, which is the focus of Chapter 5. While residents overwhelmingly acknowledge that immigrants belong in Tribeca in a functional way, they, as well as immigrants
themselves, also see immigrant workers as having a social place in the neighborhood. Residents view immigrants as socially belonging for several reasons. First, the symbolic boundaries that exist between residents detract from their sense of community. In order to counter that feeling, residents reach out socially to other constant local actors: immigrant workers. But other factors also facilitate the building of this inclusive community, including residents’ liberal valuing of diversity; the social ties that were built in the wake of 9/11, a national tragedy that occurred locally in Tribeca; and the absence of any sort of competition between residents and immigrants that could cause intergroup tension. Their interpersonal contact and relation(ship)s build a sense of belonging for residents and immigrant workers, creating an inclusive definition of who is a part of the community.

Yet despite positive contact and the inclusivity of the local definition of community, neither symbolic nor social boundaries between residents and immigrant workers are being altered. Boundaries hold firm in Tribeca, as is evidenced by the superficial nature of resident/worker interactions and rare occurrence of intergroup friendships. What is happening instead is the bridging of some of the myriad boundaries at play in Tribeca; boundaries of social class, occupation, race, gender, nativity, and so on remain in place, but through residents’ and immigrants’ interactions with one another they become less relevant on an individual basis over time. This allows residents and immigrants to have interpersonal, rather than transactional, contact.

The only boundary that is readily pliable in Tribeca is that of community. Positive intergroup contact between Tribeca residents and immigrant workers widens the scope of how community is defined in the neighborhood to include the immigrants who work there. This is evidenced not only by immigrants’ claims to belonging in the neighborhood in a social way, but
the social significance that immigrants have for residents. Indeed, immigrant workers’ presence in Tribeca enhances many residents’ sense of community in their ever-evolving neighborhood.
CHAPTER 2: TRIBECA’S HISTORY AND PEOPLE

This chapter describes Tribeca as it exists today; it also explores its history, which, especially in recent decades, has altered the neighborhood in surprising and drastic ways. In addition, I provide some basic background on the people for whom Tribeca is their home, workplace, or, in many cases, whether literally or metaphorically, both. I start by laying out Tribeca’s location and boundaries, then provide a brief historical overview, followed by an exploration of the people who live in Tribeca, their cultural attributes, place-based identities, and influences on the local economy, as well as the people who work in the local labor market.

TRIBECA’S BOUNDARIES: GEOGRAPHIC

Tribeca, a small neighborhood of less than one square mile, is located in Lower Manhattan in New York City (see Figure 1). Its name, an acronym for Triangle Below Canal, derives from the neighborhood’s geographic location, as the street grid produces triangle-shaped blocks just south of Canal Street. Originally encompassing only a few blocks, the area now known as Tribeca extends as far south as the World Trade Center. While some of Tribeca’s geographic boundaries—specifically at the southern and eastern ends—are unofficial, the geographic definitions I describe below generally match most Tribecans’ cognitive map (Suttles 1973), or ideas of where Tribeca’s outer limits exist (Cohen 1985; Abrahamson 1996) (see Figure 2).

Tribeca is defined in the north by its original, and perhaps most agreed-upon, boundary: Canal Street. The street, a large, six-lane, busy thoroughfare, divides Tribeca from Soho and Hudson Square to the north. Since Canal Street connects the Manhattan Bridge to the Holland Tunnel, there is a constant stream of vehicular through-traffic. Canal Street’s sidewalks are a magnet for street vendors who draw throngs of tourists in search of souvenirs and knockoff
purses, watches, and sunglasses. Because Canal Street is usually clogged with traffic—both motor and foot—most Tribecans avoid it, making the street a physical boundary along the neighborhood’s north edge.

Figure 1: Tribeca’s location (in black) in Manhattan

The Hudson River forms Tribeca’s western boundary between Canal Street and the north edge of Battery Park City, and from there the western edge is along West Street south to Murray Street. West Street, also known as the West Side Highway, is an eight-lane, grade-level highway with a substantially wide median. Because of the street’s width, it can be dangerous and difficult
To cross (many pedestrians take respite on the median as the allotted time to cross often isn’t long enough to reach the other side) making it, like Canal Street, a distinct and objective physical border between Tribeca and Battery Park City to the West.

Tribeca’s eastern and southern boundaries are less clear, making it impossible to determine exactly where Tribeca ends and another neighborhood begins. I define Tribeca’s eastern boundary as Broadway, which is a major street in Manhattan’s grid. It is often busy with motor vehicle and foot traffic, and has mainstream tourist-oriented and other commercial activity that is inconsistent with the kinds of businesses usually found in Tribeca. Chinatown, Tribeca’s neighbor to the east and northeast, has a much more substantial presence east of Broadway, as does the Civic Center, which lies mainly east of Tribeca’s southern half.

Figure 2: Tribeca’s boundaries
Tribeca’s southern boundary is the most ambiguous, and locals consider the line to be drawn anywhere between Chambers Street and Vesey Street, which runs along the northern edge of the World Trade Center site. I consider Murray Street to be Tribeca’s southernmost boundary because the area just to the north is significantly more residential, with examples of the neighborhood’s historical architecture, including cast iron, Italianate, and federalist buildings. The blocks south of Murray are predominantly populated with newer office buildings, and therefore have fewer residents. Manhattan Community Board 1 also sets Tribeca’s southern boundary at Murray Street (Gill 2011).

LOCAL HISTORY

Tribeca has gone through dramatic changes over the past century-and-a-half. Indeed, with the exception of its architecture, today’s Tribeca hardly resembles the neighborhood it was fifty years ago. Tribeca has seen a rapid transformation from primarily wholesale commercial to residential and retail use, as the once-bustling market and manufacturing district has given way to an affluent residential community of luxury lofts and apartments, boutiques, wine bars, galleries, and Michelin-starred restaurants. Large swaths of the neighborhood have been preserved as historic districts by the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission in an effort to preserve some architectural elements of the past, but Tribeca will likely continue to evolve in its current incarnation as a high-end residential district.

Tribeca was largely residential until the mid-1800s (Allen 2010), but changes in the 1880s began to transform it into a commercial district. Large warehouses were built along Washington, Greenwich, and Hudson Streets, close to the Hudson River piers (Senft 1993). These concerns, collectively known as Washington Market, were mainly food wholesalers, including, among others, a produce market and a butter and eggs district, although the area also
attracted a number of manufacturing enterprises. Because of its location along the river and at the terminus of a freight train line, this part of Lower Manhattan was ideal for shipping goods in and out via boat or rail. The market thrived until the end of World War II when decline set in with the loss of the freight line and the increased reliance on trucks meant that the area, with its narrow, crooked streets, was no longer so easily accessible. Wholesalers and manufacturers began leaving the area for Hunts Point in the Bronx and other places in the metropolitan area. Within decades, many of the commercial warehouses had fallen into disuse, and by the 1980s Washington Market was, with few exceptions, largely gone from Lower Manhattan.

Meanwhile, in the 1960s the city responded to the market’s departure by launching an urban renewal effort to revitalize the area. A 24-block swath of land where much of the market once stood was leveled, and the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey built the World Trade Center on the southern end of the cleared land (Dunlap 1989). The northern half of Tribeca, however, remained undeveloped for several years. By the early 1970s, immense apartment towers, originally planned as luxury rentals for Wall Street bankers (Goldberger 1982), rose along Greenwich Street between Duane and North Moore Streets. This was Independence Plaza North (IPN), an apartment complex consisting of three high-rise buildings and 1,339 units, which was completed in 1973 (Noble 1989; Senft 1993). Alongside IPN, the city built the main campus building of Borough of Manhattan Community College (BMCC) which opened in 1983, and in the 1980s made a deal with Shearson Lehman Hutton, Inc. to build a large office tower (now leased by Citigroup) on the land just to the north.

This urban renewal development was only part of the changes that were already underway in the neighborhood. As early as the 1950s, artists, writers, and other creative-types were coming to Tribeca to work—and live. These artists were drawn to the area by the large,
inexpensive spaces that were left behind by wholesalers, manufacturers, and other industrial companies. The lofts were ideal for artists who needed ample space to work and, because of the lack of real estate demand in the area, rent for a loft in the 1960s and early 1970s was significantly lower than could be found in Soho, a nearby artist community, at the time (Zukin 1982).

Few New Yorkers knew anything about this part of Downtown, and even fewer considered living there. To begin, there was very little in terms of amenities—the neighborhood didn’t even have a proper grocery store until 1982, when a Food Emporium opened on Greenwich Street; early residents often went to Greenwich Village to do the bulk of their shopping. Cab drivers did not know any of the streets, and there was no sense of local identity. Many longtime residents who moved to the area during that time recalled that they had never heard of the neighborhood—never mind been there—before.

Because it was largely ignored and had been commercial for so long, the area was not seen as a residential neighborhood by the majority of New Yorkers, including the city government. The city did not recognize the population living in the loft spaces zoned for commercial, not residential, use, and therefore did not provide them with adequate municipal services. In response, some residents organized and, in an effort to legitimize the area as a residential neighborhood, gave it a new name, changing it from Washington Market to TriBeCa. It was at this time in the early 1970s that the area acquired its identity and became, for some, a community. The creation of its initial boundaries and identity were a result not only of its development into a residential enclave, but in relation to an outside force (Suttles 1973)—the city—that had the power to service or neglect the growing population, many living illegally in spaces zoned for commercial use.
Throughout the 1970s Tribeca slowly became more visible to the rest of the city as residents, whether tried to or not, essentially put it “on the map.” The initial wave of artists, while lacking economic capital, brought with them cultural capital that made Tribeca attractive and highly marketable, especially after the city passed the “loft law” in 1982\textsuperscript{ix}, which rezoned many of the lofts to allow conversion into residential spaces. Soon after, publications like the New York \textit{Times} began printing guide-like articles about Tribeca, such as Paul Goldberger’s (1982) piece on “architecture, restaurants and bargain hunting” in the neighborhood, which said, “the air smells of coffee and spices to remind us that wholesalers still occupy the ground floors of many of these buildings, but the sounds of rock music waft out of the upper-floor lofts, and mothers with babies stroll along the street.” Realtors capitalized on the hip local artist culture (Smith 1996) and the newly legal residential spaces by appealing to white-collar professional renters and buyers with more money (Zukin 1982). Many of these new residents were lawyers and bankers who worked in the nearby Civic Center or Financial District. Some had children, and, if they didn’t, would soon, adding to the rapid population growth in the neighborhood (Senft 1993), which, by the end of the 1980s, had one of the fastest population growth rates in the city. By the late 1980s, the median price of a loft had increased in value to $525,000 and rent for a one bedroom unit was $1,800 a month\textsuperscript{x} (Noble 1989). As the neighborhood grew in popularity, more people flocked to it, attracting an increasingly affluent, including celebrity, contingent (Kasinitz, Smithsimon, and Pok 2005).

\textit{September 11, 2001}

While Tribeca has mainly been an economic and real estate success since the 1970s, it has experienced its share of trials. It lies immediately north of the World Trade Center, so the

\textsuperscript{ix} Article 7-C, Legalization of Interim Multiple Dwellings is available at http://www.nyc.gov/html/loft/downloads/pdf/loft_law.pdf

\textsuperscript{x} About the equivalent of $980,000 and $3,360, respectively, adjusted for inflation in 2012.
attacks on September 11, 2001 left Tribeca in a purgatory of uncertainty, as well as economic, emotional, and physical loss. Parts of southern Tribeca were forced to evacuate (Foner 2005) and vehicular traffic was strictly limited for months. Businesses located in the “frozen zone,” south of Chambers Street, into which entrance was restricted mainly to residents and rescue personnel, suffered from lack of pedestrian traffic and inability to get goods into and out of the area.

Yet despite the gruesome nature of the tragedy, initial fears of neighborhood decline proved wrong and Tribeca’s economy grew stronger than ever before, bouncing back in the months following the 9/11 attacks. Many Tribecans returned, embracing recovery and working together to rebuild their neighborhood. Real estate values continued to soar and new businesses flocked to the neighborhood and thrived (Kasinitz, Smithsimon, and Pok 2005). Tribeca’s resilience can be attributed not only to investment by local residents and officials, but also the disproportionate amount of federal recovery funds it received, especially compared to nearby Chinatown and the Lower East Side, which faced comparable challenges, because of their proximity to ground zero (Gotham and Greenberg 2008). As a result, even though 9/11 was a major event in the neighborhood’s history, it did not lead to long-term devastation. This quick recovery helps to explain, at least in part, how Tribecans look back on that day.

Although September 11th evokes a range of emotions and memories for Tribecans who lived in the neighborhood at that time, it comes up in few conversations with residents today. Those who do broach the topic today mainly think of 9/11 as a reference point in time, often comparing various aspects of the neighborhood before, immediately following, and long after the event. For very long-time residents, the voluntary and involuntary evacuation of so many residents in the weeks immediately following 9/11 reminded them of the less-populated
neighborhood they had moved to in the 1970s and 1980s. Julie\textsuperscript{xi}, a 39-year resident, noticed that immediately after 9/11 the neighborhood suddenly became quiet again:

[It was] almost like the old days. Not for a very happy reason, but suddenly there’s this huge hush, and that’s kind of what it was like in terms of the sound and just the feel. It was very [quiet]... and that was sort of nice because it was sort of... it was just us artists. That was it. And it was very low key.

Evelyn, a 35-year resident, made a similar observation:

One of the really profound things after the Trade Center came down, the towers came down, is for a time thereafter, so many of the newer people had fled the neighborhood—understandably so. I mean, they went to their country houses with their kids or whatever, and all of a sudden we were seeing it was like the old neighborhood again. Like we just would see people; we were all commenting on it, like ‘Wow, it’s just us left again,’ because most of us didn’t have any place else to go. We weren’t—we didn’t have country houses.

“It was like all the trees cleared out,” her husband Malcolm added, “and it was like ‘oh, there’s that person over there.’ It was pretty funny.”

Some, like Daisy who has lived in Tribeca for 18 years, identify with other locals who lived through that time in Tribeca’s history:

I think 9/11 maybe will always be some kind of a riveting thing, like ‘Were you here for 9/11 or were you not?’ There is that group of ‘Oh, we were here for 9/11 and you’re not; you came after 9/11.’ That was kind of a dividing, or an identifying... maybe not a dividing line, but maybe a... grouping of some sort.

It was also an event that some believed exposed Tribeca to the rest of the city, more so than the influx of artists in the two previous decades. The new awareness of Tribeca as a neighborhood, they are certain, fueled further real estate investment. Annette, a 27-year resident reflected:

After September 11th, it sort of blew our cover, and everybody knew where these streets were and that kind of thing. It was very, you know, that changed our world in so many ways. But an enormous part was losing our privacy, and all of a sudden people are asking you about these things that are like in [my] neighborhood, and it’s like ‘Well, how do you know that?’

\textsuperscript{xi} All names have been changed in order to protect the identities of people who chose to participate in this study.
She continued, laughing, “I don’t know what’s going on in your neighborhood, you know. But we were sort of under this microscope, so that changed a lot of things.”

*Connections to the Surrounding Area*

Tribeca was not created in a vacuum; its development and changes over time have been strongly influenced by its geography and the neighborhoods that surround it. As discussed earlier, Tribeca gained and lost its role as a wholesale market and manufacturing center because of its location. Upon the market’s departure, artists moved in not only for the cheap and ample space, but because many could no longer afford to live in nearby Soho, then a popular, and increasingly expensive, artist enclave. Tribeca’s geographic proximity to an artist outpost prompted its initial development as a residential neighborhood as displaced artists looked south for live/work space (Dunlap 1989; Senft 1993).

Once Tribeca was “settled,” lofts were legalized, and amenities became available, Tribeca became more attractive to white-collar professionals who worked in the nearby Civic Center, Financial District, and, to a certain extent, Battery Park City, many who had lived in the suburbs and wealthy neighborhoods further uptown. Bankers, traders, attorneys, and other high-earning professionals were increasingly attracted to Tribeca’s geographic proximity to their offices. For them, the neighborhood was conveniently located, allowing them a shorter commute—in some cases, so short that they could walk to work.

Tribeca’s current incarnation as an affluent neighborhood has led to even more connections with the surrounding areas (see Figure 3 for adjacent neighborhoods). Tribeca and Battery Park City are now closely linked, and although the neighborhoods are quite different in geography, structure, and history, Tribeca and Battery Park City are demographically similar. Unlike Canal Street, West Street—while wide, busy, imposing, and fear-inducing—has proven
to be a rather porous boundary that residents from either neighborhood often cross. Each neighborhood has amenities, such as parks, libraries, community centers, gyms, and extracurricular programs, that residents from the other like to use.

Figure 3: Tribeca’s location in relation to surrounding neighborhoods

There are also more connections between Tribeca and Chinatown than ever before. As Tribeca becomes more and more economically exclusive, Chinatown, although having developed separately, and with little overlap with Tribeca in terms of its residential and commercial composition, has become increasingly vital for some Tribecans. Many long-term, middle-class residents rely upon nearby Chinatown, an ethnic enclave that caters mainly to low-income and working-class Chinese, to acquire basic necessities. Betty, who has lived in Tribeca for 38 years, often goes to Chinatown for her groceries and other needs, noting, “you know, [Tribeca’s] expensive. Even getting a piece of fruit is expensive in this neighborhood. I often go to Chinatown to do my shopping. It’s so much cheaper.” For Betty and many long-time residents like her, it is worth the short walk east to shop for provisions, services, or other items, the prices
of which are inflated in their neighborhood. They can typically meet their needs in Chinatown for a fraction of the cost they’d find at “home.”

TRIBECA TODAY

Gentrification

Today’s Tribeca is an example of a neighborhood that has undergone rapid hypergentrification, or extreme gentrification, over a period of about 35 years. However, Tribeca’s version of gentrification diverges from the traditional understanding of the definition, in that there did not exist a long-standing, low-income or working-class population in the neighborhood when the initial artists started moving in (see London and Palen 1984 and Bowler and McBurney 1991). Those “pioneers” moved into a neighborhood that was industrial, with very few residents (Zukin 1982). This is not to say that displacement hasn’t occurred in Tribeca—it has. The first people who were displaced were the artists, those who jumpstarted the neighborhood’s gentrification, starting in the 1980s with the growth in Tribeca’s popularity, real estate speculation, and white-collar professional population. Middle-class renters who can no longer afford today’s rising rents are unable to relocate within the neighborhood, and often move to Brooklyn, Queens, or New Jersey.

Despite the hundreds of residential units that have been added to the neighborhood since the 1980s, many encouraged by tax abatements like the 421a Program designed to promote development in the city during the period of 1970s disinvestment, the middle- and working-classes now find themselves increasingly residentially excluded. Tax incentive programs have not required developers to build many units for low- or middle-income renters or buyers (Owens 2006), so most new units constructed in Tribeca are rented or sold at market rates, excluding everyone but the affluent from the neighborhood. The majority of Tribeca’s middle-class

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residents are able to live there today because they are longtime residents, having bought or signed leases\textsuperscript{xiii} when real estate values were lower.

As it has gentrified and grown in popularity, Tribeca has become the victim of its own success, or, as Jane Jacobs (1961) would have more forcefully asserted, self-destructive. The local public elementary schools are constantly battling overcrowding, the neighborhood has become saturated with expensive restaurants, nail salons, and spas that cater to wealthy clientele, and skyrocketing real estate values have forced out many long-time residents and businesses. The neighborhood has become increasingly homogenous, as the residents and the kinds of businesses that can remain in Tribeca are limited to the affluent. Having for quite some time been a magnet for locally-owned businesses, commercial enterprises in Tribeca are increasingly high-end and/or national chains. Residents are far less diverse in terms of race, class, and nativity today than when rent and property were more affordable. IPN, as middle-income housing, was a particular hub of diversity, but since the complex was bought by a private company in 2004, it left the Mitchell-Lama Housing Program; newly available apartments now rent at market rate, with many of the new renters—wealthy as well as white—moving in to units vacated by middle-income people of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds\textsuperscript{xiv}.

\textsuperscript{xiii} In the case of renters, some are still protected by the city’s rent control and stabilization laws.

\textsuperscript{xiv} Many middle-class Tribecans live in Independence Plaza North. When IPN was first completed as luxury housing in 1973, it was hard to find tenants to fill the buildings because of lack of interest and amenities in the area. In order to attract tenants, the developer joined the Mitchell-Lama Housing Program, a New York State housing subsidy for middle-income renters, in 1975 (Landis 1983). Under the program, the developer received tax abatements and, over time, IPN became home to hundreds of middle-income occupants. IPN was privatized and left the Mitchell-Lama Housing program in 2004 when it was bought by Laurence Gluck. (Buildings may be removed from the program when the landlord or a new buyer pre-pays the mortgage.) This prompted fears that residents would no longer be able to afford their apartments (Vega 2002), which would be marketed as “luxury” rentals. Eventually, in the ultimate agreement on the sale, the buyer conceded to allow current tenants to apply for federal vouchers that would allow them to pay 30 percent of their income in rent. Annual rent increases as allowed in rent-stabilized apartments would be applied, while vacated units could be rented at market-rate (Chen 2004).
**Tribeca’s Residents**

According to the American Community Survey, approximately 13,687 people live in Tribeca\textsuperscript{xv}, distributed across three census tracts: tract 21, which falls within the boundaries of West Street, Barclay Street, Broadway, Chambers Street, Hudson Street, and Reade Street; tract 33 within Reade Street, Broadway, Canal Street, and Hudson Street; and tract 39, bounded by Hudson Street, Canal Street, the Hudson River, and Chambers Street and Reade Street. These tracts more or less match the commonly agreed-upon geographic boundaries of the neighborhood. Tracts 21 and 33 resemble each other closely in terms of economic and demographic characteristics. Tract 39, however, contains IPN, which still has a sizable number of middle-income tenants, making it more economically and racially diverse than the rest of the neighborhood.

Tribeca is unusual in a city as diverse as New York because of its homogeneity. Almost 97 percent of Tribecans report that they are one race and nearly 78 percent of the population identifies as non-Hispanic white. The next largest group is Asian, weighing in at 11.8 percent. Although one might assume that Asians live in Tribeca because of its proximity to Chinatown, this is just a coincidence; Tribeca’s Asian residents (half of whom are Chinese) tend to have higher human capital and socioeconomic status than residents of Chinatown, and are not socially or economically reliant on the ethnic enclave. Blacks and Latinos make up only four and 4.4 percent of Tribeca’s population, respectively, compared to 23.2 percent and 28.2 percent in New York City.

Residents and realtors tend to consider Tribeca a family-friendly neighborhood and hold its public schools in high regard, so many of the people drawn to the neighborhood are families

\textsuperscript{xv} Demographic data in this section on Tribeca’s population are drawn from the 2006-2010 Census Bureau American Community Survey 5-year estimates.
with children or planning to have children. Very young children abound in Tribeca. There are so many, in fact, that double and even triple strollers are a common sight. Young people under 15 years of age comprise about 17 percent of the residential population and 22 percent of Tribeca households have children under 18. There is a low rate of family households with children under 18 headed by single mothers (7.6 percent) and an even lower rate of families with single fathers (1.5 percent) in Tribeca. These rates are especially low when compared to New York City as a whole, where single fathers head 6.9 percent of households and single mothers head 34.4 percent.

Tribecans aged 25 and older have very high levels of educational attainment: over 99 percent of the population has earned at least a high school diploma, 87 percent a bachelor’s degree, and 44 percent a graduate or professional degree. Their labor force participation rate is also high. Seventy-eight percent of Tribecans over 16 are in the labor force, with a 4.8 percent unemployment rate. The latter figure is surprisingly low considering the economic recession that hit the financial industry, in which many Tribecans are employed, particularly hard. Tribeca residents tend to work in white-collar professional jobs, including management (27 percent), business and financial operations (13 percent), sales (17 percent), and legal occupations (10 percent). There are still a number of people who work in the arts, entertainment, and media (10 percent), and in the public sector (8 percent). Many Tribecans are also self-employed (11.4 percent, compared to 6.5 percent for the city). Conversely, Tribecans are underrepresented in services (1.9 percent), which include healthcare, protective, food, building, and personal care. A large number of Tribecans work in or near the neighborhood, as eight percent work at home and 21 percent walk to work. This kind of proximity to work is not unusual for individuals who
work in high-paying, time-consuming occupations; they save time on commuting by living near where they work (Florida 2005).

Given Tribecans’ education and occupational concentrations, it is unsurprising that many are quite wealthy. Nearly two-thirds of Tribeca households earn more than $100,000 annually, with 39 percent earning $200,000 or more, compared to 22.8 percent and 6.2 percent of all New Yorkers, respectively. Median family income is even higher, with 76 percent earning $100,000 or more and 54.5 percent earning $200,000 or more. The median household income in New York City is $50,285, while the figures for tracts 21, 33 and 39 are $203,849, $161,328, and $73,150. Average incomes are even higher, at $280,795 for all Tribeca households and $384,113 for families. It follows that Tribecans have very low rates of poverty, with 4.8 percent of individuals and 3.5 percent of families below the poverty line, compared to 19.1 percent of individuals and 16.2 percent of families in New York City as a whole.

Tribeca has a majority native-born population (80 percent, compared to 63 percent for New York City), and its immigrant residents are different from those in the rest of the city. New York City’s largest immigrant groups are from the Dominican Republic, China, Mexico, Jamaica, Guyana, Ecuador, Trinidad and Tobago, Haiti, India, and Russia, with the largest regional concentrations from Latin America and the Caribbean (52 percent), and Asia (27 percent). In contrast, Tribeca’s immigrant residents mostly come from Europe (46.5 percent) and Asia (34 percent). The largest sending countries to Tribeca are China, the United Kingdom, Germany, Canada, India, Japan, Italy, Vietnam, Greece, and Australia, regions of the world that tend to send high human capital migrants (Foner 2000). Foreign-born Tribecans are highly educated, with over 99 percent of foreign-born adults having completed high school, 74 percent holding at least a bachelor’s degree, and 41 percent having earned a graduate or professional
degree, and most fluent in English, with 88.5 percent reporting that they speak English “very well.”

Amenities

In a radical departure from the pre-1980s past, many New Yorkers today consider Tribeca to be an attractive neighborhood in which to live. Its tree-lined streets are quiet and relatively safe compared to those in other parts of the city; it is well-served by transportation, including taxi cabs, buses, and most subway lines; and it has numerous options for leisure activities. Tribeca has an abundance of galleries, theaters, boutique shops, and, especially, restaurants, for which the area is famous, many of which are well-known and attract diners from across the metropolitan area. The neighborhood is so comprehensive when it comes to necessities and amenities today that many of the wealthier residents I talked with mentioned that they rarely have to leave Tribeca to meet their everyday needs.

Since children are a particular focus in Tribeca, the area has a large and growing number of preschools, pediatricians, supplementary learning facilities, and numerous child-oriented extracurricular activities. Stroller “parking spaces” can be commonly found outside popular family-friendly restaurants, daycare centers and preschools, and even at the bookstore Barnes & Noble. Two large parks serve mainly children and families. Washington Market Park, complete with a lawn, playground, community gardening area, and basketball and tennis courts, runs along Chambers Street west of Greenwich Street, and Pier 25, a newly-reopened pier that has a playground, a miniature golf course, beach volleyball, and an artificial turf soccer field, gives locals space and options for outdoor activities. These parks, and others in the neighborhood, have active volunteer associations that host free, family-friendly events throughout the year, including concerts, holiday celebrations, and educational activities.
Adult Tribecans can also find respite in the neighborhood’s public outdoor spaces. Several small, well-tended parks dot the area, including Albert Capsouto Park and Beach Street Park in the north and Duane Park and Bogardus Garden, with a converted pedestrian plaza on adjacent Hudson Street, in the south. These small, triangular-shaped parks are ideal for people to sit and enjoy the outdoors. Additionally, Hudson River Park, which has jogging and biking lanes, basketball courts, a skateboarding park, and shaded sitting areas is part of a park that spans much of Manhattan’s west side waterfront that many Tribecans cite when they discuss aspects of their neighborhood that they particularly enjoy.

Local Culture and Identity

Tribeca has, over time, developed a distinct local culture and identity. Tribecans are members of what Richard Florida (2002) describes as the “creative class.” The creative class can be divided into two categories: the super creative core, such as artists, musicians, entertainers, architects, and engineers, and creative professionals, like doctors, lawyers, businessmen, and bankers. These individuals are highly-educated and work in occupations that require creativity, independent thinking and problem solving skills.

Members of the creative class choose their cities and neighborhoods carefully, moving specifically to places where they want to live. They value places that are diverse and open-minded, stimulate their creativity, and provide a wide range of experiences and excitement. Large cities are especially appealing to the creative class because there they can find loose-knit communities that allow for quasi-anonymity and creative freedom. The creative class is also drawn to amenities like cafés, bookstores, theaters, galleries, music venues, old architecture, and converted living spaces, all of which are abundant in Tribeca. Lower Manhattan and, specifically, Tribeca, Florida notes, is the center of the New York metropolitan area’s creative
culture and industries, so it attracts an extraordinarily large number of creative individuals to live, work, and play in the neighborhood.

Because they seek new experiences, Tribecans tend to be consumers of “ethnic” cultural foods and products, and there is no lack of international consumer goods in the neighborhood. Many restaurants featuring international cuisine line the streets, representing cultures from Argentina to Vietnam. However, few of the restaurants actually reflect the most sizable immigrant groups in New York City—the people Tribecans see every day. Instead, the variety of ethnic cuisines serves to add a cultural element to the neighborhood that the wealthy, native-born residents can consume.

Tribeca also has a large number of art galleries and boutique specialty stores. As Tribecans have more disposable income than the average New Yorker, art and material investments are popular ways to utilize that wealth, which can double as status symbols (Goffman 1951). Local galleries have been known to showcase works by international artists, and many stores sell imported items from around the world. These products are not intended for Tribecans’ practical use or as a means for them to connect with or understand the international population around them, but rather serve the purpose of adding a cultured or exotic flair, or at the very least a decorative aspect, to their homes or lifestyles.

Tribecans’ comfortable economic conditions permit them to have liberal attitudes (Florida 2002), and most identify as socially and politically progressive, and consider themselves open-minded, tolerant, and welcoming of people with backgrounds, worldviews, and lifestyles different from their own. Tribecans often note that they are more progressive and liberal compared to residents of many other similarly affluent New York City neighborhoods. Lucy, a 10-year resident of Tribeca, was surprised to learn that some caregivers who work for Upper East
Side families are required to wear uniforms. “At least they’re not wearing uniforms [here],” she said, laughing, and continued:

That would be bad. Well, they do on the Upper East Side and that’s a cultural norm there, which I don’t like. […] I wouldn’t, like, I’ve never had a nanny [for my son], I’ve never. But that’s much more to do with management, you know, and I mean it’s like… so there’s no judgment around it, it’s just that… you know, I have a cleaning woman and she doesn’t wear a uniform, either.

This, I posit, has to do not only with their creative class ideals, but also the neighborhood’s history. Since Tribeca was settled by socially liberal and politically progressive people in the arts, their political leanings and cultural capital attracted like-minded arrivals later on—albeit those who are much wealthier. To put another way, because Tribeca residents, like those in other gentrified neighborhoods (Lees, Slater, and Wyly 2008), tend to identify as politically liberal the pseudo-bohemian artist enclave was not appealing to a more conservative contingent.

Tribeca’s liberal culture was also exemplified by how Park51, an Islamic community center, was received by locals. When much of the country fiercely debated the purchase of a building several blocks north of the World Trade Center site by the organization, commonly referred to as, the “Ground Zero Mosque,”xvi Tribeca residents were overwhelmingly in support of Park51’s plan to operate there. They recognized that it was not only a Muslim worship space, of which there are several others in the neighborhood, but also a place that would, when it opened in 2011, host secular classes, art shows, and events. Although the impact of 9/11 on Tribeca was significant, most Tribecans do not associate Muslims living in New York with what happened on that day. Instead, they welcomed the institution as a cultural center that would add to the diversity, social fabric, and quality of life in their neighborhood (The Tribeca Trib 2010).

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xvi Many New Yorkers and Americans in the rest of the country were opposed to the community center because of its proximity to the World Trade Center site, citing insensitivity on the part of the Muslim organization toward victims of the attacks of September 11th, perpetrated by Muslim extremists.
Their liberal identity as creative class members can also influence Tribecans’ perception of the monetary wealth in their neighborhood. Some see displays of excessive wealth as distasteful, so wealth in Tribeca is not always readily apparent. Although outsiders can presume that the neighborhood is well-off because of its clean and cared-for condition, the proliferation of fancy restaurants and cocktail bars, immigrant caregivers of color with white babies, doormen, and the omnipresent signage for “luxury” living spaces, a lot of the wealth is hidden. The signage for high-end stores and restaurants, like the well-known restaurants Nobu and Mr. Chow, is often very small and easily missed. Windows on ground-level floors of restaurants, apartments, and even the New York Sports Club are frosted, draped by large curtains, or obscured by other means, making it hard to see into the buildings. To most residents, the wealth in the neighborhood is taken for granted, and is purposely hidden from outsiders and those not “in the know.”

Just as Tribecans tend to share a liberal identity, many also identify with their neighborhood. This is common for members of the creative class, who often identify more with the place where they live rather than their occupation (Florida 2002). One reason for this phenomenon is that there is status to be gained by association with Tribeca today; some people move to the neighborhood not just for the material perks that the neighborhood provides, but for the status that comes with being able to say that one lives in Tribeca. Mary, who has lived in Tribeca for 35 years, noticed that some Tribeca residents try to “one-up” one another in terms of how long they’ve lived in the neighborhood, explaining:

I think there's something charming about that, that people are so in love with where they live and they take a certain status from identifying with this place and saying when they moved here. It’s a thing. But then the newest layer of people— I think it doesn't matter to them when they moved here. It’s that they're here. […] I think there is a certain possessiveness.
Since association with Tribeca provides prestige, there is a tendency for residents to make claims to being part of and long-time residents of the neighborhood.

The sense of community in Tribeca is also strong, which is tied to residents’ local identity. Some Tribecans believe that the sense of community in their neighborhood is more prevalent than in other urban neighborhoods, and it is common for Tribecans to refer to the neighborhood itself as a “community.” Howard, who has lived in Tribeca for 33 years, explained:

This is a neighborhood that has a sense of itself. It has an identity, it’s small enough within a big city to give people the sense that they live in a community, particularly people who have kids and whose kids go to local schools. They really use the word community; you hear that word a lot around here. And I’m not sure whether that’s the case in a lot of other parts of New York City, where people feel they’re living in a community where they sort of feel like when they’re walking down certain streets they will be able to say hello to people they know still. It’s not something that you think of as, you know, something that’s part of New York City. And that’s, I think, that’s a real draw for this neighborhood and it’s a nice thing.

However, as I will discuss later on in Chapter 5, much of this talk of community is rhetorical, and many Tribecans do not feel that the neighborhood is a community in the sense that residents have close interpersonal relations with one another.

_Tribeca as a Brand_

Just as many Tribecans closely identify with their neighborhood because of the benefits of association, so do businesses—local and otherwise. A Yellow Pages search in June, 2012, turned up 142 businesses that utilized the word “Tribeca” in their name. This demonstrates not only the neighborhood’s strong sense of identity today, but also the desire of many businesses to fit in with and capitalize on the status afforded by a “Tribeca” identity. The Tribeca brand is also viable outside the neighborhood; there are 210 business listings with “Tribeca” in the name outside of Lower Manhattan in all five boroughs and New Jersey.
“Tribeca” has become a brand that suggests high-end quality and prestige. It has name-recognition, as Americans associate the neighborhood with its celebrity residents, celebrity-run and owned restaurants, and, of course, the Tribeca Film Festival (which, ironically, now mostly takes place outside the neighborhood). Dozens of items are marketed using the “Tribeca” name, such as an SUV made by Subaru, a men’s watch by Michael Kors, and a Gucci handbag. Beds, laptop cases, Wordpress templates, shelving units, couches, curtain rods, cell phone covers, shoes, dresses, jewelry, cigarette lighters, floor tiles, and ovens are just a sampling of such branded items, none of which have any actual relation to the neighborhood.

*Tribeca’s Workforce*

According to the U.S. Census Bureau’s Center for Economic Studies’ Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics data for 2010, there are approximately 88,994 jobs in Tribeca. The vast majority of those in Tribeca’s workforce commute to their jobs from outside the neighborhood (99.1 percent). Most workers live within a 24-mile radius (87.4 percent), and 60 percent travel less than 10 miles to get to work. Two-thirds of low-income workers, earning less than $15,000 annually, commute in to Tribeca from within 10 miles. This figure is similar to those earning less than $40,000 annually (68 percent), but is larger than for those with high incomes (more than $40,000, at 56 percent). But while low-income workers are geographically concentrated closer to Tribeca, often on public transit lines, they are also most likely to travel more than 50 miles to get to their job in the neighborhood (6 percent). High-income workers in Tribeca are more evenly spread throughout the New York metropolitan area.

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xvii Tribeca is a very popular place to live for the rich and famous. Some of Tribeca’s most well-known current and former residents include Jay-Z and Beyoncé Knowles, Robert De Niro, Justin Timberlake, Ed Burns, John F. Kennedy, Jr. and Carolyn Bessette-Kennedy, Richard Serra, Alexander Wang, Harvey Keitel, James Gandolfini and Mariah Carey. Even Dominique Strauss-Kahn, the then Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund, rented an entire townhouse on Franklin Street in which to live while he fought sexual assault charges brought against him in 2011.

xviii Available at http://onthemap.ces.census.gov/

xix This figure is likely an undercount, excluding many off-payroll jobs.
More than one-third of Tribeca’s workers earn less than $40,000 a year, and 13.1 percent earn $15,000 or less annually. The vast majority of jobs are in public administration (46 percent), as the state and municipal governments both have offices in Tribeca due to its proximity to the Civic Center. The next largest industries are finance and insurance (19.2 percent), health care and social assistance (8.2 percent), professional, scientific, and technical services (4.9 percent), accommodation and food services (4.6 percent), and retail trade (4.1 percent).

Most workers are white (61.2 percent), with 22.8 percent black, 17.9 percent Hispanic, and 13.5 percent Asian. Workers are mostly educated, with 60.7 percent having had at least some college education and 40 percent holding a bachelor’s degree or higher. Only 6.8 percent do not have a high school diploma or its equivalent. There is a slight female majority at 52.8 percent.

For all workers who earn less than $40,000 a year, the largest industries of concentration are public administration (31.26 percent), health care and social assistance (19.2 percent), accommodation and food services (9.5 percent), retail trade (8.71 percent), finance and insurance (6.8 percent), and information (5.2 percent)—in other words, service and back-office workers. These workers are more likely to be black (25.4 percent), Asian (18.2 percent), and Latino (24.3 percent) than higher-earning workers. About 42 percent have some college education or more, and 22 percent have a bachelor’s degree or higher. Thirteen percent do not have a high school diploma or its equivalent. These workers are also much more likely to be female, at 64 percent.

Low-paying services have been on the increase in Tribeca since 2002 (see Figure 4), especially in retail (which grew 140 percent between 2002 and 2010) and accommodation and
food services (a 58 percent increase). This is unsurprising given the dramatic rise in the number of high-end boutiques and restaurants in the neighborhood over the past two decades.

Figure 4: Change in personal services in Tribeca

*The Link between New Residents and Workers*

The increase in personalized services is directly related to the changes in the local residential population. Most of Tribeca’s new residents, often wealthy and white with young children, would never consider moving to a neighborhood that lacks a grocery store, as Tribeca had for a time. In order to attract and serve this population, an increase in amenities and services inevitably developed. New residents, with a great deal of disposable income, seek out high-end amenities like salons, spas, doormen, parking, and pick-up/drop-off laundry (Florida 2002). In addition, because of the high cost of living in the neighborhood, the option to be a stay-at-home mom for many Tribeca women is out of reach. As a result, they have high rates of labor force
participation and, therefore, commonly hire domestic workers to help take care of their children and their homes. As these service businesses and the need for their provision proliferated, so did the demand for people to supply such services, many of whom, in New York City, are foreign-born.

Immigrants, who now fill many of the lower-level service jobs, have always had a presence in Tribeca. Many worked in or owned the wholesale and other businesses in the neighborhood in the 19th and early 20th century, and later a large number moved into IPN as residents. But today immigrants are mainly present as service workers owing to contemporary gentrification. In Tribeca, as in similar kinds of neighborhoods elsewhere, highly-paid residents working long, sometimes odd, hours in creative and professional jobs end up being intricately connected to immigrant personal service workers, who support their consumption habits and lifestyles (Florida 2002); as the number of wealthy Tribecans rose, so, too, did the number of service workers. According to Fredrik Barth (1969), there are three different kinds of relationships two groups can have when they share the same space: they may occupy different niches, and thus exist separately and not be in competition with one another; they may compete for resources within the same space; or they may have an interdependent, or symbiotic, relationship in which they provide goods, services, or other amenities for one another. In this case, changes in one population will have an effect on the other. This third kind of relationship is that which exists between Tribeca residents and immigrant workers, as they are interdependent. So as the residential population increases, so does the number of immigrant service workers. Thus, even though most immigrants cannot afford to live in Tribeca, their

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xx According to the 2006-2010 American Community Survey 5-year estimates, 70 percent of females 16 and over in Tribeca are in the labor force, compared to 57.5 percent in New York City.
numbers have grown in the workforce, mainly in service positions where they cater to the newer, wealthier Tribeca population.

In short, the neighborhood has undergone dramatic change over a short period of time—from being virtually devoid of to, some say, being overrun with services for Tribeca residents. While long-term residents tend to acknowledge that the services have improved their quality of life in the neighborhood, some lament the loss of some of the old neighborhood’s atmosphere, despite its inconveniences. Upon reflecting on the Tribeca he moved to in 1978, Douglas noted:

We had one Chinese restaurant over here, and we had one little, I want to say bodega, but it was run by an Indian fellow, and we had a dry cleaner over here and that was it. My wife and I would have to go to Jersey to go shopping for the nearest supermarket. It was closer to go to Jersey than to find one uptown. And the nearest drugstore was [C. O.] Bigelow’s in the Village on Sixth Avenue. There was nothing down here and, you know, that was a bit of an inconvenience, but it was great. It was really nice—it was really fun. And of course everything was very inexpensive down here.

Immigrant Incorporation

As I have indicated, Tribeca was once a neighborhood that had a diverse residential population with people from varied economic backgrounds as well as nations of origin. However, as many of these residents have been priced out of the neighborhood, people of color and immigrants who were once integrated residentially are now mostly integrated through the local labor force. They no longer occupy the position of neighbors or as equals; instead they are incorporated as service workers who cater to wealthy clientele. Despite their large presence, few local businesses in Tribeca cater to the population of immigrant workers that keeps the neighborhood running.

While immigrant workers tend to cite many benefits to working in Tribeca (see Chapter 3 for a more detailed discussion), the neighborhood does little to provide for them. Bank branches lack readily available pamphlets in languages other than English. There are very few affordable
restaurants or take-out eateries in the vicinity, no foreign-language periodicals, and almost no services specifically for the immigrant population. Since services in Tribeca are geared toward wealthier consumers, immigrant workers have few options when they look for places to eat, shop for necessities, or relax after work. Even basic items, like bottled water, can be prohibitively expensive for some workers, like César, a parking attendant from Ecuador, who noted “Really, the neighborhood, I think it’s okay. I really like everything... Only, it’s expensive. I have to, yeah, that’s only [thing] that I [dislike], it’s an expensive place. You know, sometimes we don’t have water here,” as he gestured toward a water bubbler, “I have to bring a gallon of water. It’s here like three dollars. In Queens I get that [for] one dollar. That’s something like that, it’s too expensive.”

Many residents also recognize the dearth of services for service workers. Victoria, a 33-year resident, lamented:

Well, I wish that I lived in a more normal, middle-class community, which would be more affordable even to the immigrants and to the workers here. Instead, to have this vast divide between the haves and the have-nots is painful for me to see. I don’t like vast divides, and I often wonder what could this worker possibly be thinking who is serving a dish for $36 for a little piece of fish and a few potatoes.

She laughed, and went on:

What are they thinking? It’s taking them three hours to make that much money and this [customer] just ... they serve it to their children. I mean, what is this person thinking? [...] There’s only one place in all of Tribeca I think where they could go in and have a cup of coffee for a dollar. It’s not accessible to them.

Immigrant workers adapt by doing most of their shopping close to their own homes, despite the fact that many spend relatively little time in the neighborhood where they live; they sometimes bring food from home to eat, patronize less-expensive eateries that border Canal Street (if they work in northern Tribeca), and, in some cases, eat communally with coworkers in their workplaces. For example, David, an immigrant from Mexico who works in a restaurant,
and his coworkers make large amounts of Mexican and Central American food to share every day. They prepare their meal in the restaurants’ kitchen and, in the mid-afternoon when business is slow, they eat together at a large table. This allows them to simultaneously relax, bond, and save money, as they often do not have time at home to prepare meals to bring with them to work.

Schools and the Drawing of Social Boundaries

As an affluent neighborhood with prestige and coveted resources, Tribeca has become a form of defended neighborhood (Suttles 1973) as some Tribecans have found ways of maintaining boundaries (Abrahamson 1996) by excluding social outsiders who are a potential threat to their safety or, more often, status. A prime example of this is Tribecans’ defense of the local public elementary schools. Many new residents have moved to Tribeca specifically for the schools, P.S. 89, P.S. 150, and P.S. 234, whose quality is often trumpeted by realtors in the neighborhood. Student performance at these schools ranks as average or high compared to other New York City elementary schools, and the schools receive high scores in reviews of overall quality. Although some Tribeca parents send their children to private schools in Manhattan and Brooklyn, most want their children to attend one of the local public schools, which means they have to take part in the annual ritual of jockeying for a seat for their kindergarteners at the end of the summer.

The way residents define insider/outside status through the local schools demonstrates how social, like geographic, boundaries can be clear or blurry between Tribecans and others in and around the neighborhood. Tribeca and Battery Park City are demographically similar, so there are fewer social boundaries between them than there are between Tribeca and Chinatown.

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whose residents are mainly working-class immigrants. The definition of these social boundaries (as well as desire to maintain social class advantages in schooling for their children) are well-illustrated by how Tribeca parents recently responded to two different potential solutions to public school overcrowding in their district.

One proposed solution to school overcrowding for the 2010-11 school year was to send Tribeca children to P.S. 89, just across West Street in Battery Park City. Many parents complained that the Department of Education (DOE) was putting their children’s safety at risk by asking them to cross the very busy street (Glassman 2010). However, when the DOE suggested assigning some Tribeca children to P.S. 130 in Chinatown, protesting parents cited not the hazards of crossing a wide, busy street (Canal, instead of West), but concerns related to the quality of education in a school with a large number of first- and second-generation immigrant children (Hindell and Paris 2011). Were it not for a highway dividing Tribeca and Battery Park City, few Tribeca parents would oppose sending their children to Battery Park City’s P.S. 89.

Contention around the local schools is not new in Tribeca. Until 1991, non-residents who worked in Tribeca, many of whom were black public sector workers, were permitted to send their children to the local elementary schools. However, as Tribeca’s population burgeoned, both in number and wealth, residents pushed to close the schools to non-residents. As a result, the children of the local workforce were no longer given the opportunity to attend school in the neighborhood (Senft 1993). Similarly, in 1996, the local public community college, Borough of Manhattan Community College (BMCC), proposed a new elementary school for the neighborhood in which both children from Tribeca and the children of BMCC students on public assistance could attend. This would make it easier for economically disadvantaged community college students to balance the demands of school and parenting, and would also create a racially
and socioeconomically integrated elementary school. Tribecans rejected the plan because they feared sub-standard education at the school as a result of serving the children of parents receiving public assistance. In her rejection of the proposed school, the chairwoman of Community Board 1 stated that “mixing those children with local children just won’t work,” although later, in a letter to the District superintendent, she wrote, “[d]on’t accuse us of being racists” (Stamler 1997).

CONCLUSION

Over the past hundred years, Tribeca has undergone remarkable changes, from a commercial and industrial zone at the turn of the 20th century to one of New York City’s most expensive neighborhoods at the turn of the 21st. As each year passes, the residential population grows in size and wealth, and Tribecans’ taste for personal services creates a demand for an ever-increasing number of people who must commute into the neighborhood to provide them. Because, for the most part, the workers are unable to live or buy goods in Tribeca, these people, many of whom are immigrants, are incorporated into the neighborhood only as service workers.

Service workers’ unequal position within the neighborhood influences their relations with those they meet and deal with there, especially the residents they serve. The way Tribeca residents and immigrant service workers interact with the neighborhood and one another reveals, however, some surprising twists, running counter to what many might assume. Residents and workers have actually found ways to breach social barriers in unexpected ways, and often develop positive relationships and a mutual understanding of immigrants’ “place” within the neighborhood. I discuss these relationships and perceptions, and the factors that explain them, in the chapters that follow.
CHAPTER 3: TRIBECA IS BEING BOTOXED: PERCEPTIONS OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD

The jobs that immigrants have in Tribeca introduce them to an environment, class of people, and way of living that most would otherwise not normally have much familiarity or contact with in their everyday lives. In this chapter, I begin by looking at what immigrants like and dislike about Tribeca, and their opinions regarding the residents with whom they share space during their working hours. Many immigrants’ perceptions of the neighborhood are informed by the social boundaries that exist between themselves and Tribeca residents, including nativity, race, language, social class, and occupation.

Despite the many bright symbolic and social boundaries that distinguish immigrant workers and Tribeca residents from one another, I found that, for the most part, immigrants still reflect positively on the neighborhood. Indeed, those who tout the benefits of working in Tribeca far outnumber immigrants who point on the neighborhood’s economic exclusivity or other negative aspects of working there. Many immigrants feel that having the opportunity to work in Tribeca is preferable to work environments that they would find in their own neighborhoods. In fact, they gain status within their own social circles by serving Tribecans, a racially, economically, and socially privileged group of people, and, after a period of working in the neighborhood, begin to feel less distant from Tribecans and more comfortable in an affluent and white atmosphere. Yet despite immigrant workers’ constant presence in Tribeca, boundaries remain unchanged. They, instead, become less salient to immigrants as they acclimate to working in the neighborhood.

Residents’ perceptions of their own neighborhood are also part of the story. Their opinions about the neighborhood, like immigrants’, are affected by the neighborhood’s physical
structure, amenities, and resources. They are also—again, like immigrants— influenced by other people, including immigrant workers and other residents, who share the space with them. What I found is that residents’ responses to immigrant workers are complicated, and often conflicting: sometimes they are welcoming, sometimes resentful, and sometimes simply oblivious to immigrant workers’ presence, raising questions about the salience of boundaries between people with wide social distance in different contexts. Residents’ views of immigrant workers have little to do with the workers as individuals or as foreigners. Rather, what is important is immigrants’ structural function in the neighborhood as suppliers of services that residents consume. Those consumer services and the immigrants who provide them highlight for Tribeca residents the social and economic boundaries that exist among residents themselves—between the affluent and the less well-off.

**HOW IMMIGRANTS PERCEIVE TRIBECA**

The vast majority of immigrants who work in services in Tribeca do not live in the neighborhood and many lack the free time and disposable income to do much in the neighborhood aside from work. How do they, then, perceive the area? One theory would be that, since so few utilize the space for personal reasons, most do not think much about the neighborhood at all; perhaps all these workers do is arrive for work, do their jobs, and subsequently go home without spending much time assessing the neighborhood. This assumption, however, is by and large not true. In fact, immigrant workers have many opinions regarding Tribeca, based in part on their own experiences, but also on their views of the people who live there and on American cultural concepts of what constitutes a “good” neighborhood that they have adopted.
What Immigrants Like

Immigrant workers have a strong preference for Tribeca compared to other parts of the city they are familiar with, including the neighborhoods in which they live or work at another job. Immigrants like Tribeca for several reasons. To begin, they perceive it to be particularly clean. They also see it as quiet, slow paced, architecturally pleasing, and family-friendly. They appreciate the access to nature that is limited in other parts of the city, as there are more trees, (what is interpreted as) fresh air, ability to see they sky, and the Hudson River. César, a parking garage attendant from Ecuador, noted of Tribeca: “It’s [a] really quiet place. [...] It’s good, you know, I walk in the park a couple times; it’s nice and quiet. It’s really nice here. I like [it here], I like [it] lots.”

Immigrants also note that Tribeca feels safer and less crime-ridden to them than other parts of the city. Ka-chung, who goes by Kevin at work, is from Hong Kong and owns a small printing business. Although he had once been robbed in Tribeca, this did not alter his overall sense of safety in and appreciation of the neighborhood. “So far the area’s good. You know, they made [the] apartments better [by renovating old lofts], they really clean the street, it’s very nice. Overall, it’s good. The area is pretty safe,” he explained. “So far I have not had that much problem—except a couple year[s] ago when I [was] not here, someone stole a laptop early in the morning. I wasn’t here.”

Even when compared to other demographically similar neighborhoods in Manhattan, Tribeca still wins immigrants’ favor. Li, who is Chinese Malaysian, has gotten to know several

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xxii This seems to be true as ACE, a private company that reintroduces people who are homeless to the workforce, cleans the neighborhood’s sidewalks.

xxiii Several immigrants in my study use Anglicized names at work, especially those from Uzbekistan and East Asia. One informant from Colombia goes by the English translation of his name at work. While Anglicized names can serve a practical purpose of reducing confusion for Americans who are unfamiliar with names from certain, especially Eastern, cultures, the adoption of an English name is also a sign of an immigrant’s assimilation.
different neighborhoods through her work as a housekeeper. Typically, after she leaves the apartment she cleans in Tribeca, she heads to another client’s apartment on 23rd Street in Chelsea, further uptown. When she thinks about these two neighborhoods, she said, she finds that she likes Tribeca better. In Tribeca, there is more space and she likes to walk around the neighborhood when she has the time, which is, admittedly, rare. On 23rd Street, on the other hand, the neighborhood is so crowded with people, workers, and tourists on the street that she spends as little time as possible outside. The apartment she cleans in Tribeca also has the added benefit of a spectacular westerly and northerly view, which she relishes. People like me, she said, don’t always get the chance to see such a nice view.

Gary, from Panama, felt the same way when it comes to comparing the neighborhoods in which he works. He works seven days a week—five in Midtown, Manhattan as a security guard in an office building and two as a doorman in a residential building in Tribeca. For him, Tribeca is “totally different, a lot better” in terms of safety and general aesthetics than Midtown. Naresh, who is from India, agreed. He owns a small boutique in Tribeca, but until several years ago had been working in Midtown for over a decade. When he started his business, he quickly discovered that he prefers working in Tribeca:

First of all, this particular neighborhood is amazingly clean. There are very few pockets you see in New York City where you feel really comfortable walking with your child, with your family, so I do see that here, and that brings… some kind of a joy when you look at the whole family walking in the street; nobody’s bothering them or, you know, there’s no traffic. [...] I’ve been in Midtown for twelve years and I know how it is, rubbing shoulders with people when you are trying to squeeze in and just pass a block. I was on 47th [Street] and 5th [Avenue]. So yes… and, uh, yeah, very relaxed people here. It’s almost like you are in New York, but the pace kind of, like, gets controlled—I won’t say [it] slows down; it’s [a] pretty controlled pace here for people I see around.

Immigrant workers, therefore, are impressed by Tribeca’s environment and prefer it even when compared to other affluent, white Manhattan neighborhoods.
The Benefits of Working in Tribeca

Immigrant service workers also like Tribeca because of the general benefits of having a job in a wealthy and native neighborhood compared to similar positions in working class and/or immigrant enclaves. Some immigrant workers explained that, based on their own experience, the quality of work available in Tribeca is superior to that which they would find in other places in the city. In Tribeca immigrants are less likely to be working exclusively with co-ethnics, which many mentioned they don’t like. When reflecting on her work in restaurants in other parts of the city and upstate New York, Yesenia, a young Mexican woman who waits tables, mentioned in a mix of Spanish and English, “Even if you work with the same people [who] are Mexican, it’s hard to work with that people, with Mexican [people]. Sometimes when you work with your own people it’s more difficult than working with people from other countries.” When I asked her why, she said she wasn’t sure, but part of the reason Yesenia and many other immigrants prefer workplaces in which employees are more diverse is because of the drawbacks of jobs in places with high co-ethnic concentrations xxiv.

Immigrants’ pay and tips xxv are generally better in Tribeca than what they would earn in a less wealthy neighborhood. When I asked Marisol, who is from Mexico and works as a caregiver, if there were aspects of working in Tribeca that she particularly likes, pay ranked first on her list. “The salary is a little better,” she explained. In addition, “there are more places for children to play. You can work with confidence because in this place; I don’t feel like it is

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xxiv Although ethnic niches and the ethnic economy allow newly-arrived immigrants easy access to jobs and training in a culturally and linguistically familiar environment, the financial disadvantages to working in such segregated workplaces often outweigh the benefits (Catanzarite and Aguilera 2002). Even when controlling for skill, workplaces that are highly segregated by ethnicity pay employees lower wages than those that are more integrated (Catanzarite 2000).

xxv During the first few months of my fieldwork, some immigrant informants noted that their income had decreased over the past year or two because they were receiving fewer tips. This they attributed to the economic recession, which hit industries that many Tribecans work in, such as finance, particularly hard. Immigrant workers in Tribeca, therefore, experienced a trickle-down effect of the recession in the financial industry.
dangerous. It is a very safe place, and the people who you work with [other caregivers] help you.” Gavriel, or Gabe, who has worked as a barber in several locations throughout the city, noted that tips tend to be higher in Tribeca:

This area’s really good [for tips]. People have a lot of money here, so it depends on the person. Sometimes the really rich people, they don't give a lot. But average, middle class people, they give more. […] There’s people who are middle class who might make $100,000 a year, but they’ll leave $8 or $10 or $5, so it depends on the person. It’s the city, people have more money in the city. When I worked in Queens it would be a lot of immigrants also, people that don’t have much, so what are you gonna do? They’ll leave a dollar or two, but a dollar or two for them is a lot. Here people make so much money they don’t know what to do with it. Some people, they spend $200 on a haircut. Just next door we had [a] place that charged $150. So they throw it away. For their kids they spend a crazy amount of money.

For Juan (who goes by Jon at work), a Colombian who works as a parking attendant, earnings are the most important factor when it comes to job satisfaction. He prefers to work in Tribeca, he explained, because not only can he can put in the most hours, but tips are also better than what he has earned in other parts of the city.

Immigrants’ higher earnings in Tribeca can be attributed to the fact that, with the exception of most domestic work, the labor market there is by and large mainstream, rather than a part of the secondary ethnic economy, in which employees are typically compensated less for their work (Catanzarite and Aguilera 2002). Also an indicator of the mainstream positioning of most immigrants’ jobs is Tribeca’s labor market hiring practices: although the majority of my informants got their jobs through social networks, an astonishingly high proportion, 40 percent (not including entrepreneurs or family workers), obtained their jobs through applying directly or through an agencyXXVI. Employers in the mainstream labor market rely less on word-of-mouth referrals, which are common in the ethnic economy and creates concentrations of co-ethnics in

XXVI Interestingly, an unusually large number of informants who had gotten their jobs through chance application attributed their success in landing the job to luck, perhaps because they did not have any direct social network connections to the employer to serve as a reference for them.
the workplace (Waldinger and Lichter 2003). Mainstream jobs, or those in the formal economy, give immigrants more job stability and security. Most immigrants are on payroll—even some of the domestic workers—resulting in a lower turnover rate than is often found in service positions and a population of longtime workers in the neighborhood.

Tribeca Isn’t Perfect, Though

While immigrants who work in Tribeca commonly talked about things they appreciated about the neighborhood, there are several features that they did not like. The primary complaint immigrants had about Tribeca is the high cost of amenities and property. Immigrants often pointed out their inability to afford to shop, eat, or otherwise consume in the neighborhood (which I discussed previously in Chapter 2). Li noted that even though she likes Tribeca, it is generally too expensive for her so she hardly does anything there aside from work and take walks.

Entrepreneurs and their family employees laments the high cost of rent for their businesses. Lev, an Uzbek immigrant who goes by Leonard at work, is part owner of a hair salon that recently relocated from a street-level storefront to a basement location because his landlord increased his rent by nearly 300 percent. He likes Tribeca enough that he is unwilling to move his business to a less expensive area, but must wait for a new, more affordable space to become available on the street, which may never happen. Junghee, or Jenny, a Korean woman who works in her mother’s small grocery mentioned on several occasions how rent is a constant struggle and stress for her and her mother. When I asked if there were things that she disliked about Tribeca, she replied with a laugh:

It’s too expensive. The rent, only one thing, it’s too high, the rent. It’s so high. Other than that we don’t have any problem here. Rent is $40,000 [a month], pay the rent. It’s killing us. That’s why I have to work six day[s a week], 12-hour
day every day. No vacation, you have to cover up for some, save money on the labor.

The high property values thus force small business owners and their family employees to put in as much time as possible to save on costs in order to meet the high rents landlords charge. These immigrants end up paying for rent with their time.

Some immigrants who have good relationships with longtime, middle-class residents even acknowledged those residents’ struggles to stay in the neighborhood. For Anna, a Hungarian woman who owns a high-end retail store with her husband, the expense of the neighborhood is a drawback because it displaces the long-term population of residents and businesses. “Well, I don’t know much really about economics,” she said:

I just know that some landlords got very greedy, I guess, but that goes for the whole of New York—or the society nowadays—and they pushed out people who were here for a long time, and they could not afford being here, which, you know, I don’t think it was such a good thing for them.

Ka-chung is also bothered by gentrification and the out-migration of middle class residents that he has witnessed over the 16 years he has worked in Tribeca. He explained:

The area [has become] too commercialized. It’s kind of… most of the people [who] move in [here now] is kind of upper class people, and a lot of people cannot afford to stay. [They] move out because that’s bad. Yeah, when I first started the business, some of the artists I would deal with had to move out because they don’t have rent control or something like that. […] They probably move out of state, a lot of them move upstate, and in this economy it’s tough right now for everyone.

Through his contact with clients in his printing business, he has learned about residents’ problems affording housing and amenities in Tribeca as it gentrifies, and he sympathizes with their difficulties.

The second most common complaint among immigrant workers has little to do with Tribeca itself, but simply getting there. Because nearly all service workers in Tribeca must commute from more affordable areas elsewhere in the city and metropolitan area, immigrants—
like the majority of mass-transit-using New Yorkers—sometimes have problems getting to work. Although the neighborhood is served by more than half of the subway lines in the New York City system, the New Jersey PATH train, and local and express buses, immigrants commonly noted that their commutes can be particularly trying when the mass transit system fails to function properly. When I asked if there was anything she disliked about working in Tribeca, Laura, a Mexican caregiver who commutes to Tribeca from Flatbush, Brooklyn, responded, “The train. The train is, like, the worst sometimes when it’s really crazy, but other than that, everything’s good [here].”

EXPLAINING IMMIGRANTS’ PERCEPTIONS

Tribeca’s Status

In New York City, Tribeca is widely recognized as a well-off and desirable neighborhood that is largely white, native-born, expensive, and privileged. Some New Yorkers even know about the dozens of celebrities who call Tribeca home (for at least some of their time). These attributes are not lost on immigrants who work in the neighborhood. They know about the wealthy and well-known people who live in the neighborhood, the destination restaurants, and the perceived quality of the public schools that so many rich, white parents desperately covet. Immigrants learn that Tribeca carries with it prestige and, for them, their affiliation with it allows them to claim a little bit of that status. Their ability to be involved in an environment, from which they would otherwise be excluded, gives them a sense of pride.

Alejandra, who is from Mexico and works as a housekeeper for several residents in Tribeca, gained status in the eyes of her English instructor and fellow language learners when they found out that she works in Tribeca:

It’s hard. If I had another job I would take it, but I like the place [neighborhood]. And my teacher asked me ‘Do you work in Tribeca?’ ‘Yes,’ [I replied] ‘Oh my
God, that is a nice place,’ she told me. Yes, it’s a nice place. We saw in the news, I don’t know which article, we saw an article about Tribeca and we comment[ed on] in the [English] classroom about that, and I remember [I said], ‘Oh, I work there, I work in Tribeca.’ ‘Oh, you work there?’ ‘I work there.’ It’s a nice place for me. It’s a good place for work here.

Although she would like to have another, less physically taxing job, the fact that she works in such a well-regarded neighborhood is significant to her and partly offsets her desire to be working in a better job. The recognition that she gets from the people she knows because of her association with the neighborhood is an added, informal benefit.

Immigrants aren’t the only people who feel they can gain status in Tribeca through their affiliation with the neighborhood. Certainly, one of the reasons why some new residents are attracted to the neighborhood is because of the status it affords. Immigrants, themselves, are aware of this. Bill, who is from Ireland and works in a pub, explained:

Well, right now Tribeca is probably the most desirable place to live. There are people who have actually moved from uptown and midtown Manhattan and from very exclusive areas who have moved down here because they like to live down here. And also, even though the rents are high, at that time they were less than they were up there on 57th Street and 5th Avenue. And also the schools. It is desirable, very much so. And the schools down here, [P.S.] 234 and, of course, you’ve got Stuyvesant High.

Tribeca’s status is one of the perks that makes the exorbitant rents and mortgages and uncertainty about getting one’s child into the local public schools worth it for new arrivals.

Longtime residents, on the other hand, are not impressed by the fact that Tribeca has prestige, and do not see themselves benefitting from it. In fact, many express the sentiment that the neighborhood’s high profile is actually a hindrance for them as it has increased their cost of living. Those who moved to Tribeca prior to the mid-1980s were drawn to the neighborhood precisely because it was unknown and unpopular, and gave them an affordable and quiet space in which to work and live. Victoria, who moved to Tribeca in the late 1970s recalled:
At that time it was not a desirable place to live, and they had built some high-rise buildings here maybe a few years earlier and they were unable to rent apartments in the buildings. So the government stepped in and turned them into middle-income housing. [...] [My husband] and I, he’s now my husband, he was not at the time, we applied to move into these apartments only because the rent was cheap, since it was middle income housing. [...] We got a call and after a very short time, maybe one year, and we moved in. We were very lucky. But our friends said to us ‘Are you crazy? Moving to that area? There’s nothing there. Why would you want to move there? It’s so desolate.’ And it was very desolate.

The fact that Tribeca was not a prestigious place to live was the draw for longtime residents when they were new arrivals themselves.

_Favoring Whiteness and Wealth_

Cities, neighborhoods, and other geographic spaces often become associated with the people who inhabit them (Abrahamson 1996) and influence how people perceive them (Rich 2009), and much of the reason immigrants think so highly of Tribeca has to do with its demographic makeup in terms of race, class, and nativity. Immigrants note that Tribecans are “educated” and, thus, are perceived as being easier and more pleasant to serve than people who are not. Sajjad, who earned a Bachelor’s degree in his native Pakistan, works in a restaurant. Emphasizing the fact that his coworkers are “illiterate,” or have low levels of formal education, he described them as hypocrites, two-faced, and backstabbing. In contrast, he held local residents in high regard because they are “educated.” Tribeca is the best area, he said, because of the people who are there; these are people who work in offices. They are educated, in his view, so he perceives them as having a better attitude and behavior than the people with whom he works. Tribecans are responsible, he explained, and people with responsibility are much more mature than those without. Some immigrants I spoke with even claimed that Tribecans are friendlier than residents of their own neighborhoods. Laura had this impression: “It’s a good neighborhood; it’s very calm, quiet, nice. [...] Everybody seems so nice. I don’t know about in other neighborhoods, but here everybody seems so nice.”
Although Tribeca residents are overwhelmingly white, there are pockets of the neighborhood in which racial minorities are the numerical majority on the street. One of the most prevalent of these is the blocks just south of Canal Street. Several immigrants stated that they are wary of the West African street vendors who tend to congregate on Church and Lispenard streets to rest, eat, and pray. Rosaria, a woman from Italy who works in a high-end salon washing clients’ hair, said that the African immigrants made her feel nervous when she went to purchase gifts on Canal Street for Christmas:

And, you know, Tribeca is close to Chinatown, and I saw last month it’s no more Chinese. All over black people. It’s Africantown, not Chinatown. For Christmas I went there because I look for something [to buy for gifts]. I said, ‘Where is [the] Chinese people?’ No more China people. It’s Africantown. Over there in Chinatown is—I feel a little bit scared.

Because the work Africans do peddling items, many of them sold illegally, is in the street, the Africans are seen as inhabiting a social position below immigrants in “legitimate” jobs. Their race, however, is also a significant factor in the negative comments since none of the immigrants I talked with mentioned the East Asian street vendors who predominate on Canal Street.

Some entrepreneurs and family employees expressed concern that the African vendors, who are outside, highly visible, and hang out near their establishments, make customers feel uncomfortable and unsafe and discourage them from coming into their business. Gavriel, who works for his father, noted:

For the most part it’s quiet [here]. Before it used to be worse, like, all these African guys [street vendors], they’d be smoking weed by the door, but now it’s pretty good. They closed down a lot of places on Canal, all the illegal handbags and stuff, so before on this whole block everybody would come here to hide from the cops, and it kind of mess[ed] up the business also. So but now they’ve got it under control. […] But if they’re by here and they’re smoking weed and other things, people are going to get scared; they’ll wait to come back later.

Contact between the immigrants I spoke with and the street vendors, though, was minimal or non-existent, so their concerns about safety were partly based on racial prejudice as well as, for
entrepreneurs and family workers, fears that the presence of vendors would be bad for their own businesses. None of my immigrant informants ever expressed a common identity with the African vendors as immigrants who were working just as hard as they were in order to make a living and support their families.

If many immigrants prefer Tribeca to other wealthy, white neighborhoods in New York City, it follows that they also like it more than the neighborhoods they live in. They tend to have much lower opinions of their own neighborhoods, which have much larger immigrant, racial/ethnic minority, and working class populations than Tribeca. Alejandra thought that residents of Corona, Queens, where she lives, are particularly abrasive when compared to Tribecans:

Queens, especially in Queens, it’s so, the people is—some of them, not at all—they are angry, mad. They are [have]… bad manners. If you want something, they respond like mad, you know, with not good manners. That’s what I notice here is the difference from Queens. When I say good morning, good afternoon they [people in the neighborhood] answer me.

Some immigrant workers have strong concerns about crime, drugs, and disorder in their neighborhoods, such as Cristian, a building maintenance worker who, like Alejandra, is from Mexico and lives in Corona. His main concern about Corona is the danger of violence he believes characterizes the area, as he explained using a mix of Spanish and English:

For me, [Tribeca] is better because Corona is more… well, you hear about dangerous assaults. […] Every night there are people drunk, with guns, you know? Over there, in Corona it is like that. There are parts, there are areas where there aren’t police, so Corona is more dangerous. You hear that it is dangerous because people sell drugs, people have guns, drink, everybody is all crazy. Here [in Tribeca], no. No, truthfully, I’ve been here at night until two, one [in the morning], ten, eleven at night and I haven’t seen that. I haven’t seen anyone drunk in the street, telling, saying ‘blah, blah, blah,’ or on drugs. No. There in Corona there are people smoking marijuana in the street, doing cocaine, drink in the street, they don’t care, you know? The people over there. But this is a problem over there. But never you don’t talk to them, you just keep going straight because if you talk to them it’s a problem for you because they’ll attack you.
Cristian’s approach to dealing with his neighbors? “Leave them alone,” he advised with a chuckle.

Immigrants have low regard for other neighborhoods that have large working class and/or minority populations. Carolina, a Mexican woman who works as a caregiver for children whose mother lives in Tribeca and father in the East Village, spends time in both neighborhoods. She has a clear preference for Tribeca, and will even bring the children there on days when they are at the father’s residence:

It’s different [in the East Village]. Over there it’s more Spanish people and black, and I don’t like it. Too much like the Bronx, where I live. Last week I went on Thursday to work over there, but I take the train I come here [to Tribeca with the children]. I bring them [to Tribeca] to go to park. It’s better. […] I love the neighborhood. It’s more better here.

Despite their own nativity, social class, and, for many, racial or ethnic minority status, many immigrants have adopted a preference for and privileging of rich, white, native people (like many Tribeca residents), and vilification of those who are foreign-born, minorities, or working class. Tribeca, therefore, is considered “better” and Corona or the East Village “worse” partly because of the people who live in each respective place.

Being a “Natural” Part of the Local Structure

Immigrants also like working in Tribeca because, even though they differ from residents in terms of socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and, often, race, they feel accepted in the neighborhood. In Tribeca, immigrants have become a “normal” feature of the social landscape—as indeed they have in New York City as a whole, where immigrants now represent more than a third of the populationxxvii. In upscale, white Manhattan neighborhoods, immigrants typically perform most of the service work. In Tribeca, for service workers to be foreign-born is

xxvii In 2010, 37 percent of New York City’s population was foreign-born; immigrants and their U.S.-born children were about 55 percent put together (Lobo and Salvo 2013).
the norm, which explains why so many residents claimed that they never even noticed how most
of those working around them are immigrants. When I asked Chelsea, a 21-year-old who grew
up in Tribeca, what she thought other Tribecans think about immigrants who work in the
neighborhood, she told me:

I don’t think that they have an opinion [about the immigrant workers]. Like, I
don’t think that it occurs to them [that they’re immigrant]. I think that they, you
know, go to the deli and they order their sandwiches. I don’t think—I’m starting
to realize that I never, at least I don’t, think about that sort of thing. I really, I
don’t think occurs to people.

This question led her to compare New York, with its heavily foreign-born workforce, to other
places where she had spent a considerable amount of time:

I guess it’s interesting because now that I think about, it’s like in Kansas you
don’t see a lot of immigrants working behind counters or working, like, you
know… Actually that’s weird. I never thought about that. But you just don’t see
that population, really. And in [Norwich,] England I didn’t really see that, either.
But that’s true, it literally never occurred to me that when I’m in Kansas it’s like
you don’t see immigrants.

For Tribecans, and New Yorkers in general, immigrants are the default workers when it comes to
service jobs. In some cases, customers and clients do not even notice the person who is
performing the work.

Tribecans have become accustomed to, and therefore do not tend to question, or even
notice, the hierarchies of nativity, language, and race that are inherent to service work in New
York City. They are, however, used to seeing immigrants occupying specific service positions in
Tribeca; residents commonly mentioned Latino restaurant workers, West Indian or East Asian
caregivers, and Korean grocers.

Because residents are so used to sharing space in Tribeca with immigrants who work
there, immigrants feel like their presence, despite their foreignness in a native neighborhood, is
accepted. Chana, a Russian woman who owns a barbershop with her husband, doesn’t feel as
though, as an immigrant, she stands out in Tribeca. “I am immigrant,” she told me, “but [in Tribeca] nobody cares.” Moreover, she likes being in Tribeca more than her own neighborhood, Rego Park, in Queens, because it makes her feel like she is living in the United States, rather than an ethnic enclave. Residents in Rego Park, she said, are all Russian like her, so she doesn’t feel like she is in America when she is there. Tribeca, on the other hand, feels more like America to her because there is a mix of immigrants and native-born Americans.

WHAT RESIDENTS THINK OF TRIBECA

Residents new and old tend to cite attributes similar to those immigrants mention when it comes to what they like about Tribeca. Proximity to the river, safety, quiet, and convenience to transportation and goods and services they need all ranked high on residents’ lists. But as Tribeca changes, so have residents’ reflections on the neighborhood—and the things they used to like about it are often no longer there. Of course, all neighborhoods constantly evolve, but in Tribeca this process has been occurring at a more rapid pace and in more extreme ways than in many—perhaps most—New York City neighborhoods. As I will discuss further in Chapter 5, immigrant workers often welcome the changes they witness in Tribeca because they help give them a sense of belonging and place in the neighborhood. Residents, in comparison, are divided when it comes to the costs and benefits of local change.

This divide aligns with residents’ length of tenure in the neighborhood. For one, longtime residents have seen more drastic change than those who have only moved to the neighborhood within the past ten or 20 years. Also, as discussed more in-depth in Chapter 2, longtime residents and more recent arrivals were drawn to Tribeca for different reasons. Longtime residents were interested less in restaurants, parks, schools, luxury amenities, and proximity to the Financial District than affordable live/work space in a quiet, near-forgotten part
of the city. The quiet, near-forgotten Tribeca that attracted longtime residents is largely gone.

Annette, who has lived in Tribeca with her husband for 27 years, lamented:

I’m not part of what a lot of other people find attractive [about Tribeca]. I mean, when I tell people that I live here, they’re like, ‘Oh wow, so many great restaurants!’ And it’s like [I think], Yeah, but I probably don’t go to any of them because I still miss the old ones that have disappeared.

Longtime residents tend to view changes in the neighborhood more negatively than recent arrivals—as a loss of a place and community. They commonly expressed nostalgia for the neighborhood they once knew and liked living in.

This is not to say that newer residents don’t notice changes that occur in Tribeca—they do; they are just less concerned or dismayed about the neighborhood’s evolution. Lucy, for example, who has lived in Tribeca for ten years, noted:

You can’t… You can’t stop progress. I mean in a way, the way I describe Tribeca right now, it’s like an area that’s being botoxed. It’s being smoothed out and prettified and beautified but not necessarily become more interesting. And, um, I like the 99 cent stores and they’re all gone, like, there’s none of them left. And I live on Chambers, which is probably the most still kind of… least exclusive street in Tribeca in that kind of way, and I like that it feels a bit earthier, but even that’s not much. I mean, one by one those kind of quirky, weird shops are closing and disappearing and being replaced with things that are beautiful. It’s not… It’s a stupid thing to complain about.

She laughed, and continued, “It was grittier [when I first moved here]. Yeah, there’s no question. I mean it was. You could see it. It’s definitely become wealthier. There’s no question. It’s a wealthier neighborhood than when we moved in.”

A more common response to local change by residents who arrived after the 1980s is that it should be accepted and taken in stride. According to these residents, change is inevitable, natural, and organic, and neither good nor bad. Michelle, who bought her loft in the 1990s, reasoned:

I mean, there’s always your characters, the people, and they want to keep the neighborhood the same as it was 50 years ago and… I had an old friend tell me
long ago ‘Change is change.’ I just kind of watch it happen. It’s fascinating to me. It’s a bummer for many people if they can’t afford it anymore. You know, on the other hand, people develop things, it provides jobs, there’s always kind of this give and take. […] So there is this cycle that just always kind of happens and I guess the ideal state is if it stays somewhat balanced and doesn’t tip too far. Am I angry that there’s Wall Street people making way too much money? Does Kenneth Lay need 20 houses? Absolutely not. I mean, you know that, to me, is gross wealth. […] You know, the artists and musicians, they’ll go find a new neighborhood and they’ll make that great, and then unfortunately the yuppies will move in there with their kids and their Dockers and their docksides and ruin that neighborhood, too. I mean, I get it, but along with, you know, the artists and the musician and their mind set, because I’m a painter and I understand it, you know, there’s a great sense to pioneering and finding a find. So artists wouldn’t be happy if they weren’t doing whatever they’re doing, whatever that is, creating their new boundaries and stuff and finding those new neighborhoods. And if that’s [means] leaving New York City and making Austin, Texas what it is now, you know, that’s what they do and that’s what they love to do. […] So as much as they hate the yuppies or the Wall Street people, they’re just as judgmental as maybe the Wall Street people are about the pain-in-the-butt person who won’t give up their apartment. It’s all crazy, so I just tend to you know wander along and look at it kind of in the big picture as a big story.

If newer residents understand that they are a part of ongoing change in the neighborhood, they have not witnessed the drastic shifts that took place in the years before they arrived. To them, the neighborhood changes have been a slow evolution, not a drastic transformation, leading them to feel less deeply bothered by the changes they have witnessed than longtime residents.

The most dramatic of all of the changes in Tribeca has been the increase in the wealth of the residents. Regardless of their economic position, longtime residents commonly called attention to this change when discussing the neighborhood. Carolyn, for example, recounted a story of an experience her daughter had shopping at a local home goods boutique:

My older daughter came into town and she went in there [to the boutique] and they had a little children’s area and she saw two really cute pillowcases and they had embroidery on them. They were probably from India, […] and so she said, ‘Oh these are so cute.’ She was redoing one of the kids’ rooms and she said [to herself] ‘These will be really nice, so I’ll just get the sheets from L.L. Bean or whatever but I’ll get these really neat-looking pillowcases. They’ll be really pretty.’ […] So she takes these two pillowcases up to the counter and the woman starts chatting and she said, ‘And that will be $430.’ My daughter thought they were $22. She misread the label.
Carolyn laughed at this mistake, “They were $220 each. She said, ‘This will be $430, with the discount,’ and my daughter said, ‘Oh gosh, this is really embarrassing,’ she said, ‘I didn’t... how much are they? [...] I thought they were 2-2 [$22 each].’”

The rapid shift to wealth and the concentration of the rich and privileged in Tribeca have also led some longtime residents to think about inequality not only in terms of the difficulty they face in living in a gentrified neighborhood, but about how they live in such an advantaged area compared to so many others in the city. They compared Tribeca to disadvantaged neighborhoods in the city, and how Tribeca’s amenities are more abundant and of better quality than those in other places, often insinuating that this is unfair. Paul, a 15-year resident, recalled a conversation he had with a young Latino man from upper Manhattan’s Washington Heights who he met while out in Tribeca. The young man told him that he came to Tribeca simply because it is a nice place to be:

There are neighborhoods with the guns shooting and the violence, and this place [Tribeca] is extremely safe. Especially, if you read the local newspapers they report on local crime and it’s [got a] phenomenally low amount of crime. Unbelievable. It’s wonderful. He said it [Tribeca] was a very lovely, peaceful place to come to. I guess where he lives in Washington Heights, you know, there’s nowhere to sit, and gun shots [are] going off.

Douglas, who has lived in Tribeca for 33 years, made a similar comparison to a neighborhood in Brooklyn:

If you ever wanted to see inequality go down to East New York and places like that and then come here [to Tribeca], and you’ve got to shake your head. It’s too much. I don’t know how people come from there and work here and not think [to themselves, I’d like to kill all those people.]

He laughed, and continued:

Really, I just—it’s hard, that’s why a lot of them feel so totally disenfranchised that they don’t vote. They don’t really want to take part in anything as far as the city [goes] because they feel like they’ve been totally neglected. The first teachers that get cut, you know that it’s going to be in their neighborhood. The first firehouses to get closed? Bang[, it’s theirs]. Although they wanted to close
one here, and of course everybody was in an uproar so they didn’t close it. But guaranteed the one on Jamaica Avenue, they closed that sucker. They didn’t think twice about it. What are they going to do? Lose a few more houses down there? Who cares! It’s too bad. It really is. And it’s really a shame. I would hope that we would reach a point someday where we’ll look back and say this was an atrocity that we set up these economic ghettos that are absolutely horrendous. […] That’s the inequality.

Even if they dislike the changes and gentrification that Tribeca has undergone, longtime residents know that they are still advantaged in living in such a privileged place.

IMMIGRANTS AS SYMBOLS

A final issue concerns residents’ perceptions of immigrants who work in Tribeca, which are often conflicting. On the one hand, residents often do not even notice that the majority of service workers in the neighborhood are immigrants, or think about them as being foreign-born. On the other hand, as I discuss in Chapter 5, residents like having immigrants working in the neighborhood because they make Tribeca more diverse. To complicate matters further, some residents, especially those who are middle class, resent the presence of immigrant service workers in the neighborhood, who are a reminder of their own increasing economic exclusion in the midst of a gentrified neighborhood and growth of personal services for very affluent consumers. To put it another way, for some residents immigrants are symbolic of the changes that have occurred in Tribeca and the shift to a neighborhood that has a declining middle, and even upper-middle, class and more and more extremely wealthy individuals and families.

Howard, a 33-year resident, reflected on how the neighborhood’s residential change has created a new hyper-local labor market that places the very wealthy in close proximity with the working class. He explained:

I think that it’s … one is probably more aware, being in a neighborhood that has a very wealthy population, I think one is more aware of the divide between the residential population and those who serve that population. I mean, you can have a much more kind of even upper middle class, you know, residential population like in Queens somewhere where you still have immigrants […] who work in
service-level positions, but you don’t really see that kind of extremes—not that the immigrants are necessarily poor, I’m not equating them with poverty, I’m more equating them with the kind of work they do, the amount of hard, on-your-feet kinds of work that they do versus you know, moving money around and making more money in five minutes than these people make in a year. So, I just think I’m sort of more keenly aware of that kind of, those two extremes.

Most residents are not as conscious as Howard of the connection between the increase in the affluent residential population and the growth in personal services (and, thus, immigrant service workers) in the neighborhood. The vast majority of residents do, however, notice—and complain about—the growing proliferation of nail salons, boutiques, and fine dining establishments. Albert, who has lived in Tribeca for 27 years, admitted that, as a man, perhaps he doesn’t understand the potential importance of beauty establishments to those who patronize them. Nonetheless, he feels as though there is little need for so many nail salons:

There used to be a lot more hardware stores and small boutiques, pet stores and stuff, affordable things, and now there are nail [salon]s. There are more nail spas in this neighborhood. I don’t know, how many women need nails? Just file them. I know, [I sound like a] typical male sexist idiot. File your nails, polish them. What is this? Putting your feet up with cotton in between your toes. So many [nail salons], one after another after another.

Michelle, while less bothered by the number of nail salons, echoed Albert’s sentiment when it comes to luxury personal services. “I think the biggest change that I saw in the past years since I’ve lived here is the number of skincare places and spas to get botox done or, you know, any kind of treatments,” she observed. “So it’s become kind of a tony kind of neighborhood, I guess.”

It is not the immigrant workers, themselves, that longtime residents dislike, but the service businesses in which they work. Yet even more so, they dislike demand for the services that has led to the increase in service establishments and workers in the neighborhood. Together, the services, businesses, and people who work in them are symbolic of Tribeca’s gentrification and the particular residents who have fueled that process.
Outsourced domestic childcare arouses particularly strong feelings among many (especially longtime) Tribeca residents, in part because it symbolizes the wealth of the newcomers, and also because most have grown (or no) children. Tribeca families with young children rely heavily upon caregivers. Often both parents are working—sometimes just to be able to afford to live in the neighborhood—and affluent families, even those in which the mother is not working, have the resources to employ caregivers. Lucy observed:

[Tribeca is] becoming wealthier, and it’s becoming, part of the wealth is, [while] there are more women who don’t work, there are a lot of two-parent working families, so there’s more of a nanny culture, which wasn’t so big when I came here in the first instance.

Caregivers are a specifically targeted group, commonly cited when residents talk about their unease with the direction of the neighborhood’s change because they are so highly visible in the neighborhood (Brown 2011). Most caregivers spend a good part of their day outside their employer’s home (which I explain in Chapter 4), so they are seen everywhere in the neighborhood: on the street, in parks, and in establishments that cater to children. The fact that caregivers in Tribeca are usually racial/ethnic minorities and nearly always take care of white children makes them even more visible (Brown 2011). Karen, who has been in Tribeca for 18 years, laughed when she recalled her mother’s assumption that the women of color she saw in Washington Market Park were local residents:

When my daughter was younger […] we would go into the park sometimes. It was really quite horrifying to go into the park and there would be all these black women sitting there taking care of these white children. And I remember going in there with my mom […] was saying ‘Oh yeah, look at all these black people here, isn’t that nice?’ I said, ‘Ma, they’re all maids and nannies.’

To many residents, caregivers are symbolic of what they interpret as wealthier residents’ unwillingness to raise and take responsibility for their own children. This sentiment was expressed by residents regardless of tenure in the neighborhood, whether or not they had
children, or how old the children were. The views of Evelyn, who has lived in Tribeca for 35 years, were common:

Kids are raised by their nannies. So that’s different [from when I first moved here]. They’re everywhere. I mean, that’s because it takes two working people, well, that has a good side, that means the women are working and they’re doing what they want to do, but there’s something… Some of it seems like there’s never a parent around. You know, all I see is nannies. And every once in a while I see a woman that I know is a parent, and I wonder if she feels judged or funny or, like, who is she socializing with?

The prospect of wealthy residents neglecting their parenting duties upset Neil, a 20-year resident:

Why have children that you’re going to turn over eight hours to somebody else? It’s like how I’m baffled by people who carry their children around in those plastic baskets. Put them on your shoulder, they’re humans. Love them. I’m baffled sometimes by the values that the people bring in [to Tribeca]. The parents are in one of those really high-end coffee shops or they’re at [Le] Pain Quotidien having lunch and spending three-and-a-half dollars for a cup of coffee, or being pampered at one of the many spas, or playing golf, or… I don’t know what the hell they’re doing, but I’m so sorry for them—or for their kids. Actually I am sorry for them because their kids are going to get to be 20 years old and they’re going to want to have a great relationship with their kids and their kids won’t know who they hell they are. […] But absolutely, I think that the proportion of nannies to actual parents has grown. […] I don’t know them and I don’t know what they do, but it almost seems like there is something more important that they have to be doing: pampering themselves, or taking care of… there’s something that’s more important than taking care of their children. Or you know, god help them, more rewarding.

When I asked if he could change anything about Tribeca what it would be, Michael, a 10-year resident, stated:

This is going to sound terrible: the nannies. I’d get rid of the nannies. For several reasons: one, there is just too many of them. […] So I’ve been to the park during the middle of the week: 90 percent nannies. Understandable. Saturday, Sunday, 50 percent nannies still. That’s the part that drives me nuts.

Michael moved his finger in circles around the side of his head, indicating how crazy this makes him feel.

So it’s not so much the nannies, it’s what it symbolizes, which is if you’re having a child it’s, like, the biggest job you’ll ever have in your whole life. Ever. It’s an important job. Don’t screw it up, and don’t give the job to [someone else]. You
know the old expression, if you want it done right do it yourself? Well, your kid
is your job. You can’t give it to somebody else to do. [...] So it’s not really the
nannies, it’s the, what it symbolizes. [...] It’s a privilege, it’s a privilege to have
a child. It’s a huge responsibility, and it’s a privilege. And if you have it, you
have to take it really, really, really seriously. No matter how good a nanny is,
they’re never going to take as good care of your child as you. Period, full stop. It
won’t happen. Unless, of course, you’re a really shitty parent.

Residents tend to be upset by the idea that their neighbors seem to be disinterested in
spending time with their own children, and often wonder what the parents are doing while the
caregivers are raising their kids. Residents I spoke with who had never employed a caregiver
were rather proud that they hadn’t, and expressed the importance of raising their children
themselves.

Criticism is easy for residents who have little or no contact with caregivers and thus do
not have the opportunity to get to know them. Paul, for example, often passes by Washington
Market Park, where many caregivers congregate with their charges, and does not like some of
what he sees:

As a psychologist I’m particularly tuned into child-rearing stuff, and some of the
things that I see what the nannies do to the children do upset me. Jerking them,
screaming at them. Being a big-time family man, it’s hard for me to watch. Talk
to them quietly and with patience. [...] I’m very opposed to violent nannies that
scream and yell and get physical. They’re my biggest objection. It’s the manner
[in which they raise the child], when they scream at kids.

Residents judge and critique caregivers from a distance, so in Tribeca, as elsewhere where
caregivers are prevalent (see also Brown 2011), caregivers are under constant scrutiny by local
residents. Negative comments about caregivers and disapproval of how they look after local
children, therefore, come from residents who have only seen, but do not know, caregivers in the
neighborhood.

As for residents who actually employ, have employed, or personally know caregivers
who work in the neighborhood, they usually have little, if anything, bad to say about them as
individuals. Carolyn described two women she had gotten to know who work for families in her building, and the personal struggles they face raising their own children in New York and as transnational mothers:

In terms of service workers, I know some people, like Malea who is the caregiver for this little boy. It’s interesting because if the service, people in service work, like that basic level of working for families, if they have children, they have the same concerns that the people they work for have. Because I know she [Malea] recently told me that her daughter’s going from 5th grade in their neighborhood in Queens in a public school, which I think sounds like it was pretty good, to Catholic school, and I think it’s not a religious thing. It’s […] … [because the public schools] might get a little rougher, or they’re bigger or whatever the reason is. And so her little girl is going to Catholic school next year. And Raissa, […] who’s from Côte d’Ivoire, she’s African, and the family she worked for originally when she came here, they wanted someone who could speak French, and in Côte d’Ivoire people speak French, but she also had very good English. But she left her daughter behind to be raised by her mother. So there’s all kinds of personal issues that service workers face that probably their wealthier clientele don’t necessarily face issues [like] ‘Am I going to be with my family, or I’m leaving my family to do this job so I can send money.’

Most Tribecans, in short, are aware that what they see as the “nanny problem” has little to do with the caregivers themselves, but with the demand for their labor.

CONCLUSION

Although both residents and immigrant workers in Tribeca tend to agree that certain aspects of the neighborhood are pleasant, positive, or desirable, including its location, comparative safety, and outdoor space, from there perspectives and opinions on Tribeca diverge. Much of this has to do with the kinds of boundaries that exist between residents and immigrants, as well as among residents, in the neighborhood, and which are most important—or apparent—to them.

The boundary of social class is most commonly felt by immigrant workers, as it is difficult for them to consume or, in the case of entrepreneurs and their family workers, pay rent in the neighborhood the way (they presume) most residents can. The reality that the
neighborhood is increasingly expensive and economically exclusive creates perhaps the brightest boundary in Tribeca, and cannot be overlooked for immigrants who earn low wages and/or own a small business.

For residents, the boundaries that divide them from immigrants—in terms of national origin, culture, and ethnoracial status—are typically less important. For them, the contact that they are accustomed to having with immigrant workers from a broad range of countries on a daily basis becomes routine and normal. Indeed, residents tend not to think explicitly about the fact that the people who serve them are typically foreign-born and/or racial/ethnic minorities, as immigrants are so commonly found in, and have come to be associated with, service jobs in New York City.

This reduces the salience of the nativity boundary for immigrants, many of whom—though not all, as will be discussed in Chapter 4—do not feel as though they stand out as foreign-born in this predominantly native neighborhood. Despite the racial and socioeconomic makeup of the residential population, this allows immigrants to view their opportunity to work in Tribeca as a benefit; although they remain on the other side of the boundary of privilege, they earn both status and higher wages through association with and working in a neighborhood that is predominantly white, affluent, native. Indeed, immigrant workers “try to align themselves” with Tribecans “in an attempt to gain recognition, power, or access to resources,” which is precisely part of the strategic process of forming boundaries (Wimmer 2013:44).

The boundary most significant to residents is in fact that which divides them from fellow Tribecans. Because of the neighborhood’s rapid gentrification over the period of a single generation, residents with wildly different incomes, lifestyles, and consumer preferences often feel as though they have little, if anything, in common with one another. While immigrants who
work in Tribeca are largely oblivious to this internal divide, the socioeconomic boundary dividing residents is strongly felt by residents, and influences both residents’ interactions with local immigrant workers, and the way they define the in-group/out-group boundaries of the local community (topics I will discuss in chapters 4 and 5).

The boundaries between residents also shape their perceptions of immigrant workers. For middle-class residents, and even some who are well-off themselves, immigrants who work in jobs that service the newer, wealthier segment of the neighborhood’s population have come to be associated with the lifestyles of the newer “gentrifiers.” Highly visible immigrant workers, especially caregivers, whose clientele are affluent consumers are seen by many residents as having become symbolic of the neighborhood’s change—and, we can also say, of boundaries between residents in different social classes. So the occupational position immigrants have in Tribeca is a boundary that is just as significant as race, nativity, class, or language. The service job not only divides immigrant workers from residents in the ordinary client/service provider way, which I will discuss in the following chapter, but the presence of the service job in Tribeca highlights for residents the boundaries that exist amongst themselves.
CHAPTER 4: THE HAND HAS FIVE FINGERS, EVERY ONE IS DIFFERENT:

INTERACTIONS

Social and symbolic boundaries are key elements of intergroup interaction, as they play a role in shaping the kind of contact that takes place between individuals (Gramling and Forsyth 1987; Ruddick 1996; van Tubergen, Maas, and Flap 2004). Yet while boundaries shape interaction, intergroup contact can also play a significant role in changing, or even minimizing the perception of, them (Jacobs 1961). Indeed, interpersonal contact can serve as a litmus test of the strength or permeability of certain boundaries. This is evident in the exchanges between Tribeca residents and immigrant workers that shift over time from being transactional—or only for the purpose of providing/receiving a service—to interpersonal. Although boundaries are commonly reinforced or disassembled through intergroup contact, the most common outcome in the case of residents and immigrant workers in Tribeca is the bridging of boundaries, in which boundaries remain largely intact, but their influence on interactions is reduced.

In Chapter 3 I focused on how boundaries immigrants encounter in Tribeca influence their perceptions of the neighborhood and their work, and how the boundaries of social class that divide residents affect their views of one another and the presence of immigrant service workers in the neighborhood. In this chapter, I analyze the contact that residents and immigrants have with one another, including how they connect on an interpersonal level—albeit often superficially. I explore both the positive and negative consequences of intergroup contact, and how the structure of immigrants’ jobs can create interaction tinged by discrimination or conflict, beginning with the inherent inequality of relationships that develop through service transactions, and how this inequality affects the way immigrants approach their contact with residents.
Relations between Tribeca residents and immigrant workers adhere to Allport’s (1958) contact hypothesis, in that interactions over time are generally correlated with positive perceptions and relations. But this analysis also makes it clear that positive relations do not deconstruct boundaries. Although boundaries may seem as though they have the potential to disappear through the process of extended intergroup contact, this is not the case here. By digging beneath the surface of those interactions, it becomes apparent that ethnoracial, socioeconomic, occupational and other boundaries constantly influence how immigrants and residents engage one another, and those boundaries are hard-pressed to change.

INEQUALITY IN CONTACT

Contact between Tribeca residents and immigrant workers is inherently unequal. To begin, immigrants work in jobs that serve the resident population, creating an employee/customer or employee/employer hierarchy. On top of that stratification are many other layers of hierarchy, including that of social class, occupation, nativity, language, gender, and race or ethnicity. The nature of stratification, and the boundaries that are constructed as a result, influence the kind of contact that immigrants and residents have with one another.

Most resident/immigrant contact is unequal in terms of the flow of information from one party to the other. In typical interactions between immigrants and residents, immigrants are expected to learn details about the residents, their lives, and their personal preferences in order to provide proper service (Bearman 2005). As a result, immigrants in Tribeca tend to get to know far more about residents than residents get to know about them (see also Bearman 2005).

In jobs where it is the norm for the service provider to start conversation with the client or customer, such as in hair salons and barbershops, the worker typically initiates talk by asking basic questions about the client’s work or family. In fact, every interaction that I witnessed in
hair salons and barbershops started this way, with the worker politely asking questions, regardless of whether the customer was a regular or a one-time patron. Unless the customer inquires, the conversation is based on information about the customer’s life, preferences, and so on, with little about the worker. Doing the job well means abstaining from talking about themselves unless this is solicited by the customer. Instead, workers politely listen as customers talk about themselves and their lives, because that is a part of their job.

The unequal nature of immigrants’ and residents’ positions in the context of service work in Tribeca means that conflicts and strains can develop. Exchanges that are, or are perceived by immigrants as, unpleasant, degrading, or argumentative can lead some to reevaluate their own feelings about Tribeca residents, their job, and/or their place in the neighborhood.

Work structure—including the type of service establishment and position an immigrant holds—has much to do with the kinds difficulties that may arise. Parking attendants often have trouble with customer complaints, the bulk of problems occurring with one-time, rather than regular, customers, who are shocked by the (unusually high) hourly rates. Regular customers’ complaints tend mostly to revolve around scratches and dents in their car that they blame on the parking attendants, but complaints from “regulars” are not common.

Then there are cases where immigrants believe they are treated in a discriminatory manner by their employer(s) or the people they serve on the job. Because of the unequal distribution of power and agency in service jobs, an immigrant who wants to keep his or her job usually feels unable to stand up for him or herself to complain or argue for better treatment. Many immigrants are economically dependent on their job and do not want to risk it for fear that lack of language skills, documents, or credentials will hinder their search for another. They therefore lack bargaining power and freedom to speak their mind. Fatmir, an Albanian man who
works as a doorman, told me of his struggles with his employer, a large real estate rental company, and believed that—despite the fact that he had a green card—his status as an immigrant made him particularly vulnerable. Fatmir felt that his employer discouraged him from joining the union, even though many of his native-born coworkers were members:

They [the company] don’t like me to join the union because they have to pay some benefits. [...] That’s the worst part of this. I don’t have any benefits. [...] If I’m sick, I can’t take day sick. If I want to go to the doctor they [union members] have the union pay for that. I don’t have that. I have to pay cash. There are some benefits that are missing so it’s not… This is the bad, and I feel uncomfortable because it’s like really discrimination. And the reason, I realized why it is like this, is me [as an immigrant]. Why isn’t it like this with the lady, she came after me? She’s [native-born and] black; she join union. Why she have to join the union and not me? Because she can speak up about her right. But for me, [if I wanted to join] it’s like ‘Okay, Fatmir, have a good day. You can leave.’ Because they [the employer] know it’s hard for me to find a job. [...] There was Turkish guy, [...] they give him the full time, but he didn’t wait the 16 days [to join the union]. He wait 14 days and he went to the union to sign the papers [and] sent papers to [the employer] to sign it. [The employer] called him and said, ‘We told you no union. Why you went over there? We don’t need you.’ And they fire him.

In extreme cases, workers who have strained relations with employers or customers emotionally detach themselves from their jobs, which they view as just a means of earning an income.

Most immigrant workers, however, try to not let problems on the job, including unpleasant interactions with employers or customers, get them down. They know they must do their job and serve customers no matter how they are treated. Most just grin and bear it, so to speak. Cristian, who is from Mexico and works in building maintenance, feels that he is sometimes treated unfairly at work because he is an immigrant, but his need to work and earn a regular paycheck keeps him focused on just doing the job and ignoring unpleasant treatment:

Some people I think look at me like an immigrant because I’m not from here. People who see me as different, they don’t say it, but they think it. They don’t tell you but… When I talk with them, when I see that he sees me as, ‘Oh, this guy is not from here, he’s from somewhere else,’ but I don’t care. For me, I don’t care. If they don’t tell me nothing, okay; I’m working, my boss pays me, that’s it, you know? This is my job, you know?
Some immigrant workers, like César, a parking attendant from Ecuador, use the only weapon at their command: they give slightly substandard service to those who treat them disrespectfully and reward customers who are nice to them by working hard to keep them happy:

Some people is, they have problems. They want to argue with us or something like that, but we have to work for them as everybody [else]. But is really we, if people is good we try to help faster with those guys. That’s how we are working for them: people is nice, we try to work faster. We don’t care if we running faster. But people who like annoy us, people like that, we try to go slow. We have to work anyway for them, but if people is nice we try to serve them nicer. Nice people, we work like that. But anyway, we have to work for them anyway. They pay the rent. That’s what we have to do. Some people is aggressive, there are some people like that. But anyway, you have to work. We have to work.

On the whole, immigrants accept unpleasant encounters and even prejudice as a normal part of doing service work. They take the difficulties in stride and cope by acknowledging that each customer or client is different; for every difficult, cranky, or rude customer or client, there are usually more who are tolerable, or even pleasant.

“Reading” Residents’ Intentions

Because immigrant workers are there to serve, they must read and interpret residents’ verbal and non-verbal cues to understand what kinds of interactions residents seek to have with them. If a resident is interested in chatting, then that is a signal that it is okay to engage the resident in a more personal way. If a resident is not open to such exchanges, the immigrant worker must stick to the service transaction. As Mirella, a waitress from Mexico, explained, “Sometimes I get some people who aren’t friendly. They are very hard. You shouldn’t do anything like joke; you should be like ‘Okay, you are the customer, I am the waitress.’” Similarly, Gary, from Panama, gauges how he should act toward residents who live in the building where he works as a doorman by how they act toward him; if they are friendly, he will return the gestures in kind, but if they are rude or ignore him he won’t talk with them unless
there is business to attend to. Fatmir expanded on this unspoken rule of worker/customer interaction:

If you start first, I have to follow you. I have no problem talking with people and to ask questions and give answers. She [a certain tenant] was asking me not much, I said [to myself], okay I have no problem telling you because I have no secrets for this question that you making. Follow the conversation. The conversation was going that way like you know each other for years. The people, depends on the people you dealing with.

Gavriel (Gabe at work), an Uzbek barber who aspires to be a pharmacist, echoed Fatmir’s statement, adding that a large part of what he does as a barber is social, and unrelated to cutting hair. Being a service provider requires a certain amount of interpersonal skill:

It depends on the person, it depends how open that person is. Some people just sit there, quiet, and they don’t really like talking. So you have to know how to read people, […] how to ask the right questions. […] Just dealing with different people I learned [this]. I think thanks to this job, I could be a good pharmacist. Like, I know how to talk to people, I know how to deal with different personalities, I know how to blend myself in different situations. It’s a good skill to have. Cutting hair is just one little thing about it [the job].

I was able to see Yura (Jack at work), also a barber from Uzbekistan, “read” a client one day while he was at work. As he began to cut a man’s hair, he asked several simple questions to initiate conversation. The man answered briefly, and then was silent. To break the silence, Yura made a joke. “Cha-cha-cha-chia,” he said, referring to Chia plants that often come with head-shaped containers, a well-known American cultural reference. “You know, the chia plants?” “No,” the customer curtly responded. “You put the seeds on it and it grows by the next day,” he explained. “It can come in any shape, like a head?” “Nope,” the man replied. The customer indicated that he was not interested in having a conversation through his short, dismissive responses, so Yura stopped trying to engage him in conversation.
Even when residents are open to interpersonal contact with immigrant workers, immigrants still have to maintain a strict distance because they are, first and foremost, interacting with the resident to provide a service. Gavriel illustrated this point:

There’s a fine line. You can’t go too much into their lives. I have to be professional at the same time, also. I can get close, but not too close. Before I worked in four or five different shops, barber shops, and there I had customers who’d say, ‘Oh, let’s go out, let’s go to the club, let’s go there…,’ you know. Okay, in the beginning when I was younger I used to do all that. Now these people [in Tribeca] are different; they’re all business people who have families, so I can’t get too close. […] I don’t really share my personal life too much. My job is I ask the right questions. I’m working, I have a job to do. I’m cutting their hair, so I can’t get too distracted. So I ask them a question and they talk about their day, and then I do my work and I also talk.

So even when customers signal that they are comfortable being friendly and having more interpersonal conversations, immigrants have to make sure that they don’t get too close or casual with them.

HOW PEOPLE CONNECT

Despite the many social boundaries that separate them, many immigrant workers and Tribeca residents find that, over time, they develop positive relation(ship)s with one another. Some are even able to connect and talk on an interpersonal level. For some residents, their relationship with a particular immigrant who works in the neighborhood is important in itself, quite apart from the service provided, so they go out of their way to see and talk with immigrants they like. Gavriel illustrated this point: “They come in, we talk about everything, like relationships, about work, about everything. I think they sometimes come more just to interact than to get a haircut. The haircut is just an excuse to come; they come to talk.” Immigrant workers tend to value these relationships as much as the residents do.

The key to getting to this point of interpersonal contact lies in several factors. Residents who are invested in Tribeca in a social or emotional way, and immigrants who are economically
invested in the neighborhood (often through ownership of a small business), are especially likely to be interested in connecting interpersonally with one another. Time also influences interactions. As both residents and immigrants spend more time in Tribeca, the more interest they have in getting to know other people there. Time in the neighborhood, for many residents, is inversely correlated with wealth, and longtime, more middle class residents often connect more with immigrant workers than do their newer, better-off counterparts. Change of context can also promote more positive and interpersonal relations, as interacting outside of the workplace frees immigrant workers, to a certain extent, from their professional responsibilities as service providers that, for many in Tribeca, entail maintaining professional distance. Residents and immigrants connect, too, through non-English languages, as residents often use immigrant workers as a linguistic resource in helping them or their children practice another language. Finally, residents and immigrant workers who joke with one another are able to create or strengthen interpersonal relationships.

**Economic and Emotional Investment in Tribeca**

Residents and immigrants who are invested in the neighborhood in an economic or emotional way are more likely than those who are not to have contact (Rich 2009) and engage with one another in an interpersonal way. Many residents who have a strong emotional investment in Tribeca—often those living in the neighborhood for many years—make efforts to socially connect with immigrant workers because of their interest in cultivating a sense of local community. Immigrants who have worked in Tribeca for a long period of time sometimes seek to build friendly relationships with local residents for the same reason.

For immigrants, economic investments in Tribeca are important in motivating them to reach out or develop good relations with local residents. This is especially true for business
owners and their family workers. Building good relations benefits the business, and indeed may be imperative for its very survival. Immigrant business owners try harder, therefore, than regular employees to interact with local customers in a way that encourages customers to return. As a result, even though entrepreneurs and family workers readily admit that there are customers they dislike, they tend to report more close and positive interpersonal relationships with Tribecans than other immigrant workers.

It follows, then, that residents usually cite entrepreneurs when speaking of immigrants whom they have gotten to know. Annette, for example, recalled a Chinese couple who owned a local laundromat as significant to her:

When my kids were little and the laundromat was operating, there was a Chinese family that ran that, and they, it was like a grandmother and grandfather who ran it, and they, like, got to know my kids really well and sort of would kind of take them in the back and like play with them while I was doing the laundry. […] They were, it was that sort of culture where you see a kid and you pick it up and you entertain it, so… They were sort of like these two-hour grandparents. Yeah, it was sweet.

She laughed, “It was my older daughter, and she was the kind of kid that was very happy to play in a laundry basket, and they would just kind of come over and scoop her up and, like, chat with her and take her around and show her stuff.”

When Michelle thought of local immigrant workers she knows, they were also entrepreneurs:

I know about their [immigrant workers’] kids, I know where they’re trying to get them into school, I know—the guy who owns [a local eatery], he’s Turkish […] I know where his kids are [going to school], you know, kind of the trials and tribulations that people go through. […] The guy who owns [a store] on Chambers [Street], his two kids went to [P.S.] 234.

Entrepreneurs, as independent business owners, are also sometimes perceived to be more professional, upper/middle class, or educated than their wage- and salary-earning counterparts, putting them more on a par with residents themselves. This makes it easier for residents to want
to talk and develop relationships with them, as entrepreneurs seem less different (Pettigrew 1998).

For their part, entrepreneurs and their family workers are more likely to report positive interpersonal relationships with Tribeca residents than other immigrant workers. One Uzbek man, Amnon, who goes by Aaron at his barbershop, told me that he intentionally develops good relationships with his customers by trying to create a welcoming atmosphere:

Most of the customers who come more than five years, we become friends. We got very good relationship. Actually, most of my customers are loyal customers—they are my loyal customers. There’s people who bring friends, they are very friendly and it feels like home. I try to make it more friendly [at the barbershop]; people come, relax, watch TV. For kids I got cartoons.

“For men,” Amnon giggled, “I got special magazine.”

Junghee (Jenny at work), a Korean woman who works in her mother’s greengrocery, reaches out to regular customers in a way that demonstrates that she cares about them:

“Everybody friends, talking; customers ask if everything [is] okay [with the store]. Sometimes [when a customer has a] problem, you gotta listen.” She cited an example of one regular customer, Victoria, who had come into the store one day after having broken her hand. Junghee immediately noticed. “I ask Victoria, ‘How are you feeling?’” This concern was not lost on Victoria, who told me, “We [my husband and I] go almost every other day, we go to the same deli to buy some essentials, and we chat with the checkout person there. […] When I broke my hand recently they were very solicitous. They were very considerate.”

Ka-chung (Kevin at work), a small printing business owner from Hong Kong, also shows customers that he cares about them by ensuring that they get what they need—even if that means sending them to another business:

Sometimes, just, if I cannot help, I will definitely help them [by referring them to another business]. […] I’m not sure if I can [continue to] run a stable business, but, you know, this is sometimes… I think it’s better to have a relationship with
people. Even if I cannot provide the service, I will tell them, ‘Maybe around the corner they can provide that kind of service.’ You know, I think that’s maybe kind of good to let people know about. […] I know somebody that never, in the past, I don’t want to mention anybody[‘s name], but they if they cannot provide a service and the customer say[s] ‘Where can they that special service,’ even [if] the person know[s], they say they don’t know. I think that’s kind of… kind of bad.

“So it shows them that you’re honest?” I asked him. “Not honest,” Ka-chung replied, “but care. Because you never know when they need something [if] you can provide the service. Sometime [I] may be able to help them next time, so they will come back. I hope I can keep it like that.”

Ka-chung builds good relationships with his local customer base through showing them that he cares about them, not just his business. This kind of personal concern and interaction gives both the worker and the customer a good feeling, strengthening customer loyalty, keeping immigrants’ small businesses afloat, and building positive relationships between economically invested immigrants and emotionally invested residents.

Time

Repeated contact over a period of time is an essential element in most interpersonal contact (Hochschild 1973) that occurs between Tribeca residents and immigrant workers. In general, as a particular resident has more contact with a particular immigrant worker, the more curious the resident becomes about the worker. This is reflected in the degree to which residents engage immigrant workers in interpersonal conversation. Most immigrant workers feel out of place in Tribeca when they first begin working in the neighborhood. Because residents do not yet recognize, and lack much interest in talking with them, immigrants tend to report that they felt ignored when they first started working at their job.

But as residents see particular immigrant workers more often, they begin to express interest in expanding their interactions. The two doormen in my sample were especially aware of this phenomenon, since their jobs require sociable contact with the tenants in their buildings.
Gary explained that when he first started working in the building, the atmosphere felt very impersonal; many tenants were cold to him, and did not acknowledge, or say hello or thank you to him when he held the door. It took the vast majority of tenants, he said, about six months to warm up to and begin to chat with him when they passed through the lobby. However, “it shouldn’t be that way,” he asserted. “Because people are people,” no matter what job they’re doing.

Fatmir also had this experience when he started his doorman job:

When I first started working here, the tenants wouldn’t really talk to me or ask me any questions about myself. But after I was here for a while, they started to ask me ‘Where are you from?’ or ‘How long have you been here?’ At first, I think they didn’t engage me because they thought I was temporary, but once they realized that I am here regularly, they started to want to ask me questions and talk with me.

Rosaria, who is from Italy, made a similar observation about her job washing hair at a high-end salon. As in the case of doormen, it is common for beauty industry workers to talk socially with clients. It took a while for this to happen for her, though:

I’m [an] assistant, they is [the] customer. So I have a barrier, yes. But, you know, I work, I do my job and that’s it. In [the salon], the first month is [the] same thing: barrier. But now, you know, step to step [the customers] know me […] When I start, just ‘Hi, how are you,’ that’s it. But now, the conversation is more. Okay, is more.

Immigrants attribute this initial coldness to residents’ assumption that they are temporary or transient workers, like many in the service industry. Immigrants told me that it was only when residents saw them repeatedly over a long period of time that residents made any social investment by talking with them.

Residents also told me that they are more friendly with longtime workers. For example, Jennifer, a longtime resident, having lived in Tribeca for 33 years, mentioned that she felt that
she has more connections with immigrants who have worked in Tribeca for a long time than those who have shorter tenure in Tribeca:

I kind of feel there is a community with, in that sense, with people who’ve been here for a long time. […] With somebody who’s been here longer I definitely feel [closer] more so than somebody not so much. I tend to be friendly with those people more; I’m just acknowledging or saying ‘hi.’ […] If I was in a place that I go [to] regularly, like I guess the guys that have [a restaurant], I mean, they’re Greek, they immigrated from there, so I, even though I don’t go there that much anymore (I used to), have longer conversations [with them]. […] So it depends on where you’re going regularly, too, [and] who you’re talking to.

Residents’ own length of time in the neighborhood also comes into play. In general, newer residents have not gotten to know immigrants who work in the neighborhood as well as their longtime counterparts. Cheryl, who moved to Tribeca two years ago, exemplified this pattern. When I asked about her contact with immigrants working in the neighborhood, she responded:

So, how are you defining immigrant? […] I mean housekeeping, building staff, I mean here behind the counter [here where we are eating], except I just don’t know if everybody’s born somewhere else, or their heritage is somewhere else. That’s why I asked you to define it. I don’t know for sure whether someone was born here or if someone was born in America but is of Spanish descent or something. So I don’t know how fine a definition you want to draw.

When I followed up by asking if she thinks she has contact with people who might be immigrants in Tribeca, she asserted, “I do. Yeah, sure. Well, I think our building staff, for sure, and I think behind the kitchen here, and the woman who keeps my house, you know, housekeeper, sure. I would say those are probably the three most regular, yeah.” “And what are your interactions like with them?” I inquired. “Fantastic,” she replied. “Yeah, I mean, yeah. I don’t really know what more to say than just excellent. Excellent.” The vagueness of her response speaks to the lack of significant contact she has with immigrants who serve her.
Immigrants also note that they have less interpersonal contact with Tribeca’s newer residents. When I asked Ka-chung what he likes most about Tribeca, his answer gave insight into the nature of the relationships he has with both longtime and newer residents:

The people. It’s the people from the—not the new people but… The new people, some of them’s nice, but most of the people from the [neighborhood who have] been here so long, they’re really nice. They’re friendly. […] Because I know some of them; one of the clients she is architect, landscape architect, and she been here a long time, too, and, you know, we say ‘hi’ when she pass[es] by. And they also refer people to me, even if they [themselves] don’t need my service.

The difference between longtime and newer residents’ interactions with immigrant workers has a lot to do with the amount of time they have had to build such relationships. Or, to put it another way, newer residents have not had much time to connect with workers in the way that residents who have been in the neighborhood much longer have. Another factor is involved, as well. Newer residents generally just have less time to get to know people in the neighborhood—other residents as well as workers—because they are more likely work outside the home, and have young children at home than longtime residents.

The greater wealth of many newcomer residents also comes into the picture. Jacques, who is from France and owns a small business in the neighborhood, said that he thought that his interactions with newer residents were influenced by their wealth. Those with the most money, he noted, were “some of the least pleasant people, unfortunately, that we deal with.” He sighed and explained:

The… the financial [reward] that comes with being a bigwig in Wall Street sometimes causes people to totally lose touch with reality and, uh… So sometimes the spouses, not even but the spouses of those masters of the world tend to, you know, it’s all new to them to be so affluent, and they are the ones who actually moved in this neighborhood in Tribeca and Battery Park [City] and have changed the social fabric of this neighborhood. And they are the ones who are the less-pleasant people to work with. I don’t really want to give too many details because I don’t care. I’m very grateful that everybody comes to my business, really, yeah. But when all the power that comes with money is new to you, you tend to lose touch with reality. They have demands that generally are a
little, um… too much, basically. You know, they want to cancel [an appointment] when they want, and come back when they want, and show up unannounced.

People who are very wealthy, especially the nouveau riche who are trying hard to establish their new position, tend to be less open than the less affluent to social outsiders (Abrahamson 1996). This explains why newcomers are often perceived by others in the neighborhood as acting “entitled,” and seem to have a harder time developing positive interpersonal relationships with immigrant workers.

Outside the Work Context

Residents’ and immigrants’ interactions are typically constrained by the service transaction and workplace expectations, which can prevent closer and more interpersonal contact (Ellis, Wright, and Parks 2004). (Unexpected) meetings outside the workplace—even if only barely outside the workplace, such as on the sidewalk nearby—allow for more casual interpersonal talk, since the exchange is not a routinized service transaction. A simple change of context, therefore, can “produce more psychologically meaningful communications and thereby facilitate attitudinal or behavioral changes” (Amir 1969:322). For Sajjad, who is from Pakistan, some of the most significant contact he has had with Tribeca residents occurred outside the restaurant where he works. He therefore often spends time after work lingering outside, taking the opportunity to talk with locals he knows who pass by or come in to eat.

Residents also note that their interactions with immigrant workers are friendlier outside of the work context. Sunny spoke of how much more open her interaction was with a man who works at a deli she frequents when they bumped into each other mere blocks from his work:

It’s so funny, one time, this guy that works in the deli, I never was close to him, but every time I’d walk in I’d say hello. He’s been there for years, he’s from, I think, the Dominican Republic. One day I saw him on the West Side Highway [West Street], just a different location, and he came up to me and we hugged each other and kissed. And I said [to myself], ‘This is so funny, I would never do that in the deli.’
Even though encounters like these are brief and superficial, they are the most common form of positive, friendly interaction outside of the service transaction. Interestingly, they often build an awareness among immigrants and residents of the relations that they do have in the immigrant’s workplace.

*Language and Culture*

Language, not surprisingly, affects relations between immigrant workers and Tribeca residents. While all workers I talked with speak at least some English, a skill that is required, even if minimally, for their service work in a largely English-speaking neighborhood, English-speaking residents who are conversationally competent or fluent in another language sometimes take advantage of the opportunity to practice with immigrant workers. When asked about the immigrants he knows or has contact with in the neighborhood, Jeffrey, a resident, immediately described an African man xxviii who works near his residence:

> He’ll sit on the bench and I’ll sit on the bench and we’ll talk. I’m fluent in French so we converse in French. He enjoys it. I enjoy it, too. I know where he comes from, the kind of town that he lived in, I know these kinds of things, you know. Very pleasant man. I think he seems to be nice and he always has a good ‘bonjour’ and its fun, and I’m fairly fluent in French, so I like that capacity to be able to speak all these languages in the neighborhood.

Similarly, Michelle and her husband often brought their two teenage daughters to a nearby restaurant to practice speaking Spanish with the workers when they were learning the language at school:

> When our girls were learning Spanish [my husband] always took them in there [to the Mexican restaurant] on Saturday for breakfast to talk to them. And they [my daughters] didn’t even speak Spanish that much, but we like them, and they ask about the girls all the time. And at night when [one of the workers] was closing down, he had his wife and his son [were there]. I mean, there’s definitely a relationship between [us].

**xxviii** This particular individual came up in conversation with different resident informants several times so, to provide him anonymity, I omit his nation-of-origin and occupation.
Through this contact mediated by a non-English language, Michelle and her family became interested in the men as individuals, and even got to meet some of their family members as well.

Workers tend to appreciate residents’ attempts to converse in their native tongue, especially those who lack confidence in their ability to speak English and/or feel are self-conscious about their accent. Competence in the immigrants’ language enables residents to ask questions and learn more about the immigrant worker, and is an entryway to learning about one another on a more personal level.

Sharing an ethnic background or nationality also helps immigrants and Tribecans connect through language and culture. Some immigrants who work in the neighborhood encounter foreign-born residents who come from their country. Because she perceives herself as having limited English fluency, and is often embarrassed by her accent and vocabulary, Rosaria tends to shy away from engaging in extended conversations with English-speaking clients. However, she talks a lot with clients who are Italian, like herself:

I not speak too much with my client. Just a couple of words, ‘Hi, how are you, where you been? Are you going to vacation? What did you plan?’ Just a little bit. Or talk about the weather, but it’s the same thing [with] man, woman. […] A lot of men [in Tribeca] is Italian and then I have long conversation for my country, ask about everything, you know?

Similarly, Bill, an Irish bartender, becomes especially friendly with residents who are immigrants from Western Europe:

There are quite a few people here living in the area, too, who come from England, who I’ve become very friendly [with], and their parents might come to visit them and they bring them in here and introduce them to me. We became very good friends. Not just English people; German people, there are quite a few people from Europe living in this area.

Although they may be from the same country or region, immigrant service workers and immigrant Tribeca residents tend to have little else, including and especially social class
background, in common. Even so, meeting one another in a context outside their home country helps them connect in an interpersonal way beyond the service transaction.

**Joking**

Some residents and immigrants connect with one another through joking. Joking, which has been shown to be a tool to reduce tensions between different groups in ethnically heterogeneous workplaces (Kornblum 1974), happens between those who have a pre-established, positive relationship and have already built mutual rapport. Joking is a delicate matter. It can be seen as unprofessional or highly inappropriate when the immigrant worker has not carefully assessed whether the client or customer will be receptive. In fact, being able to joke with clients or employers indicates immigrants’ and residents’ comfort in interacting with each other. It is also a sign of residents’ willingness to lower social and professional boundaries enough to be able to interact with immigrant workers this way, or, one might say, to be able to “take a joke.”

One day, Bill, who has become close with many of his customers over the years, was explaining his customers’ various idiosyncrasies and annoying traits to me, and he pointed to a man several barstools down within earshot: “But Ed,” he said, “is easy. I just tell him to shut up, and he does.” Ed let out a laugh, acknowledging this assessment of his character with a half-smile.

Immigrant workers who enjoy joking feel out their customers or clients to see if they are receptive to this kind of interaction. Fatmir, for example, can be seen regularly joking with the tenants who live in the building where he works. In the time I spent with him, it was clear that he knew the tenants with whom he could joke, and those with whom he could not. With one tenant, Fatmir exchanged what appeared to be a secret handshake (which he later explained is a series of gestures from his Albanian culture that indicate peace and loyalty). As the tenant
walked toward the door, he took out his cellphone. “Don’t text me!,” Fatmir called after him. “Oh, I won’t text you. You do your job, I’ll do mine,” the tenant responded, also in jest. In another instance, Fatmir teased a female tenant, saying, “I have a package for you.” Her face lit up with surprise and excitement. “But it’s not for you,” he giggled, as the package was for another tenant in her unit. Her face dropped, feigning disappointment. She then smiled, thanked him, and went on her way with the package.

Of course, not everyone is comfortable joking, and gender plays a role. Male immigrant workers often feel that they must be more careful when joking with female residents. Joking with women can become problematic, and perhaps even hazardous to one’s job, as Fatmir explained. He feared that friendly jokes with women could be misinterpreted as sexual overtures or seen as offensive:

Some [women] is friendly; she [a tenant who passed by] was friendly. I say, okay let’s have fun, let’s joke, let’s kill some time. [But] some say, ‘Hey, why you talking to my girlfriend?’ I came from that culture, [too], and so I don’t know which kind of person is her boyfriend or which kind of person is she. So you have to know. But when she came over there, she was open mind and she start [joking] first.

The unspoken rule of workers finding out if residents are open to joking before initiating such interactions thus holds especially true for male workers with female residents. The gender boundary is more difficult for male workers to cross into creating friendly relationships with female residents.

Joking can also take place between immigrants and residents who don’t know each other well—or at all. This is most common in situations in which a resident has just witnessed a negative interaction between an immigrant worker and another customer or client. Simón, a parking attendant from Ecuador, had this kind of experience when dealing with a customer who had parked his SUV in the lot for one hour. Because his was an oversized vehicle, there was a
surcharge added to his hourly rate, causing the customer to start an argument with Simón about the cost when he went to retrieve his car. Meanwhile, a couple waited several feet away to get their own car, overhearing the entire heated conversation. Once the upset customer was gone, Simón and the couple joked about the previous interaction, making fun of the size of the man’s car. When Simón told them their total for parking the car, it was $10 less than the argumentative man’s total. “You pay less than him,” Simón joked. “I pay less?,” the woman clarified. “Yes, you lucky,” Simón replied, and they all laughed. Simón and his customers were able to bond and joke by making fun of a customer they both had negative perceptions of. This phenomenon of “connecting” because of a common enemy happens among strangers (Bosson et al. 2006), not just people who have a pre-established relationship.

THE EFFECTS OF JOB STRUCTURE

Interactions between immigrants and Tribeca residents are influenced not only by social boundaries, but also by the structure of the service job in which most of the contact arises. The workers’ position in the job as well as the nature or structure of the particular workplace also are important.

*Ability to Have Unstructured Interactions*

One aspect of job structure that affects interaction is the looseness of the structure and supervision. Some occupations allow workers to have more freedom that facilitates interpersonal contact. One example is parking attendants, especially those who work in outdoor lots, who are able to get to know residents without as much pressure because they usually work without supervisors. Attendants in outdoor lots can talk with local residents whom they see pass by without the restriction of having to perform a service, and without that service mediating their
interactions. As a result, outdoor parking attendants and local residents can develop more casual acquaintanceships than other service providers whose jobs are more structured and supervised.

Doormen can also have unstructured interactions with residents. Because doormen often experience stretches of downtime during which they don’t have a lot to do at work (Bearman 2005), they have the time to engage with tenants who strike up conversations with them. It is also expected that doormen will be friendly and part-take in casual conversations with tenants who talk to them, so unstructured interaction is embedded in the overall structure of the job. And, like parking attendants, doormen typically work without direct supervision, giving even more opportunity for them to chat with tenants when they have the time.

Entrepreneurs, as their own supervisors, are able to have unstructured contact with clients or customers whenever they see fit. In fact, being able to have casual interpersonal conversations with customers can be seen as a good business strategy, since, as I mentioned earlier, it shows the customer you care and encourages repeat patronage of the establishment. Entrepreneurs, therefore, have the freedom to determine when it is appropriate to have unstructured contact with Tribeca residents, which builds their interpersonal relations.

Occupational Culture

In American culture, it is acceptable—even expected—that workers in some service jobs will engage clients or customers in personal conversations. Bars, hair salons and, especially, barbershops are prime examples of establishments in which the service provider regularly talks with the customer about personal matters (Soulliere 1997). It is common to ask patrons questions about their families, love lives, and weekend activities while they are working on their

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xxix This is actually how I initially got to know one of my informants who works in an outdoor lot, as I passed through on a regular basis while running a particular work-related errand. We eventually came to notice and talk to one another.
hair. Rosaria explained that, although she has reservations about conversation with clients because of her accent and self-perceived limited English ability, talking with the customer is an integral part of salon work:

You know, the stylist [for] the customer is a psychologist because you say a lot of thing about the family. I saw my boss ‘blah, blah, blah, blah,’ talking all the time [with customers] because it’s a long time [since] this customer meet him. So then talk about all of her family, job, everything.

Yura drew parallels between his job as a barber and that of a paid professional who listens to clients’ thoughts and problems:

We talk about girls, we talk about work, stuff like that. I take some advice from them like what to do… [We talk about] a lot of things, it depends, all the customers are different. We see, like, when they come by we see the way they act or if he’s sad I try to listen, because a barber [is supposed to do that]. […] You have to be very, like a psychologist with them.

In contrast, people who work in other kinds of jobs, such as domestic work, retail, and residential buildings, are discouraged from initiating such conversations, as it is considered inappropriate for them to ask personal questions. The cultural expectations and norms of each job, therefore, inform the kinds of interactions residents and immigrant workers have and the information they share with one another.

Impersonality in Services

Another way the structure of the job affects interaction is the amount of distance workers are expected to maintain between themselves and the customer, client, or resident. The majority of Tribeca businesses, many of which are and have been owned by immigrants, have historically been small, locally-owned establishments. However, as the residential population has grown and become more wealthy and transient, a larger number of national chain establishments have

xxx According to the 2007-2011 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 19 percent of Tribecans had moved into their current housing unit within the past year, compared to just over 11 percent of people in New York City.
moved into the neighborhood. Part of the reason Tribeca has experienced a growth in chain stores is because of the neighborhood’s gentrification. As real estate values increase, it becomes easier for large companies to lease space in Tribeca than small, independent business owners (see also Jacobs 1961). Larger companies also tend to employ more people, so a customer is unlikely to see the same three or four clerks at a store like Whole Foods than at a small greengrocery each time they go shop, making it more difficult for residents and immigrant workers to even come to recognize each other over time.

According to longtime Tribeca residents, this shift to large, chain businesses servicing a wealthy customer base has influenced the way they interact with immigrants who work in the neighborhood. Immigrants who work for larger companies, rather than local businesses, they say, appear to be trained to interact with customers and clients in a professional manner, making it difficult to have any sort of interpersonal interaction or small talk. Many residents lament the impersonal nature of the interactions they have with immigrant workers today, as compared to the more friendly contact of the past. Neil, a 20-year resident, explained:

There is also something about, in some of these places, there’s something about the atmosphere in the establishment itself that no longer lends itself to that [getting to know one another]. Because even if I were able to and I could if I really were to put my brain to it, there would be places where I could have that exchange, […] I could have that kind of relationship. But it now seems very out of place in the general atmosphere of the way people do business down here. […] There are people in the neighborhood […] whom I’ve known for a while down here and they would, we would stand out on the street and talk about family, talk about what you’re doing […] But it now seems inappropriate to the vibe of Tribeca, that kind of friendliness, that kind of human contact. […] I feel like it’s a little too intimate for the streets of Tribeca. It’s a little too exposed for the streets of Tribeca and it’s inappropriate that way. I would like to, like the guy down at [the greengrocery], very nice guy, and I do exchange a little banter with

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xxxii This may have to do with the fact that, as Duyvendak (2011) explains, people who are highly transient find a sense of “home” and rootedness in anything that is familiar, including ubiquitous businesses like Whole Foods, Bed, Bath, and Beyond, and Barnes & Noble, all of which have opened in Tribeca within the past decade. These establishments can be found in towns and cities across the U.S., giving such people a sense of familiarity anywhere they go.
him. Nothing like the banter I exchange, I’m a member of [a gym] up on 14th Street, and they are immigrants who work there. I have a much more personal relationship to those people than I do with people down here. It’s just because of the atmosphere that’s engendered in different places. There are doormen down here. There are buildings with doormen. And the doorman says two things: the doorman says, ‘We’re here to open the door, we’re here to welcome you in;’ the doorman also says, ‘There’s a barrier between you and the people who live here.’ Doormen are barriers in that way, and it’s sad that there are doormen down here. Do you ever go to Whole Foods? I used to go to the Food Emporium [a smaller grocery store] and there would be people in there who I would see all the time and you could kind of bullshit with them. […] Even a, you know, ‘Hi, how you doing? What’s going on?’ Even [with] the cashier or the help personnel, or even some of the people in line with you. But you go into Whole Foods and when I put my stuff on that [conveyor] belt, if I forget to put that wooden thing down to separate my [purchases], someone else behind me will go do it, [like they are saying] ‘Those are your groceries, those are my groceries. Let’s not mix our worlds here.’ It’s boundaries. There are a lot of boundaries down here, a lot of boundaries and barriers.

Many residents feel that warm relations are now generally discouraged in many of the places where they shop, eat, and otherwise consume, whereas it was socially acceptable to talk with workers in the past. In addition to these new kinds of chain businesses in the neighborhood, it may well be that service business owners assume that the affluent want distance and privacy from those who serve them, causing impersonality in service transactions and reinforcing social distance and boundaries. The influx of new, wealthy residents not only has increased the number and changed the kinds of services that are available, but also changed how those services are provided.

Depth of Interactions

Then there are the ways that job structure influences the very depth of interaction with residents. Immigrants in some jobs are visible to residents only when they are providing a service, like indoor parking attendants. Indoor attendants, because they work in a garage, are rather isolated. They have few encounters with residents that do not directly relate to the service transaction, as there is little incentive for residents to loiter in a dark, drafty garage to talk with
the workers. Their relations, therefore, are influenced almost entirely by the service being provided.

Other aspects of the job also affect the depth of interactions. Retail and restaurant work is structured in a way that interactions do not have to be close or in-depth, and neither party needs to know much about the other in order to provide good service. Therefore, interactions typically remain brief, simple, and, usually, pleasant. While immigrants who work in these jobs come to recognize and learn about the preferences of regular customers, there are also many people who patronize only once. Interactions with residents among immigrant workers in restaurant and retail settings, therefore, tend to be the most superficial and most anonymous of the six in this study.

Certain jobs require far more physical and, at times, emotional closeness than others. Residents tend to get to know workers whose job it is to serve them in close quarters and at close range most. Domestic workers who serve residents in their homes, are a primary example. Although domestic worker/employer relationships entail a significant amount of avoidance and impersonality (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001), Tribecans I spoke with often talked at length about their caregiver or housekeeper, and details of her personal life. Albert, a resident whose children are now grown, still remembered details about the caregivers he and his wife employed years ago:

When our kids were born, because both my wife and I worked we needed nannies, especially with twins. So we had immigrants as nannies. I remember they [the children] liked their nannies. One in particular […] just became about their second mother. Her name was Cecilia and they couldn’t pronounce Cecilia so they called her Cici. […] She was more than good. And so in that sense, I felt very comfortable and very welcoming [of] her. Just a wonderful person. And their first nanny was from Colombia, and when she came to be interviewed for the job she brought her daughters with her, which I thought, ‘Oh, what a wonderful thing to do.’ And they were very polite and she was, I think, showing them off, ‘Look at how well I raised my daughters. I would raise your babies that way’—or
help raise. You know what I’m saying. […] Very good relationship. Her daughter was accepted to Harvard and chose not to go, and went to B.U. instead, Boston University. She wanted something they had there better than Harvard. Talk about that, turn down Harvard. Can you imagine? And her son was a video/computer whiz, and when we couldn’t figure out something she’d ask her son and everything would be fine, that kind of a thing. So yeah, you have to be very aware not to think of immigrants as these uneducated whatevers. […] [Her] husband was an aspiring writer, so he and I used to talk every so often. So that was great. We developed a real friendship with her. And in any employer/employee situation there is a built-in class divide, but in this case that began to fizzle, which was good. We got to know some of her family, and that’s, again, another example of what I said earlier [that] we are all, we’re one. They are us, we’re them. That’s it.

Victoria also knew a lot about her housekeeper:

I know all about her life, her family, everything. Everything about her. And her relationship with her daughter-in-law, who she doesn’t really like, and she has a daughter who is mentally handicapped and how worried she is about when she dies what is going to happen to this child. So we are able to communicate quite amazingly. She lives in a house, she owns a car, she takes long vacations every year. She’s very nice, though. But she’s very… she pinches pennies and she really wants us to pinch pennies, and […] she buys us things in Costco and brings them to the house. […] So oftentimes she will buy us things in large quantities because she doesn’t like the fact that we are spending too much money. I think we have a good relationship, [but] I don’t know what she’s saying about us in Chinese.

She laughed, and completed her thought: “I know everything that’s happening with her, if she had any health issues. We get along really well and we’re very involved.” How much an employer really knows about a domestic worker is unclear, but it is interesting that some, like Victoria, feel they know so much.

In some cases, moreover, immigrant domestic workers also told me that they developed a positive relationship with their employers. This is much more common for those whose responsibilities don’t involve childcare, like housekeepers or private drivers; their relationships with employers are less complicated by the duties of their jobs, which can become more contentious when childrearing is involved (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001). At least among the
domestic workers I interviewed, most perceived the relationship with their employer(s) to be a professional one, characterized by the employer/employee hierarchy of work.

Repeated Interaction, and Its Complexities

When services require repeated contact over an extended period of time, such as building security, domestic work, and, to an extent, hair care and indoor parking, relationships can become closer and stronger, but also subject to miscommunication and strain. Immigrants in these jobs often recognize problems in their relations with the Tribecans they serve.

Rosaria was positive about most of her regular clients, but also noted that some people can be very difficult to please. She gave an example of one woman who consistently complains about Rosaria’s hair-washing technique, to the point that Rosaria secretly cringes whenever the woman walks into the salon. “Some people is mean,” she stated, “But […] you have to say ‘Okay, I’m sorry.’ I know when [an unpleasant client] come, ‘Oh no, she’s coming,’ but the stylist job is this: you have to have a smile for everybody, and that’s it.” Although the woman is unpleasant to deal with, Rosaria explained that she must do her job and treat the woman as she would a more agreeable customer.

Fatmir, who, as a doorman, has contact with the same residents ever day at work, illustrated his thoughts with a saying from his Albanian culture:

Some people are very nice and some people are very rude, they’re mean. […] We have a saying: the hand has five fingers: no one is the same as the other. So this [finger] is a little bit shorter, this [finger] is taller, this is fatter, and people are the same, different mentality and different behavior.

Through his repeated interactions with the people who live in the building where he works, Fatmir has learned that there is no “typical” Tribecan. He, therefore, bases his judgments of character and assesses each interaction based on the individual involved.
In some cases of extended contact, residents and immigrant workers use avoidance as a strategy in dealing with one another. In her ethnographic study of domestic workers in southern California, Hondagneu-Sotelo (2001) detailed how both employers and employees commonly kept distance from each other in the home. This holds true in Tribeca, where it is not unusual for parents to employ a fulltime caregiver even if they are at home, themselves, most of the day. Caregivers often try to get out of the house and avoid sharing space with their employers by, for example, taking the children to various activities outside the home. They may even schedule their days so that they spend most of their working hours this way. This can benefit not only the children being cared for, who go to many activities, the park, and see kids their own age, but also the caregivers who often feel stifled, surveilled, or uncomfortable when working within earshot or in view of their employers. Leaving the house also allows caregivers to meet with other women who work in the neighborhood (Brown 2011). Carolina, who is from Mexico, explained her reasons for spending time outside of the apartment:

Now the mother opened her own company, and she works at home. And now, for me, this is different because before she was always working, but not in the house. So I stay all day with her [the child] outside; she don’t want to go take lunch at home. She want to take lunch here [at the community center]. For her friends, she like it, she like to go to the park, and I bring her to the park and come here. Here they have different class, ballet, tumbling, dancing, every day. She likes to be out. She knows that mommy is working in the house.

It became clear that the little girl was not the only one who wanted to be out of the apartment. Carolina said, laughing: “Sometimes I don’t [want to] do things at home, [but] I have to do them; put the dirty dishes in the washing machine, clean the mess they do, or do the beds. She [the employer] want[s us] to stay outside.” Thus, her employer also prefers that she and the child spend most of the time out of the apartment, as well.

Housekeepers, who do cleaning, and those who employ them also prefer not to be around one another when the housekeeper is at work. Employers may retreat to another room in the
apartment, as I saw happen with one couple when I accompanied Alejandra, a Mexican woman, to work one day. Some leave altogether when the housekeeper arrives. When I asked Victoria if she is usually home when her housekeeper comes to work, she replied, “Usually I leave because I don’t feel comfortable. I usually go to work because if you’re there while she’s trying to work, it’s kind of awkward. But we always talk beforehand and chat about family or her health or something like that.” Housekeepers prefer to do their work on their own for the same reasons as caregivers, as well, not wanting the interruption and possible criticism from employers, extra duties added on the spot, or to have to listen to employers’ woes.

Tenants in doorman buildings also sometimes avoid the doormen. This happens for several reasons. While some tenants are simply not interested in having an exchange with the doorman unless needed, others prefer to avoid the doorman at select times, such as when they are in a hurry, tired, grumpy, or drunk. Doormen are not insulted by this kind of avoidance and, instead, understand why residents would sometimes want to avoid them when coming and going from their home, their private space.

Some building lobbies are set up in a way that allows for this to happen. Fatmir, for example, works in a building that has a large lobby with a doorman’s desk on one side and mailboxes on another, a space that is large enough to allow for brief, surface interaction between tenants and building workers (Bearman 2005). These areas are separated by a partition, so residents often come in the front door, veer to the left toward the mailboxes behind the partition, and reappear on the other side to wait for the elevators, bypassing the doorman’s desk. This makes for an effective detour if a tenant does not feel like talking with the doorman. Smaller lobbies, such as the one that Gary works in, do not allow this kind of avoidance. Tenants in Gary’s building have no choice but to wait for their elevator right next to the doorman’s desk.
This can make for an awkward atmosphere if a tenant does not acknowledge the doorman while he or she waits for the elevator, which I witnessed several times when I spent time observing at Gary’s work. In these situations, tenants can use other devices, such as cellphones or earphones, to avoid speaking with or acknowledging the doorman standing mere feet away. Appearing engrossed in music or email while waiting for the elevator limits contact with others (Valentine 2008) while simultaneously making the tenant seem less rude.

Repeated contact increases the odds that relations between immigrant workers and Tribeca residents will, at least on some occasions, be characterized by avoidance. They seek to avoid each other because they do not always have the energy to sustain the kind of interpersonal contact that has become required or expected, or because they want to conceal aspects of their lives from the other person. Avoidance is, for some, a tactic devised to save face (Goffman 2005 [1967]) and manage others’, including the doorman’s, image of them.

BRIDGING BOUNDARIES THROUGH INTERACTION

Not only is much of the intergroup contact between immigrants and residents in Tribeca positive, but the contact itself helps to bridge some of the boundaries between them, and leads to additional benefits. And although interpersonal contact between residents and immigrants tends to remain shallow, it is still significant in building positive feelings, perceptions, and, for some, trust on both sides. Residents and immigrants who have very positive relationships frequently develop a sense of mutual trust over time, as contact can cultivate intergroup trust (Hewstone and Swart 2011). Over many years of patronizing the same restaurant, Victoria built trust with the workers there:

When our children were living in the house we ate much more from the pizzeria. When we ordered food there life was much more hectic than it is now, when you have children. So I got to know the pizza guy. You know, if I didn’t have money, if I didn’t happen to have some cash at the time he would say, ‘Forget it,
don’t worry about it. Pay me later.’ Or sometimes we would be working in the office late and the kids would be home and there’s no food in the house. And I would say, ‘Go downstairs to the pizzeria and buy dinner.’ And I would call and say the kids are coming down and there was no money exchanged. They had no money. And I would just pay him the next day. […] So that’s a very intimate relationship to have with someone in the community. Trust, mutual respect, and… yeah.

I saw how some of this trust operated while spending time at some of the immigrants’ workplaces. The restaurant in which Sajjad works does a lot of carry-out business. Just as Victoria described, some regular customers “purchased” food with informal credit. These people, Sajjad explained, always came in later to pay for their meals.

Positive interpersonal contact between immigrant workers and residents does more than make those involved feel good; it helps them realize that, despite their many differences, they have more in common than they might initially assume. Many residents learn from their extended interactions with immigrant workers that they share many of the same worries, goals, and hopes, and thus may counteract or, in some instances, the social distance that exists between the people involved.

Nothing gives residents and immigrants more of a sense of commonality than being parents and having similar concerns about their children. To be sure, there is a wide gap between the educational and other experiences of the children of most immigrant workers and affluent residents. Still, there are many cases where talk about children helps to build personal relationships. Annette mentioned how she bonded with the woman who worked at her dry cleaner—whose daughter went to highly competitive Stuyvesant High School—over their college-bound teenagers:

I had a fascinating conversation with the woman in the drycleaner, an Asian woman. I went in to get my daughter’s prom dress cleaned, and we had this conversation about college and about her son [who] was at Stuyvesant and that she was, like, super anxious about college, and, you know, that kind of thing. And we had a really interesting conversation about that. It was just a parental
conversation, and I was kind of [like], ‘It’s okay, he’ll do fine. He’ll get in somewhere good.’

The daughter’s prom dress, which was a sign to the dry cleaner that they both had children around the same age, initiated a personal conversation about their mutual concerns as parents—an important part of their respective lives to which they could both relate and understand one another.

For many residents, contact with immigrant workers challenges stereotypes or assumptions about immigrants, especially low wage-earning service workers, as Jennifer’s story illustrates. She was surprised to learn that the woman who did her nails had a child who scored high enough on difficult entry tests to attend Stuyvesant High School:

Once in a while [a friend of mine and I will] have our nails done, and I remember one time […] we were talking about our kids because our kids were applying for [high] schools. Then [my friend] turned to them [the salon worker] and she said, ‘Where does your kid go to school?’ and she said ‘Stuyvesant.’

Jennifer laughed, and finished her story:

So it’s a thought I have, like, you know, kind of in terms, I wonder their perception of us, because we’re like, ‘Oh, we’re paying for this tutor, we’re doing this and we’re in a struggle to get into the school,’ and all of them, their kids are in there because this is what they’ve been prepping their kids for years and doing such a good job at it and stuff. And I just thought that whole dynamic was like really interesting.

Repeated contact over the course of many years can, in some rare cases, lead to friendships, as some resident and immigrant informants revealed. Betty, a longtime resident who owns and operates an extracurricular program that caters mainly to Tribeca children, discussed the death of a local child’s caregiver. She had become close to the caregiver over several years:

I actually just wrote a condolence card to a family whose […] mom was a caregiver who was bringing kids here [to my business], and she just passed away from a heart attack. She was a person I would hug on the street when I’d see her if I hadn’t seen her [a while]. […] She was such an important part of the neighborhood and she really cared about the neighborhood, and the children of that family were so lucky to have her.
Bill has been working in Tribeca for 31 years. Because of this, he has met myriad
Tribeca residents, some of whom he has become very close with. He described several of the
patrons who come into the bar as being “not only my customers, but my very dear friends.” He
spends time outside work with some of them, including a well-known writer, the father of a film
and television actress, and even two real estate developers, whose parties he has attended:

There’s two young fellows who I am very friendly with. They are architects. They borrowed the money from their family and they put up a very fancy building with a glass front [across the street]. It sold for about 6 or 7 million bucks. I was over there with them and they invited me to a party. […] We became very good friends.

Similarly, James, who, like Bill, is from Ireland, has met Tribecans through his work at a high-
end wine store who have become his friends. This was apparent in the time I spent with him
outside the store, as he knew, joked around with, and introduced me to local residents. “There
are a couple of them [I spend time with],” he explained. “I go ‘Hey, let’s go grab dinner.’ You
know, or ‘Hey, let’s go grab a drink,’ you know what I mean.”

James’ and Bill’s experiences making friends with Tribeca residents is atypical, however,
as most immigrants who work in the neighborhood, while friendly with residents, are unable to
characterize their relationships with them as true friendships. James’ and Bill’s ability to have
these kinds of relationships can be attributed to their own social characteristics; as white, western
European, native-English speakers, James and Bill are seen by residents as less foreign, different,
or even immigrant, than most other immigrant workers in the neighborhood. The only non-
white, non-European immigrant who told me that he spends any time with residents outside of
his workplace was Ka-chung, an entrepreneur, who noted that he occasionally goes out for
breakfast or lunch with some of his longtime customers. As longtime workers in the
neighborhood, James, Bill, and Ka-chung have also had the time to develop friendships with
Residents, and work in environments that allow for contact conducive to cultivating friendships, both key for the development of intergroup friendships (Pettigrew 1998).

Most immigrant service workers experience a more superficial kind of positive contact, which is common in face-to-face interactions in cities (Wirth 1938). Indeed, the social distance between immigrant workers and the vast majority of (typically affluent, white, native-born) residents is so wide that it is difficult for relations built on service transactions to evolve into friendships. But it is precisely the great social distance that allows shallow, friendly relationships to develop, as neither party risks his or her status or role by stepping out of it when they interact.

Although they are not friendships, informal, positive relationships that develop between Tribeca residents and immigrant workers are often meaningful to them (Oldenburg 1999). One resident, Karen, described a man she recognizes who has delivered for several restaurants in the neighborhood. “There was one guy who delivered to us, I don’t know, maybe for like a year or two from some restaurant. And then all of a sudden we’re walking down the street [one day] and he goes ‘Hey! How are ya?’” She laughed. “‘I just got a new job over here,’ [he said]. He was, like, so happy to see us.”

For Junghee, the contact that she has with regular customers at the greengrocery fills a void that she feels in her social life. “I don’t have family now. My son is 30, so he have his own life. My husband, he’s gone. That’s why I’m by myself. That’s why I don’t have nothing to do. […] I don’t have my home life. Just working, go home, sleep, come back here,” Junghee laughed. “My life is here, but I enjoy it. That’s why I like come here, talking to customers, I really have fun. I don’t mind that at all. That’s why I don’t have any problem.” Thus, for immigrants who work in the neighborhood, like the man who does deliveries or Junghee, passing
encounters with familiar faces are significant. Although they have not gotten to know one another past saying brief “hellos” in passing, exchanging pleasantries makes both parties feel good and, as I will discuss further in Chapter 5, develop a sense of belonging in Tribeca.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, the relation(ship)s and contact between immigrant workers and Tribeca residents varies considerably on an individual basis. Factors like immigrants’ race and/or nation of origin, language, and job, and residents’ length of residency in the neighborhood and social class are all important in determining the saliency of the boundaries between residents and immigrants, and in shaping how interpersonal their intergroup contact becomes or professional it remains.

Despite the different directions in which immigrant/resident contact can go, there are relational characteristics that hold across most of their interactions. First, the relationships that develop tend to be shallow or superficial. Although residents and immigrants can develop personal kinds of relation(ship)s with one another, and such contact is important to those who engage on both sides, it is difficult for them to extend their relationships to contexts outside the place in which the service transaction—and initial contact—takes place. This can be attributed to the boundaries that remain most salient, especially that of social class and the service provider/customer divide which prevent most immigrants and residents from having close relationships. Thus, boundaries are not being dissolved, but rather bridged as a result of residents’ and immigrant workers’ interpersonal contact. In other words, the boundaries are still there, but residents and immigrants find them to be less important when it comes to interacting with individuals they have come to know. However, because the boundaries are unaltered, they
still restrict the kinds of contact that develops into socially acceptable—and mainly superficial—forms of interpersonal contact.

Furthermore, the overwhelming majority, if not all, of the contact between immigrants and residents is unequal in terms of power dynamics, primarily because the relationships arise out of services that residents pay for and immigrants are paid to provide. The interactions immigrant workers and Tribeca residents have—even those that take place outside of the work setting—are always mediated to some degree by the structure of personal services. Other hierarchically stratified boundaries like race, social class, and nativity also contribute to this inequality as most Tribeca residents are part of the majority, or dominant, group, while immigrants are not. So, with few exceptions, immigrants who work in Tribeca lack the social power and agency to be able to define the relation(ship)s they have with residents in the neighborhood, regardless of the length of time they’ve known one another. Instead, residents have the ability to decide with whom they will engage, how, and to what extent.

Intergroup contact, therefore, is instrumental when it comes to bridging—and thereby reducing the importance of—normally salient boundaries between Tribeca residents and immigrant workers on an individual basis. This is especially true in the case of immigrants for whom there are fewer boundaries between themselves and local residents, such as those from western Europe (in terms of race and perceived foreignness) or entrepreneurs (in terms of social class and occupation), who tend to report closer relationships with residents. In general, however, highly significant boundaries and wide social distance make it difficult for even the most open-minded, friendly, and well-meaning immigrants or residents to push past superficial niceties and develop meaningful connections with one another. Bridging boundaries to build superficial, positive relationships is possible between immigrants and residents precisely because
social distance is typically so wide and boundaries so bright so as to thwart any confusion about or threat to statuses or roles. This explains why immigrant workers and Tribeca residents commonly have positive interpersonal contact with one another despite the many boundaries that separate them.
CHAPTER 5: THE UNEXPECTED COMMUNITY: DEFINING BELONGING IN TRIBECA

Tribeca is an example of what Arlie Hochschild (1973) calls an unexpected community. One would expect there to be high barriers to social entry for workers who are foreign-born and often non-residents, working-class, non-native English speakers, and racial/ethnic minorities in a largely native, white, and wealthy neighborhood and that these characteristics would mark immigrants as the out-group on the wrong side of the boundary of belonging in Tribeca. As it turns out, however, many residents have incorporated immigrant workers into what they see as Tribeca’s community as a result of the contact that they have had with immigrants over time.

To understand how community is defined, built, and maintained in Tribeca, it is important to first clarify the term “community.” Tribeca, first and foremost, is a neighborhood. Neighborhoods are defined spatially and materially (Smith and LeFaivre 1984). So, within the boundaries of Broadway, West, Canal, and Murray streets exists the neighborhood Tribeca. Community, on the other hand, is social, and refers to the relation(ship)s people within the neighborhood have with one another (Schmalenbach 1961; Burgess 1967 [1925]; Smith and LeFaivre 1984). Community involves subjective meanings, or how people define community and delineate boundaries of belonging and exclusion, in their minds (Cohen 1985). Therefore, the community of Tribeca refers to how individuals perceive others’—as well as their own—belonging in it as informed by their interactions with other people in the neighborhood. The difference, then, between being a part of a neighborhood and being a part of a community is involvement in social relationships within that space.

This chapter explores the extent to which immigrants and residents see themselves, and one another, as belonging in Tribeca and whether or not individuals from either group are
considered a part of a local community. I begin by discussing residents’ and immigrants’ concepts of belonging. Two different forms of “belonging,” or feeling of being a part of Tribeca, arise when it comes to immigrants who work in the neighborhood: structural belonging and social belonging. Structural belonging refers to the functional roles immigrants fill that contribute to the neighborhood’s operation. Social belonging is a belief, which can be held by immigrants and residents alike, that immigrant workers are integrated into the neighborhood’s social, in addition to its service, structure. A sense of one’s own belonging, and the belonging of others, is the first step in defining the in-group/out-group boundaries of any community.

More factors go into building community than simply feeling as though people belong. In Tribeca, particular changes that have occurred and the contemporary context as shaped by gentrification create an environment in which notions of “community” and “belonging” have been defined and developed in an unusual way. Tribeca residents, who tend to feel divided and resentful of each another, turn to immigrants they see working in the neighborhood to supplement or reinforce their sense of community. As a result, residents—who, unlike immigrant workers, have the power to determine where boundaries of social belonging lay—ultimately define community in a way that is (symbolically) inclusive of the immigrants who work there, making the local concept of community in Tribeca truly unexpected.

“Community,” therefore, is the only in-group/out-group boundary in Tribeca that changes between residents and immigrant workers as a result of their contact with one another. While the boundaries that mark symbolic (and, therefore, social) difference in the neighborhood are static, the community boundary has shifted to include immigrant workers in addition to people who live there. This shift in the boundary of belonging is due in large part to the contact that residents and immigrant workers have with one another; the positive, repeated contact makes immigrants feel
as though they belong, while the contact residents have with immigrants over time enhances or, for some, rebuilds their own sense of local community.

BECOMING THE IN-GROUP: BASES FOR STRUCTURAL AND SOCIAL BELONGING

What Makes Immigrants Belong?

Immigrants who work in service jobs in Tribeca are integral to the neighborhood’s structure and everyday operation. They take care of the children, prepare meals, clean the streets, sign for packages, maintain the plumbing, and fetch cars from lots that look like Huarong Pass sliding block puzzles. Without them, much—perhaps most—activity in the neighborhood would come to a standstill. But if immigrants are an operational asset in Tribeca, do residents—and immigrants, themselves—see them as belonging in the neighborhood in a structural or even social way? Surprisingly, the majority of Tribecans and immigrants alike do.

Although the jobs seem thankless, immigrants’ work does not go unnoticed. Tribeca residents are keenly aware of their dependence on immigrants who work in the neighborhood, and nearly every resident I spoke with acknowledged the important functional roles immigrants fill. Some Tribecans believe that immigrants structurally belong in the neighborhood because the work they do is critical to the local infrastructure. Howard, who has lived in Tribeca for 33 years, explained how vital immigrants, specifically, are to the neighborhood:

Who would be the nannies [if it weren’t immigrants]? Who would be making the, working in the delis? Who would be the porters here? I... I don’t know. I mean, I don’t know where, what other groups would be doing those jobs. And so, to that extent, I would think that they’re critical to the neighborhood and to the social structure.

Lillian, a 34-year resident, agreed. “This place couldn’t function without immigrants. I don’t know who would do all the work.” She laughed, and elaborated:

[Who would] take care of all the kids, shovel all the snow, you know, do all the things that have to be done? I mean, if you just go into the pizzeria downstairs [on the ground floor of my building], I don’t think there’s a native-born person
[working] in there. It’s the day-to-day drudge that has to get done, and, you know, people pay to have it done for them.

Immigrants are particularly important in Tribeca, another resident, Richard, pointed out, because a common low-wage laboring population is notably absent. Since Tribeca is so affluent and privileged, the teenage children of local residents do not fill such jobs as they do in many other places in the United States. Instead of having to work part-time jobs, Richard said, Tribeca’s teenagers are “in Switzerland at summer camp.” Therefore, other people, who—in New York—are foreign-born, do this work.

While these residents see immigrants’ belonging as structural because of their on-the-job contributions in the neighborhood, immigrants’ feelings of belonging are rooted in a different way. They tend to shy away from the idea of their structural belonging, as indicated by Ramón, who is from El Salvador and works in building maintenance. He expressed uncertainty as to whether or not he or his work is important in the neighborhood: “I don’t believe I’m better than nobody. I just do my job and I’m happy with do the right thing. […] Maybe I am important [in the building], but I don’t believe [so]. No.” His work, according to Ramón, does not necessarily make him a part of the neighborhood, therefore he lacks a sense of structural belonging.

Immigrants’ sense of belonging in Tribeca tends, instead, to be more social in that they feel they are a part in ways that extend beyond the work they do.

Many immigrants work more (sometimes far more) than 40 hours per week in Tribeca. Just the time spent every week in Tribeca makes immigrants feel as though they are a part of the neighborhood. Marisol, a Mexican caregiver, explained:

I live in Brooklyn, and I rest in Brooklyn. I leave here [Tribeca] at six in the evening, and I come back at eight in the morning. My life is here. I spend a lot of time here, it’s like, I don’t know, it’s a part of me; work, the people you know, the environment here, you get used to it. You get used to being here. I feel like I am a part of this place.
Fatmir, a doorman from Albania, expressed a similar sentiment:

Yes, it’s my home. I think I am part of the neighborhood. You working and you feel like you’re living over there, one big piece of your life. […] I’m nine or ten hours here [at work], so it’s a long time. The day has only 24 hours. Sometimes I have to leave late and come early [to work]. Sometimes I leave here, I get home at one [a.m.] and they call me at four in the morning, I have to come at seven. Seven [o’clock] again they [the tenants] say ‘oh did you sleep here?’ ‘Yes, I slept on the desk;’ I joke with them.

When I asked Yura, a barber from Uzbekistan who goes by the name Jack at work, if he feels as though he is a part of the neighborhood in Tribeca, he replied, “Yes, I’m spending here 12 hours [a day]! For example, what happened last year, […] my neighbors [in Flushing, Queens] said ‘Welcome to the neighborhood.’ I said ‘Excuse me, you know how long I live here? Sixteen years!’” He laughed at this mistake. “‘How come we never see you?,’” his neighbors asked. “It’s like, oh man,” he explained to them, “I come home, you’re asleep. In the morning I leave, you come outside and read the newspaper.” The fact that his own neighbors in Queens did not recognize him made Yura realize how much time he spends in Tribeca at the barbershop. This makes him feel more a part of Tribeca than the neighborhood in which he lives.

Similarly, immigrants who have worked in the neighborhood for a long period of time tend to cite this fact when asked if they belong in the neighborhood. A long work history in the neighborhood increases immigrants’ sense of belonging, as it gives them a sense of local authority as they learn more about the neighborhood and get to know local people over time; they often think they know more about the neighborhood and how it has changed than many other workers, and even new residents.

Many immigrants noted how their seeing the neighborhood’s evolution over time makes them feel they belong. New construction, businesses moving in or out, and street alterations, such as the expansion and beautification of the sidewalk along Greenwich Street, often came up
as events that made immigrants feel as though they belong in the neighborhood, where they are a stable part of ever-changing surroundings.

David, who is from Mexico, saw many changes in Tribeca over the course of the 12 years he has been working in a restaurant on Greenwich Street:

When I started ten years ago it’s different here. Everything changed now; here there not too many business. I’m here like 12 years. Not too many business. Now [a lot has] changed, a lot of business [have moved in], they changed the streets [by widening the sidewalk on Greenwich Street]. Only they had the small sidewalk [on Greenwich street], now it’s [a] big sidewalk. And they put in trees, now it’s more better.

Bill, originally from Ireland, has seen a complete transformation in Tribeca over the more than 30 years that he has worked as a bartender in a local pub. His longevity in the neighborhood is so extensive that he can recall memories of some of the area’s wholesale and industrial enterprises:

When I came here 31 years ago, […] this area, Tribeca, was warehouses. Next door was a butter and egg place. Across the street they packaged butter. I remember the name of the company: Cremora—Cremora Butter. Now, there was a constant odor on the street especially in summertime from that butter place. The bar here closed from 6 o’clock on Saturday to 6 o’clock on Sunday [because there was nobody in the neighborhood on the weekends]. Now we do big business here on the weekends. Next door here, that was a parking lot. I’d drive my car in sometimes and I could park next door for seven dollars, which is great. It’s a new [residential] building [now]. It’s like a village moving in next door when they put up that building.

Junghee (Jenny at work) is Korean and has worked in her mother’s store in Tribeca for 20 years. She, like Bill and David, noted that there were fewer conveniences for local residents when her mother first opened the store than today. The lack of retail shops offered them a business opportunity:

First time we open here they [Tribecans] were really happy, so happy that we opened this because [there were hardly any food stores]; they [did] not [have to] go too far [to shop]. […] Also you have [the store] open 24 hours. We never close. [20 years ago there was] not much. There’s a lot of stores now, but 20
years ago not too many stores in this area. But still customers happy about the [convenience]. We open 24 hours. Yeah, customer happy, neighbors happy.

The fact that she has seen, and been a part of, the neighborhood’s transformation, makes her feel part of the local fabric.

For some immigrants, their sense of belonging is so strong that they referred to the neighborhood as “home.” Fatmir, the Albanian doorman, explained:

It's [Tribeca] my home. […] You working and you feel like you’re living over there, one big piece of your life. […] I’m 9 or 10 hours here [at work], so it’s a long time. They day has only 24 hours. […] When I'm working actually I feel like I'm a part of Tribeca and when I'm out my job I would like to be here because I feel this. I know much more people here than where I live.

Fatmir’s entire family is in Europe and he doesn’t see his roommate in Queens often, so the most significant interpersonal contact he has on a regular basis in New York is with the tenants who live in the building where he works. This contact is so important to him that he arrives early in Tribeca for each shift and sits in a local coffee shop to relax and chat with familiar residents who happen by before work. He noted:

When I came here, actually I came and had coffee before and I feel like I’m in my hometown now because I’m here three years. You know, people passing by, our tenant, they say ‘Hi, Fatmir,’ you feel... you know? You feel very comfortable. I love to be with people, so that’s my point. I’m not always with friends around, with family.

Similarly, Sajjad, a Pakistani immigrant, has been working in a small restaurant in Tribeca for nine of the 13 years he has been in the U.S. His entire family, including his teenage daughter, remained behind in his home country. Because of this, he has developed a sense of home in Tribeca. When I asked him if he feels part of the neighborhood, he responded by asking me, “Do you know what Tribeca stands for? I feel like it is my ‘home triangle,’” he declared, drawing on the neighborhood’s acronym to make his point. Tribeca feels like home to him not only because he has gotten to know the area well, but also because he has developed good
relationships with residents who come into the restaurant. His level of comfort with them makes him feel as though he belongs.

Chana, from Russia, has worked in Tribeca for 15 years. She realized how much the neighborhood felt like home to her when she and her husband relocated their barbershop from Tribeca to Midtown in Manhattan. Neither she nor her husband felt comfortable in Midtown and, as soon as they could, they returned “back home to Downtown.” These immigrants define “home,” in the same way Jan Willem Duyvendak (2011) does, in that it is a positive “social, psychological, and emotional” attachment to a place—not necessarily where one lives—that has “familiar daily routines and regular settings for activities and interaction” (27). Immigrants who see Tribeca as “home” feel that way because their sense of home is relational and develops through the positive, inclusive interactions they have with others in that space (Duyvendak 2011). This is particularly significant to immigrants like Sajjad and Fatmir whose families and “homes” are far away.

Just as Tribeca becomes “home” for many immigrants who lack family in New York, it is common for them to create fictive family in the neighborhood. Yura used familial terms to describe his relationships with several of his regular customers. “I have a customer, […] he comes in once a week for shave. I talk to him; he’s like my dad.” When I asked him if his relationships with local residents are different than those he has with customers who work locally, he explained, “They [residents] act different; they act like we’re brothers, [as though] we live here. They come [in saying], ‘Hey, what's up? Nice to see you.’ We joke.” Reference to residents as family is especially common for immigrants whose own family members stayed in their home country, or are scattered across the U.S. or globe. Because they don’t have family nearby, they may create a surrogate family (Hochschild 1973) with the people they see on a
regular basis and with whom they feel they have a positive relationship—in this case, Tribeca residents whom they see regularly.

But even immigrants who have family nearby or live with them but spend most of their waking hours at work, used the term “family” to describe their relationship with customers and clients who are Tribeca residents. Job structure and employment position are both factors that contribute to the creation of fictive family ties at work. Entrepreneurs and family employees commonly refer to regular—and longtime—customers as family. One Laotian informant, Irene, who has worked in her brother’s restaurant for 23 years, used the term when describing her relationship with residents who patronize the restaurant regularly:

We know a lot of customers’ story, too, because they eat here long term. They do what they do and tell us, too, what kind of job they have. Some people they are... Mostly they are artists, you know? And doctor, too. We know a lot of them. [...] Different customer [...] who live longer here, but not for short term. The one who is ten, 20 year here they tell us, too, because [we’re] like a family. They just come and eat, talk, talk, talk, you know? And they happy because we talk with them if we have time.

Longtime, regular customers became family for Irene even though she lives and spends the whole workday with her brother. “Over here it’s only [the] same people [in] Tribeca [who] come to eat. We know them like a family,” she said.

Rhetoric of family-like relations among business owners likely has to do with the fact that entrepreneurs actively try to cultivate a positive relationship with locals who patronize their establishment. The business’ success is dependent on the customer base, so entrepreneurs and family employees encourage customer loyalty through the development and maintenance of warm, or what they see as familial, relations.

Domestic workers sometimes to see their employers, or—in the case of caregivers—their charges, as family. This has to do with the fact that domestic work, especially when it involves providing services for or taking care of children, often breeds emotional closeness (Hondagneu-
Sotelo 2001). Radek is from Croatia and works as a private driver for a family with young children. When discussing how he got his job, he revealed the nature of his relationship with his employers:

   Somehow I got connected with them because they live right here in the neighborhood; more coincidentally we got in touch and we stayed, like, even as good friends now. Not only like [I’m] just [their] driver, they became really good friends [with me]—very close. I feel like a member of the family.

Carolina, a caregiver from Mexico, has similar sentiments about the children in the family for whom she works. She has four kids of her own, and for four years has been taking care of two children in Tribeca. While her relationship with her employers is “more professional, with the kids, I don’t know, I feel a part with them,” she explained, half in Spanish, half in English. “[The parents] are good persons, good parents, I admire them as parents, but they are not like my family. But with the children, yes. Yes, it’s different. […] I say I have six children now: four on weekends and night and two on the week.”

Familial sentiments are also felt on the part of Tribecans who employ domestic workers. Cheryl, who has lived in the neighborhood for two years, said of her housekeeper, whom she has employed for nearly as long:

   She’s sort of like family. It's funny. Yeah. It’s just someone who I have great affection for. You know, [when] someone comes into your home and they take care of you and your home, it’s a very special relationship.

Reference to family-like relations between employers and domestic workers is complicated by the fact that they are mediated by the hierarchy and monetary compensation that is inherent to work. The true test of whether or not employers and domestic workers see one another as family can be measured by the existence of relationships that continue after work terminates. Indeed, some relationships between Tribecans and their domestic employees continue for years after the
employment ends. Evelyn and her now-adult children are still in contact with a caregiver who Evelyn and her husband employed when the children were very young:

I mean, she was with us constantly because, even when she wasn’t working with the kids, she was just hanging out at our house. Because she didn’t have any family here, so we were her family. […] You know, the kids still are Facebook [friends] with her and when she heard our daughter is getting married she wrote, she said, ‘Milan’s only eight hours away by plane. I’ll be there.’

Some residents, therefore, are aware when immigrants consider them to be “family” when they are far away from their own.

What Makes Residents Belong?

For Tribeca residents, feelings of belonging in the neighborhood have different origins, derived from friendships and acquaintances with neighbors. These friendships were most commonly reported by two groups: tenants who live in Independence Plaza North (IPN), a development that, for three decades, was dedicated middle-income housing, and parents of school-age children. Many IPN residents note that they feel as though they belong in the complex because, compared to the overall neighborhood, it is more socioeconomically and racially diverse. This subsection of the neighborhood, they feel, is more inclusive of people like themselves, making it easier to make social connections with neighbors.

IPN tenants’ activism over the years has also helped them to connect with one another. As some of the initial residents of the neighborhood, longtime IPN residents, along with early loft-dwellers, had to organize to gain basic amenities for the neighborhood. When asked if he feels like he is part of a community in Tribeca, Albert, a retired journalist who has lived in IPN for 27 years, replied:

Yes, I really do, primarily because of being in IPN. You know, when you’re involved in something like that, it’s such a mainstay of the community. IPN has been so involved in so much that has happened here: the parks, demonstrations creating parks as opposed to parking lots or more skyscrapers; fighting for a
supermarket when there was none here; fighting for traffic lights. That makes you a part of a community.

More recently, since IPN left the Mitchell-Lama Housing Program residents have had to organize to retain their right to stay in their units, which now rent at market rate to new tenants. Uniting for a common cause, as IPN residents have consistently done since the complex’s opening, helps people bond and develop a sense of community (Fantasia 1988).

Raising, or having raised, children in the neighborhood also gives residents a vested interest in the neighborhood (Park 1967 [1925]), leading parents to make connections with one another through their children’s friendships or activities (Janowitz 1980 [1952]). Lucy, a resident who is originally from Australia, moved to Tribeca with her husband and young son ten years ago. Despite the fact that she knew no one or anything about the neighborhood when she arrived, she quickly developed a sense of local belonging:

For me, the hub of the neighborhood for a long time was the school. […] You walk your child to school and you stand in the yard and you talk to the other parents and you see the other faces and you get to know people. And then you go to the same, you know, you go to the park, Washington Market Park, afterwards, and that was a big thing. So [the school and park] became the neighborhood hubs. And when [I would] walk in there, not [anymore] now because my son is 12, but I would always see faces I knew.

Because of the people she met through her son, Lucy now feels a part of Tribeca.

*The Significance of Positive Intergroup Contact*

One of the most oft-cited reasons that Tribeca residents *as well as* immigrants say they feel a part of the neighborhood is actually the same: positive intergroup contact. Such contact is significant to both immigrants and residents when it comes to identifying with and having a sense of belonging in Tribeca.
Contact over an extended period of time allows relationships between immigrants and residents to develop. For immigrants, the relationships they develop with local residents are particularly significant. David explained:

[I’ve been here] for ten years. Part of my life is here. Yeah, I know a lot of people [in the neighborhood]. They know me and speak to me. They see me and say like “Hey, hello. How are you?” I know the people.

Yesenia, a young woman from Mexico who works in a café, had similar feelings: “The people that are still come in [here] they got here and they recognize me and they [say] ‘Hi, Yesenia, how are you?,’ so I don’t feel like I am only the waiter for them. That’s why I stay here, because I like this area for the people who comes over.” Getting to know residents in the neighborhood makes immigrants feel a part of the neighborhood not only because of the interpersonal connections that they have, but also because being accepted by the residents is an indicator in itself of their belonging in Tribeca.

Howard, a resident, posited that interpersonal contact that stretches beyond the service transaction is particularly important when it comes to immigrants’ belonging. He compared the relationship he had with an immigrant, Nick, who had recently left his job running a small newsstand, to that with another immigrant who operates a food truck, both of whom he sees regularly:

I think the more you know people who you deal with on a regular basis, they [immigrants], I mean, they are part of the community. Especially if you feel like they feel like they’re part of the community. I mean, it’s a two-way street. Nick, obviously, feels like he’s part of the community. I asked him, what’s he going to miss most [about his job]? And he said the community, the people. You know, there’s a guy who has one of those [food] trucks, he’s at Sixth Avenue and Walker Street, you know that coffee wagon there guy? And I go, I actually see him more than I see Nick because it’s on my way to the office. […] He’s friendly, he says you know ‘thank you, boss.’ Everybody’s ‘boss.’ I thought I was ‘boss,’ but then I was very, you know, I was really disappointed when I saw that he has other bosses.
While Howard joked about his disappointment about being one of many “bosses,” this comment illustrated his perception that the coffee cart worker lacked interest in really getting to know his regular customers by neglecting to learn their names. He continued:

So, you know, there’s a… I would bet that people who see him on a daily basis feel that he’s… because he’s a friendly guy, but he doesn’t get to know people’s names because everybody’s ‘boss,’ like, he’s part of their day and he’s part of, in a way he’s part of the community, but I don’t think it’s in the same way that Nick is.

Some residents also claim that their contact with immigrants they have gotten to know enhances their own sense of belonging in Tribeca. Jennifer has lived in her loft in Tribeca for 33 years, and feels especially connected to other people who have been in the neighborhood for a long time, including workers:

Well, there’s some [immigrants] that I’ll say hi and have brief conversation. One is because he’s been here the same amount of time as me and that’s the guy at the parking lot, and he’s from Grenada. And so we’ve both been here, like, for years and so, you know, we always say hello […] It turned out that actually the place that I took my son [on vacation recently] just by some odd coincidence was this very small island off of Grenada that has a population of 600, and it turns out that’s where he’s from. So we kind of made this like newer kind of connection because what were the chances of that? And I never asked him, like, what island he was from. You know, I knew he was from Grenada. So I say hello to him, and so I talk with him a bit mainly because he’s been here, like, forever.

Like the immigrants themselves, many residents consider immigrants who have worked in Tribeca for a long period of time as having social belonging in the neighborhood because of their reliably consistent presence. They consider immigrants to be integral to the neighborhood because of who they are and the social contributions they make to Tribeca, not just the services they provide.

BARRIERS TO SOCIAL BELONGING

While many immigrants who work in Tribeca have a sense of social belonging, and residents overwhelmingly agree that immigrants, at the very least, structurally belong in the
neighborhood, several elements cause both residents and immigrants to feel as though they do not belong in the neighborhood in a social way.

Factors that Exclude Immigrants

Residents in Tribeca are conflicted regarding immigrants’ social belonging. Some believe that, to other Tribecans—especially those who are newer and very wealthy—immigrant workers are invisible. Douglas, a 33-year resident, reasoned:

Did you ever read *Invisible Man* [the novel by Ralph Ellison]? It’s about people who are just not seen. Nobody notices them, nobody sees them. […] Downstairs from me is a dentist and she has two different people working for her cleaning and doing her laundry, and they come and they go and they don’t say two words to anybody. And nobody [notices them]. […] I was talking to one of them [a neighbor] and I said, ‘Do you know her?’ and he said, ‘No, I’ve never seen her.’ She’s been coming there for four years and he never noticed. I don’t know if it’s like that all over the area, but I suspect that it is. You have all of these invisible people coming here and nobody notices them, nobody knows who they are, nobody says anything. […] Aside from the people that they work for directly, nobody knows them, nobody knows who they are, what they do, where they go. Nobody cares.

It is difficult for people like Douglas to think that immigrants belong in Tribeca when some residents fail to “see” them: “It’s [like] what my father always used to say,” he said. “‘If you didn’t have them, who’s going to clean the fish?’ And that’s the attitude toward them [here]: ‘Yeah, they serve their purpose, they clean the fish. That’s it,’ and then go home.”

Despite the fact that immigrants are seen as structurally belonging by residents, the people in those jobs are often seen as interchangeable and easily replaced, as anybody can perform such jobs without much training and practice. Michael, a 10-year resident, explained:

Obviously the immigrants that are here, anybody who’s doing any kind of job, it’s important. But everyone’s replaceable. There are certain people who are less replaceable than others. […] Could somebody else take over as dishwasher here [at this diner]? Absolutely. Would it make any difference? Maybe for the first week.
Residents like Michael believe that, in most cases, it doesn’t matter to Tribecans who is performing the job, as long as the job is getting done, which prevents social belonging. Only when residents have made very personal connections with people, or depend on a particular person’s experience or talent do individual immigrants become “visible” and important.

Several factors can prevent immigrants from having a sense of social belonging in Tribeca. Interestingly, while time spent in Tribeca makes many immigrants feel more a part of the neighborhood, for others time can be negatively correlated with belonging. This is especially true for those who spend so much of their time at work that they lack the free time (much less, energy) to do anything else in the neighborhood before, during, or after work.

Job structure can also influence feelings of social belonging. Those who work in jobs where they have limited contact with people at work also have a harder time feeling as though they are part of the neighborhood. This is especially true for parking attendants who work in indoor garages. While the majority of customers are local residents, they spend their time hidden away in a garage, which restricts their interactions only to clients who use their cars on that particular day. This job, then, entails both physical and social isolation. “I like my job, but I don’t really know the neighborhood,” Luis, an Ecuadorean immigrant who has worked in an indoor parking garage in Tribeca for three years explained in Spanish. “I stay here, and I go at night. I spend most of my time in the garage. I don’t know a lot about the neighborhood. I’m in here, inside these four walls, and I don’t go outside a lot.” Parking attendants’ inability to get to know other people in the neighborhood through repeated chance encounters prevents, or detracts from, their sense of social belonging.

Some immigrants feel like social outsiders in Tribeca because of their race, class, occupation, nativity, or other characteristic(s). But no out-group marker is more significant than
language. Working in a neighborhood that has such a sizable native-born population and where 78 percent of the population speaks only English at home, it is unsurprising that immigrants are aware of the way they speak and how it sets them apart from the vast majority of Tribecans. Immigrant workers in Tribeca tend to express self-consciousness about their use of the English language; they see their facility in English as inadequate and worry about their accent when talking with local residents. Fatmir explained the concerns he has about speaking with tenants:

Now they [the tenants are] getting used to [me] with my accent. My accent wasn’t good and is not good too because everybody say ‘Fatmir, where you from?’ [That’s] the first thing [they ask me]. But I don’t like it […] because I feel my accent is bad. But they say in different way—maybe [it] isn’t bad, like ‘Me, I am American and you are [immigrant]’… But somebody want to know ‘Oh, this accent, where you come from?’ It’s not in bad way. But the question is coming more often so I say [wonder], ‘I still have this problem?’

He laughed, and further explained why it bothers him that his accent identifies him to residents as an immigrant or, in Tribeca, as different:

I don’t like that, to start having that question [of where I’m from] again and again. Usually you talk two sentence and that’s what they ask you. […] Maybe it’s my fault. […] After four years I shouldn’t have any bad accent; I see it in the bad way. I don’t see it in the good way, and sometimes the question is in the good way. […] I have to eliminate this one [my accent] to go little by little to improve. I would like to have good accent and [so] nobody knows where I come from.

Some immigrants are concerned that they are being judged by the way they speak. Miguel, who is from El Salvador, expressed this to me one day when he asked if I thought Latinos are cognitively slower than white people. He explained that he thought some white people believe this, and he told me of the interactions he had had with a woman who lived nearby. The facial expressions she made when he spoke led him to believe that she thought he was unintelligent based on the way he spoke English. This kind of reaction from local residents can be a particular cause of worry for immigrants, since speaking with them is a key element of their job.
Factors that Exclude Residents

Even residents themselves can lack a sense of social belonging in Tribeca, so we cannot simply take their belonging for granted. In fact, despite the rhetoric that is often used by local politicians, community board members, and even residents themselves referring to Tribeca as a “community,” some residents feel as though there may not be a real community in Tribeca, or, if there is, that they are not a part of it. Tribecans’ relationship to their neighborhood—and each other—is complex, sometimes creating conflicting senses of belonging. There are several explanations for these sentiments.

While being witness to change in Tribeca makes immigrants feel as though they are a part of Tribeca, it tends to have the opposite effect for longtime residents who no longer recognize the neighborhood. For them, the rapid cultural and demographic shift that has occurred in Tribeca as it went from being an artists’ enclave to a wealthy, white citadel diminishes the sense of social belonging many once had. This is a common response among longtime residents in changing neighborhoods (Abrahamson 1996); for people who have spent a long period of time in one place, Duyvendak (2011) explains, change in population and surroundings can make them no longer feel as though they are at home.

Neil, an actor who, with his wife, bought his loft 20 years ago and raised two sons there, illustrated this point when asked if he felt a part of Tribeca:

No, not so much anymore. I feel like I’m part of this building. I used to feel part of this neighborhood because we knew so many people who lived here and who had raised children down here. But a lot of them, they couldn’t take it anymore. They moved away. […] So many people have moved out. […] It’s very different [here now]. […] I was walking down the street on Halloween four or five or six years ago, I turned to my wife and said ‘You know, all of a sudden I feel like local color.’ I felt like people could look at me and say ‘Oh, he’s one of the old people down here, one of the old timers down here.’ And I felt like I had become something other than a part of the community. I felt like I had become
part of history, and I don’t like that. That’s, I guess, what I mean when I say I
don’t feel like Tribeca has any sense of continuity anymore.

It is common for people, like Neil, to feel out-of-place or nostalgic for the past in rapidlychanging neighborhoods (Duyvendak 2011). Some Tribeca residents attribute this to the
lifestyles of newer, younger residents. It can be hard for longtime residents to make connections
with newer residents because the latter tend to lack time to get to know their neighbors given
their demanding work schedules and shuttling their children to myriad activities. Additionally,
new residents are more likely to be young, affluent, and starting families than their longtime
counterparts who are older, less affluent, and often in the “empty nest” stage of family life.
Therefore, there is a palpable social divide in the neighborhood between longtime and new
residents because of their lack of sufficient commonalities to make significant social
connections. These negative or exclusive relations between residents can detract from their
sense of home or belonging (Duyvendak 2011).

Some longtime residents get the impression that newer arrivals are not interested in
becoming involved in the neighborhood, which is, in fact, an accurate observation for many
newcomer professionals (Park 1967 [1925]). Annette, a 27-year resident who raised her children
in Tribeca with her husband, explained that she felt the people who have been attracted to live in
Tribeca in recent years are not as immersed in the neighborhood as she or other longtime
residents are.

When I moved to this neighborhood it was a live/work neighborhood, so it was
like a small town. My kids went to school with the people who owned the local
businesses, who owned the newspaper, who were really, really invested in the
community. Now, I don’t know, everybody I know here works somewhere else,
so it’s a bedroom community. So your investment literally is very different.
You’re not running a business or promoting a service or anything.

Newcomers’ focus is outside the neighborhood, she said, unlike those who have been in Tribeca
longer.
New and longtime residents’ inability to interpersonally connect with one another is well-illustrated by an experience that longtime residents commonly shared with me: in high-rise buildings, residents used to talk with each other in the elevator. Sharing the tiny space for a minute or so forced many to get to know one another over time. Friendly elevator chats have become less common as the population of newcomers booms. Victoria, who lives in IPN, brought up this issue in an informal conversation we were having one day. “My husband and I were in the elevator in our building,” she said, and there were three other young, blonde women in the elevator with us. They were on their gadgets [cell phones], you know, and the elevator stopped and this older black woman got on the elevator. She said ‘hello’ and my husband and I said ‘hi,’ but the three women didn’t respond. They were totally oblivious. The perceived disinterest in social interaction feels like a loss to people who were accustomed to the amicable contact they would find in the elevator—and the neighborhood—previously.

But longtime residents aren’t the only ones who feel alienated in Tribeca. In my sample of residents who had lived in the neighborhood for a decade or less, only one felt as though she was really a part of the neighborhood. While new Tribeca residents do not say that they feel excluded, economically or otherwise, in Tribeca, they are less likely than longtime residents to report that they have, or have had, friends locally, and overwhelmingly report shallow interactions with other people in the neighborhood. Yet, for them, most did not express that feelings of belonging were important. This can partly be explained by the fact that newer residents have not had the time afforded to longtime residents to develop an attachment to the neighborhood, and many only see their residence in Tribeca as short-term. Indeed, the high cost of living in the neighborhood can be prohibitively expensive even for dual-earner professional households; disappointment in the local public schools’ ability to accommodate the large and growing population of children; and investment in communities outside of Tribeca, such as
work, or where their children go to school mean that many newer Tribecans will no doubt move elsewhere before long.

The new local culture of (white) privilege, wealth, and consumption also prevents some newcomers from wanting to be a part of the local system of inequality—even if their presence in the neighborhood contributes to it. For example, when asked if he felt part of the neighborhood in Tribeca, Roy, a 3-year resident who had moved from Queens, said that he did not:

In Queens I did get myself more folded into the neighborhood fabric and people and stuff there than I have here. It’s a little bit by choice for me because I don’t want to become too…I don’t want to slide into being very, very neighborhood-centric here because in Manhattan there’s often a chauvinism that comes with that, that I didn’t feel where I was living in Queens. I don’t want to be one of these Manhattanites who is obsessed with my neighborhood. It gets to be kind of, there’s a little chauvinism about that in a sense that it’s ‘us versus the other’ and the prestige competition and the status positioning of it and stuff. I don’t want to get too wrapped into that.

For Roy, becoming a part of, or identifying with, a wealthy neighborhood like Tribeca meant condoning a system of classed hierarchy. So, like many longtime residents, some newer ones also notice—and dislike—the socioeconomically exclusive culture that has developed and been cultivated in Tribeca as it has gentrified.

The Significance of Economic Exclusion

As discussed in Chapter 2, Tribeca has a dearth of affordable amenities, including necessities like grocery stores, retail, medical, and other services. Immigrants who work in Tribeca commonly noted how expensive the neighborhood is, that they are residentially excluded, or unable to carry out everyday tasks there. Economic exclusion from increasingly costly shopping, restaurants, and housing in Tribeca were cited by both immigrants and residents as a reason why they feel like they don’t belong in Tribeca.

Immigrants who work in service jobs in Tribeca find it difficult, sometimes impossible, to meet their needs there. Douglas, a resident, explained, “There is no facility for them to linger
in the neighborhood outside of their jobs, so there’s no way they could become part of the neighborhood. And of course there’s no place for them to live here either.” César, the parking attendant, gave an example of how even getting water to drink at work can be an economic challenge in Tribeca:

Really, the neighborhood I think it’s ok. I really like everything... only, it’s expensive. I have to, yeah, that’s only that I, it’s an expensive place. You know, sometimes we don’t have water here. I have to bring a gallon of water. It’s here like three dollars. In Queens, I get that one dollar. That’s something like that, it’s too expensive.

The cost of living in Tribeca is becoming too high for many middle-class residents to afford, so economic exclusion does not stop at immigrant workers. Douglas shared his own experience:

I like the fact that they [we] have all these restaurants; I hate the fact that I can’t afford to eat in them very often at all because they charge an arm and a leg. And there’s not a lot that’s still affordable down here. We go over to the East Village and eat a lot over there. [...] The [super]markets are outrageous here. I mean, we don’t have a decently priced market. We have to drive over Pathmark, but at least Pathmark’s not that far away. We go over there to pick up our food. But a lot of elderly people that live here can’t drive over to Pathmark, and they’re stuck here and they have to deal with the Food Emporium or Whole Foods.

Michelle, a 20-year resident, also pointed out that many residents she knows who have been in the neighborhood longer than her cannot afford to take advantage of the neighborhood’s new destination restaurants: “It’s expensive. Fourteen dollar glass of wine? Forget it! Right?”

Some residents, like Betty, drew attention to the fact that immigrants cannot eat at the copious number of restaurants in Tribeca. “So now it’s all nail salons and cleaners and kids’ stores and these franchise eateries like Dunkin Donuts and Subway and you know, really,” she lamented, making a face of disgust:

eateries that are not, you know, those are the kinds of eateries that are, like, you know, creating this horrible condition of ill health in our communities, and they should be paying more taxes than be getting tax incentives. But anyway, yeah, so I think that those are the kinds of places that the service population [that] is
supporting this neighborhood can afford to eat at. They can’t afford to eat at the small, hip little… […] Probably they bring their own food, or they cook at home for their families. The support system for the service people [in Tribeca] is not one of the best. I think you pick up an easy, quick piece of carbohydrate to get you through the day.

Victoria made a similar observation:

I wish that we lived in a more normal neighborhood with a middle class, some lower middle class, and some upper middle class, but just a more normal place with normal restaurants—someplace where they [immigrant workers] could go in and have a cup of coffee. There’s only one place in all of Tribeca, I think, where they could go in and have a cup of coffee for a dollar. It’s [the neighborhood’s] not accessible to them.

In terms of immigrants’ ability to live in Tribeca, Douglas recalled how, over the 33 years he has lived in Tribeca, that has changed:

When we first moved in here, if the people [service workers] liked the neighborhood they would move here. We had apartments here, there were apartments available all around here, until they made them all into co-ops and condos. And they would move down here and they would become a part of the neighborhood in addition to working around here. But now, no way. They’ve forced them all out. There’s no place for them to move [to here]. They can’t get into this place. There’s no affordable apartments down here, so where the hell is an immigrant going to go? Unless they immigrate with a lot of money, they’re not getting in here. I guess if [Muammar] Gaddafi decided to immigrate he could buy an apartment down here, but other than that I don’t think so.

Many immigrants I talked with said that they like being in Tribeca and, given the opportunity, would choose to live there. However, for virtually all those working in the service industry, this is a financial impossibility. Marisol, who lives in Flatbush, Brooklyn, discussed her desire to live in a place like Tribeca:

It’s [Tribeca] nice, it’s very nice, this place. There is a lot to do, walk, to see, the river, the parks. Brooklyn is nice, but not as much. [Tribeca] is better. […] But the only thing is that it’s very expensive to live here. It’s too expensive to live here, but I like it here. If one day I had the opportunity, I would live here.

She laughed at the prospect of ever being able to afford to live in Tribeca, and continued:

But with what I would pay for rent here, I could have three apartments [in Flatbush]. I have a friend who told me who was living [in Tribeca] with three
women, and I asked how much do you pay? And she told me $5,000. What?!? And how much do you pay in rent? I only pay $800 and I’m dying for this money. I would like to stay here [in Tribeca].

Because it is so expensive, most cannot afford to do anything in Tribeca aside from work. This economic exclusion can lead some to feel, despite their partiality to the place, as though they don’t socially belong.

Longtime residents also have concerns about the affordability of the real estate—not necessarily for themselves, since many bought or leased when property values were much lower, but for their children. They lament the fact that their adult children can almost never afford to live in the neighborhood in which they grew up. Evelyn who, with her husband, raised two children in the neighborhood said:

What I don’t like about the neighborhood is just that it’s very expensive, and it pains me that my grown children cannot afford to be in this neighborhood. Our son is a musician, he’s a cellist and he lives in Bushwick. He lives in inner Bushwick where the rent’s really cheap, and has to move out soon and he doesn’t know where he's going to move to. And our daughter lives on 30th and 11th, which is like Tribeca used to be. It’s pretty desolate. So, but she makes a better living [than my son], but to live in Tribeca would take all of her living [salary].

And New York is the one place I think where parents, I guess, don’t expect their kids to come back, but this is their hometown. A lot of people like to move back to their hometown. And a lot of people would want to come back to New York for your first job and all these things, so it’s hard for us to watch our kids and see how they’re struggling to pay the rent. […] I mean, our daughter’s in marketing, she makes a healthy living, but she always says ‘God, I wish I could afford to rent a loft in Tribeca,’ because it’s a nice neighborhood.

Even the adult children who grew up in Tribeca become frustrated that they cannot afford to live there, short of living with their parents. Neil described his son’s reaction to gentrification in Tribeca:

My youngest son Andrew, he used to get very angry at what happened to the neighborhood. He came home from college one day and he was talking about throwing a brick through the window of [a high-end bakery]. I mean, obviously he wasn’t going to do that, but he is a kid who was raised in this neighborhood, as Justin [my other son] was raised in this neighborhood. They had a lot of friends in this neighborhood; they can’t afford to live here. And they’ve all moved away.
A lot of their friends and a lot of the families of their friends have moved away, and as funny as it was sometimes, Andrew’s anger, it was still genuine. They feel that and I feel that the neighborhood has sort of been taken away from us by rich people. They can’t live down here.

**TRIBECA’S UNEXPECTED INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY**

Immigrant workers and Tribeca residents have a range of perceptions when it comes to their own place and belonging in the neighborhood. Similarly, Tribecans’ opinions vary when it comes to immigrants’ belonging. As previously discussed, some residents believe that immigrants lack social belonging in the neighborhood and, therefore, cannot be part of the community/ies that develop there. More, however, believe that immigrants do socially belong in Tribeca, which opens up the possibility that they may become a part of the (social) community.

Personal relationships and contact lead residents and immigrants, themselves, to believe that immigrant workers belong in the neighborhood in a social way. This is one of the most significant building blocks of local community. However, in Tribeca’s specific context, four additional factors are key to creating a community defined by inclusivity, incorporating not only people who live in the neighborhood, but the immigrants who work there as well. Residents’ cultural value of diversity, local tragedy, the presence of another “other,” and lack of competition between residents and immigrants all converge to create an environment in which “community” includes residents and immigrant workers alike. In Tribeca, an “unexpected community” (Hochschild 1973) has developed in which people from remarkably different backgrounds not only harmoniously share space, but also see one another as an intrinsic and important part of the community.

*Diversity*

Immigrant service workers in Tribeca come from myriad backgrounds. In some native, white communities in the U.S., this would set them apart and exclude them. However, in
Tribeca immigrants’ diverse characteristics put them at a certain advantage. As members of the creative class, Tribeca residents, both the original “pioneers” and the newer professionals, generally value diversity (Florida 2002), and many longtime residents lament how racially and socioeconomically homogenous Tribeca’s residential population has become as the neighborhood has gentrified. Karen, who lives in IPN, discussed the demographic changes she has witnessed in her apartment complex and the neighborhood:

When I came here 18 years ago it was really different than it is now. The most [change] is like the huge explosion in the number of rich, white people in the neighborhood […] And then, in our buildings [IPN], a complete transformation from what used to be my ideal New-York-City-mix-in-every-possible-way living situation. It was like a microcosm of the New York City I grew up in as a child and now it’s become all, you know, it’s 50 percent young, recent college graduates who work in finance. […] So it’s changed the whole character of the neighborhood and the whole character of our, you know, community within this development. [It used to be] very diverse in terms of age, race, ethnicity. […] What we [in IPN] brought to this entire area was racial and ethnic diversity, older people, and people who have had a very long period of residence. Like, we had a much older average age, lesser median income, and much longer average length of residence than the whole city, actually—or certainly of all of Manhattan. It’s a really different kind of community now. That’s gone.

In terms of its residents, Tribeca is no longer a diverse neighborhood in class or ethnoracial terms. However, it is still heterogeneous because of the neighborhood’s workforce. Workers, especially immigrant service workers, are one of the main populations that make Tribeca diverse, and many Tribecans recognize how immigrant workers help the neighborhood retain some of the heterogeneity that it once had. Joyce, a 10-year resident, believed that other Tribecans also appreciate the presence of immigrants in their neighborhood: “I think they [other residents] find it colorful. Actually, I think that immigrants are enriching wherever they are, to bring a piece of their culture to wherever they’re living. I regard it as a positive thing.”

xxxii This speaks to the local culture in Tribeca, as residents of Battery Park City—an adjacent neighborhood across West Street—tend to be oblivious to the fact that their neighborhood is so racially and ethnically homogenous (Smithsimon 2011).
Residents’ value of diversity in class, race, and nativity influences how they treat and interact with immigrants who work in Tribeca. One resident, Sunny, for example, was interested in East Asian culture, so she initiated contact with the women who work in the local nail salon that she frequents. Over time they got to know each other, and they now regularly exchange small items from their respective cultures, American and Korean. “I have a different kind of relationship [with the women who work in the nail salon],” she explained “because, […] I like learning and discussing and going into their world. And they love me coming to their world and teaching me.” Her interest in the Korean workers’ culture stems from her valuing diversity, and she sees the presence of other cultures in her neighborhood as enriching, rather than foreign or culturally threatening.

Tragedy

Disasters or disruptive occurrences can, perhaps paradoxically, cause people to form stronger bonds. An example of this took place in Tribeca more than a decade ago (Kasinitz, Smithsimon, and Pok 2005): the events on and following September 11, 2001, which took place just to the neighborhood’s south, were a major element in building community. Many immigrants and residents recalled the disappearance of the towers, which loomed over Tribeca for three decades, as a major change, and remembered the disruption to the local neighborhood that 9/11 created in terms of transportation, local commerce, exodus of some of the residential population, and loss of life.

Yet, for many residents and immigrants today, 9/11 is not remembered so much for the tragedy and destruction it brought, but as an event that gave residents a stronger sense of community, not only with neighbors, but also with people who work and own businesses in the neighborhood. Anna, who is from Hungary and owns a high-end retail store, noted of 9/11, “I
don’t mind being next to the World Trade Center, actually. I consider that very spiritual for me. So I cannot say I wish we hadn’t been here [at that time]. We were here and my clientele was extremely supportive and everybody came in, so I feel very close to that.” Having lived through the event itself gave residents and workers a better sense of connection with others who shared their experience.

Rather than abandoning their neighborhood in the wake of 9/11, Tribecans came together to revitalize, sustain, and strengthen it as a community (Kasinitz, Smithsimon, and Pok 2005). So, in the days, weeks, and months following 9/11, Tribecans reached out far more than they typically do to one another. For Victoria, 9/11 made her feel connected to immigrant workers she knew in much deeper ways than she would have expected:

I remember after 9/11, though this is unusual circumstances, but I remember there are some restaurant owners from Greece, they own […] a restaurant in the neighborhood, and I remember after 9/11 meeting them on the street and we embraced each other. I had never thought to embrace them before. Maybe they tended to be more warm people, because often times people from different countries are warmer I think. Well, there’s no question that you felt very close to the people [after 9/11].

The way residents extended themselves to immigrants after 9/11 added to their sense of “home” and belonging there. Russian-born Chana re-opened her barbershop 10 days after 9/11 and found an outpouring of support from local residents. Her customers and neighbors were so relieved to see her that many came in that day to talk with her or to get their hair cut, even if they didn’t need to. Upon recalling her memories of that time, Chana was visibly moved, and tears welled in her eyes when she mentioned the customers who supported her, and those she lost on 9/11, who are now memorialized in a large display in their barbershop. So, for a short period of time following 9/11, the tragedy that occurred so close to home led both Tribeca residents and workers to find community where they lived and worked.
Another “Other”

While immigrants are often targeted as the out-group in native white communities in the U.S. (Fennelly 2008), in Tribeca residents have found another “other:” each other. As the neighborhood has come to attract hyper-rich individuals and families, many longtime residents, who are often middle-class, feel disenfranchised in their own neighborhood. Longtime residents tend to resent the way the neighborhood has changed as a result of newcomers’ presence, and what they believe is the newcomers’ sense of entitlement, and their lifestyles and consumer habits, which have increased the local cost of living.

Michelle, who moved into her renovated loft in the early 1990s with her husband, was aware of how longtime residents thought of her and others arriving in the neighborhood at the time:

> When we came in, there was a whole group of people upset that people were moving in ’92, ’94, feeling like the yuppies were moving in. So we were encroaching on who was here before us, and those people were talking about when they built P.S. 234, when nothing existed across the West Side Highway. And then from ’92, ’94 to now, you know, it’s been another wave of people.

Each “wave” of newcomers senses the resentment of their predecessors, which they, in turn, hold against arrivals later on. Residents, both new and old, are aware of these sentiments, fueling their “othering” of one another, and further bolstering social barriers between them.

Tribecans who moved to the neighborhood in the 1960s and 1970s see themselves as having been more involved with it and with one another than newer arrivals are today. This is a stark change from the past, as Jennifer explained:

> You know, this is my community where I live, though, just... I don’t know. There is like kind of a difference of the, you know, the newer, very, very wealthy people moving in and people that have been here longer. I mean, I’m like aware of that. Well, I mean, it feels different. I mean it’s not, except when I first moved here you would know everybody on the block and [now] people just, here, people that live in the building next door don’t even acknowledge that you exist, really. There’s not that type of community [anymore]. It’s a different type of
community. It would be something you would have to kind of go out and search for something like that, if there would be some event or something that came that people had to be opinionated about or something that you would get involved with the community board or something like that. But not really like I walk out the [door and find community], you know, I walk out the door and I generally always run into somebody I know. If I go to Whole Foods I’m often stopping and having a conversation with people, but I also am very aware that, you know, I have neighbors that like don’t even acknowledge I exist, you know?

Many longtime residents feel disenfranchised, excluded, and alienated in a neighborhood in which they once felt they belonged. The changes in local culture and social interaction among residents leave a void in their sense of community in Tribeca.

The real and perceived lack of common lifestyle, values, and ideologies between longtime and new residents makes new residents seem culturally and socioeconomically foreign to longtime residents. Some, in fact, refer to their new neighbors, most of whom are native-born, as “immigrants” to Tribeca. When I, referring to service workers, asked her about the immigrants in Tribeca, Julie, a resident who has lived in Tribeca for 39 years and is self-employed in bodywork, responded, “Can we count all the lawyers as immigrants?” She laughed, and explained:

At a certain point, a lot of wealthy people came in [to the neighborhood]. I mean, they’re not all lawyers. They’re probably investment bankers. […] I kind of feel like the whole tenor of the neighborhood changed because lots of people came in with money: a lot of bankers, a lot of lawyers, a lot of who-knows, but completely different economic strata. And they came in with the money. It wasn’t like some artists who maybe made some money while they were here, or they did better as time went on; they weren’t all waiters and waitresses and whatever. But there is a pretty big difference between people who are making six figures and somebody who is lucky to pay the rent. […] It’s just a very different [culture]; most people don’t live like in this loft[, which is modest]. They have, they live in a fancy place, at least the ones I’ve seen. There’s still a few artists around, but it’s a different neighborhood [now]. So I think those people might count as immigrants also.

New Tribeca residents are thus fundamentally different from most of those who have been living there longer because of their socioeconomic status and lifestyle. Tribeca’s wealthy residents are
more “immigrant” to many middle-class, longtime residents than the foreign-born individuals who work in the neighborhood, and they often see themselves as having less in common with new residents than with working-class immigrants in service jobs. This detracts from residents’ sense of community and, in an attempt to regain that loss, can actually improve the way residents view and act toward immigrants—including their opinions on immigrants’ place in the community.

Because it is harder for residents to make personal, social connections with one another, they turn to immigrants who work in Tribeca for this kind of interpersonal contact and to (re)build their sense of belonging. Longtime residents find that immigrant workers are more open and receptive to interaction and welcome to the opportunity to create a community-like atmosphere than their wealthy neighbors.

Some longtime residents note that it is also easier for them to have regular contact with immigrant workers than with other residents because workers are always around while newcomer residents are not. Simon, who has lived in the neighborhood for 18 years, illustrated this when discussing the difficulty in arranging to meet with a neighbor about his interest in becoming involved with the Community Board:

But as there are so many people down here with younger children, it does tend to affect [social relations] here quite a lot. For example, on this [Community Board issue] about the bars and the restaurants, a guy across the street contacted me and we emailed back and forth and he said ‘Oh, I’ll help out with this; I’ll make a Facebook page, and so on,’ and he said ‘Let’s meet for coffee.’ And I said okay, well you give me [at time to meet]. ‘Well, I can’t do it tonight, not tomorrow night, and then this weekend I’m away and then…’ And we haven’t yet hooked up, and we’re across the street from one another. He’s got young children and he’s got a business, and so on, so it’s… I mean it’s easier for me because I’m [retired].

But, he and his wife Daisy observed, when it came to having contact with immigrant workers in the neighborhood, their presence and availability are reliable.
Daisy: Yeah, they’re [immigrant workers] the constants. The fruit guy, you know him.
Simon: Oh yes, on the corner of Chambers Street.
Daisy: He says when he doesn’t see you, ‘Where have you been?’, right?
Simon: And I go to the gym in the morning, early in the morning at about 6:30 and he’s usually setting up and he says ‘Hi, boss! Hi, boss!’ And then when I come out of the gym I always buy some fruit from him, and he’s… Yeah, he's quite a fixture.

Long-term immigrant workers are especially significant to residents who have witnessed the loss of some of the residential population to gentrification and rising property values, as they are stable in a neighborhood that is seemingly always in flux. For Neil, who lamented the demographic and commercial changes that he had seen over his two-decade residency, immigrants working at local establishments became increasingly important to him over time:

There have been some people, there’s a guy who runs the grill at Morgan’s [Market, a greengrocery], been there for I think as long as I’ve been here […]— famous for having chased a guy, took a little knife wound, but chased a guy who had tried to rob the place. He’s a great guy. He’s one of the people who I’m always glad to see him. And he always looks at me and he says, ‘Quarter pound of smoked turkey?’ Or when I went in the other day he said, ‘Whole wheat bagel?’ So he knows what you want. He’s the last of the people down here; the other restaurant that used to be down here, Delphi, […] when Delphi was priced out, that was the final shovel-full on the grave. Those were very nice people, and they knew you, you knew them. I don’t think that there are any other restaurants left like that. Also the Mexican guys who run what used to be called the Little Kitchen, now it’s called the Bigger Place, the Mexican place on [West Broadway]. Delicious corn chowder. It’s a nice place, and they’re very nice people, and they’ve been there for a long time also. So I sort of, I mean I have a relationship with them, but nobody else.

Seeing immigrant workers regularly over a period of time and getting to know them adds to residents’ sense of a community in the neighborhood.

*Lack of Competition*

Another reason immigrants are not othered and, rather embraced by so many Tribecans is because their presence in the neighborhood is non-threatening to them (Florida 2002). Tribecans and immigrants do not compete for jobs, housing, or other kinds of resources, which can detract
from positive relations (Amir 1969), so immigrants are neither an economic nor cultural threat.

“It’s not as if we are in a situation where they’re coming in and taking our jobs,” said Albert. He went on:

I don’t even think it’s really the case elsewhere, but it’s a conservative political argument, obviously. But I don’t think that the influx of immigration has really taken away jobs that non-immigrants had initially. I really don’t think that’s the case. That’s not the situation here, certainly, in Tribeca.

Tribecans view immigrants as improving the neighborhood, rather than detracting from it, through the diversity and essential services that they provide. Immigrant workers are actually an economic benefit for Tribecans, improving their quality of life and property values, and, thus, an important part of the community for them.

At the same time, because residents and immigrant workers occupy such disparate positions within the socioeconomic and other social stratification systems, there is no risk to residents’ status—especially for Tribecans—by stepping out of their role and interpersonally connecting with immigrants on the other side of a service transaction. In other words, the social distance is great enough for bridges to be built without any threat to residents’ social status, position, or role in the kind of intergroup contact that occurs between immigrants and residents in Tribeca.

CONCLUSION

Despite wide social distance in race, nativity, language, occupation, and class, residents and immigrant workers have managed to bridge these boundaries and build an unexpected community in Tribeca. Most immigrants who work in Tribeca have a sense of social belonging there and feel as though they are part of a community based on the contact and relation(ship)s they have with people who live in the neighborhood. Likewise, residents tend to see immigrants as belonging in Tribeca in a way that extends beyond the structural services that they provide,
and their social interactions over time build a community that is inclusive of more local actors than just the (increasingly wealthy, white) residents.

Tribeca’s community is defined in a relatively inclusive way not only because of the value placed on diversity, but because of the existence of another social boundary. Indeed, there is another “other” aside from immigrant service workers: residents themselves. In Tribeca, the wealthy newcomers who further gentrify Tribeca are the “other” that experiences the most resentment from neighbors; because longtime residents view the newcomers as foreigners, social and cultural outsiders, or “others,” they feel increasingly out of place in a neighborhood in which they used to feel a part. This intra-resident boundary actually improves the way all residents see and act toward immigrants, a group of potential “others” present in the neighborhood. Residents look to immigrants, who are seen as non-threatening to Tribecans’ sense of neighborhood, community, and economic stability, to create a sense of community.

Regardless of tenure in the neighborhood, residents view immigrants as more friendly and open to conversation than many other Tribecans. Many longtime, middle-class residents also find it easier to identify with immigrants because they see them as being more similar to themselves in socioeconomic status as compared to their hyper-affluent neighbors. If it weren’t for residents’ tensions, misunderstandings, and social distance between one another, it is possible that immigrants working in service jobs would be the “othered” group, as they are in much of the U.S. Instead, Tribecans view immigrants as improving the neighborhood socially and culturally, and, of course, in terms of services and amenities, rather than detracting from it.

But to what extent is this community really inclusive of immigrants? Immigrants and residents alike in Tribeca have mixed feelings about the extent to which immigrants are a part of the local community, and it is difficult for immigrants to become a part of the community as
social equals. Daisy illustrated this point when she recalled a demonstration she attended in support of Park51 (then called Cordoba House or, by the media, the “Ground Zero Mosque”), an Islamic-run community center on Park Place at Tribeca’s southern reaches:

One thing I thought that was interesting [was] when the "mosque" issue was hot. We all had a demonstration one day that the Tribecans wanted the mosque and it was the outsiders who didn’t want the mosque, and we all gathered on the corner there, just quietly stood there, big group, and I found it very interesting that all the people from the little shops, who were all immigrants, and a lot of them were Middle Eastern, were all watching like crazy. Watching, watching, watching, but none of them came to participate. So it was almost like they were really happy, they loved having that support, or that show of support, but they didn't dare participate. Whether they were afraid for themselves or they were afraid approach us, I don’t know, but yeah, I remember that sticking out in my mind. […] I thought they’d all run over and, you know, get in the crowd.

Although residents at the demonstration were in support of Park51 and hoped that local (Middle Eastern and/or Muslim) immigrant workers would feel as though they could participate, the immigrants stood at the sidelines because they were unsure that they would be accepted as equal participants.

In defending Park51, Tribeca residents were supporting an institution that draws more diversity to the neighborhood. While residents’ valuing of diversity helps to integrate immigrants into the neighborhood in a way that extends beyond their structural roles, these immigrant workers are a “safe” and distant form of diversity within the neighborhood. The vast majority of immigrants leave Tribeca when they’ve finished working for the day, and their children attend schools in different neighborhoods. Although Tribecans value the diversity that exists in their neighborhood because of the presence of service workers, there is still considerable marginalization (see also Ruddick 1996). In an ideally diverse community, interactions between people of different backgrounds are not affected by social stratification and boundaries. In Tribeca they are, so the diversity residents desire is, one might say, a stratified
diversity, as those who make the neighborhood heterogeneous are not incorporated to the extent that residents are.

Immigrants’ social belonging in Tribeca is also complicated by other factors. For example, social distance eliminates the risk to social status for residents who build bridges over boundaries and engage immigrants in an interpersonal way, but those bridges are weak. Social distance prevents residents and immigrants from interacting with one another as social equals, making it difficult for their relations to go much beyond the friendly banter of acquaintances, as I discussed in Chapter 4. In addition, Tribecans and immigrants cannot interact in the community as equal actors because their relationships are borne out of service transactions, which are inherently stratified in terms of power distribution and agency. The primary reason immigrants are present in Tribeca is to work and serve the residential population, not to befriend them. So when friendly relations grow out of service transactions, they typically take place at the point of service and, thus, are always influenced by that hierarchy and boundary.

Finally, the in-group/out-group boundaries that define who belongs in the Tribeca community are not decided upon by immigrants. It is the residents who delineate who is “in,” or a part of the neighborhood, and who is not because they have the power and agency to decide. Most immigrants feel as though they belong in Tribeca because of their contact with residents, but they can only become part of the community if residents see them as a social part of the neighborhood. No matter how much immigrants feel they belong, if residents reject them they cannot be a part of the community.
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

Although its residents are now mostly affluent, white Americans, Tribeca is a neighborhood that is rich in diversity thanks largely to those who work there. A major component of Tribeca’s workforce is the people who work in the many personal services that proliferate locally because of the consumer preferences and lifestyles of the residents. Most of Tribeca’s service workers differ from residents in terms of their ethnoracial status, nativity, and, of course, social class. Yet they are critical to the neighborhood’s everyday operations, and Tribeca residents recognize this. Service workers prepare meals, rear children, sign for packages, clean the sidewalks, and do the endless other tasks that allow Tribeca residents to live comfortably. Indeed, service workers are the very glue that holds Tribeca together.

Tribeca, like all neighborhoods, has a unique history, local identity, and culture. Two generations ago the neighborhood, then called Washington Market, was a fully functional industrial and wholesale commercial area; few people lived there, as it lacked the necessary resources and amenities to support a residential population. But as transportation technology changed, lower Manhattan was no longer a practical or profitable location to do this sort of business and was abandoned by wholesale and manufacturing concerns. Artists then took advantage of the opportunity to live and work in the large loft buildings that were left behind. This was the initial step that transformed Washington Market into “TriBeCa.” Within less than a generation Tribeca became one of the most desirable—and expensive—places to live in New York City.

As Tribeca’s residential population grew, so did the need for services—and people to work in those service jobs. Service workers, many who are foreign born, and residents in Tribeca, therefore, are intricately connected to and interdependent on one another. But service
workers, who mostly are working or lower-middle class, by and large cannot afford to live where they work; most commute from other, less privileged neighborhoods in the outer boroughs, New Jersey, and upper Manhattan. This creates a boundary of residency, in addition to boundaries of occupation and social class, between themselves and Tribeca residents.

Yet while Tribeca’s history and contemporary context are certainly unique, it is also an example of the gentrification process that many other neighborhoods in large American cities have experienced. In Tribeca, the service-and-information-based economy brings immigrant workers and residents into close proximity with one another. But their experience sharing space is complicated by the fact that immigrants and Tribecans have little in common. Thus, they must interpret, navigate, and respond to the many symbolic and social boundaries between them as they interact with one another. This phenomenon in which the working and upper classes, the serving and served, share space exists elsewhere in neighborhoods in global cities across the U.S. (Sassen 1988). It is critical, therefore, to understand processes of intergroup contact in these contexts, and how contact is simultaneously influenced by and influences social boundaries.

To understand the nature and dynamics of residents’ and immigrants’ intergroup contact and boundary navigation in Tribeca I spent over six years in the neighborhood getting to know it and the people there. Twenty months of that time I spent actively talking with residents and immigrant workers, and spending time with immigrants at their work. My aim was to get an understanding of how residents and immigrants view Tribeca and one another, how they interact, and the factors that help build a sense of local belonging and community. This qualitative approach to a community-based study was ideal for capturing immigrants’ and residents’ opinions and relations with one another.
When I started collecting data, I thought I had a good idea of what I would find. I assumed that immigrants would feel alienated and out-of-place working in such a rich, white, and native environment. I also thought that many residents would overlook or look down upon immigrant workers. How could people from such different backgrounds and living such distinct kinds of lives ever make connections with one another outside of their forced interactions through service provision? I assumed this was impossible—and my assumption was wrong.

What I found came as a true surprise. I learned that in Tribeca bright boundaries do not always constitute insurmountable barriers. Although ethnoracial, cultural, linguistic, occupational, socioeconomic, and other boundaries are not being altered there, many residents and immigrants are able to bridge those boundaries on an individual basis. Regular, repeated contact between Tribeca residents and immigrant workers allow them to discover ways to connect on an interpersonal level. These kinds of relation(ships) reduce the importance of the boundaries between them, as they begin to see—and treat—one another as individuals, rather than as a housekeeper, barber, or doorman, or client, customer, or employer.

Indeed, simple, routine interactions between people of different groupings or social categorizations are significant forms of contact in diverse settings (Valentine 2008) as the findings of this research show. Not only does the contact between immigrant workers and residents in Tribeca help them to build positive perceptions of one another, supporting Gordon Allport’s (1958) contact hypothesis, but it also gives them a sense of belonging in a place where they might otherwise feel as total outsiders or a lack of social connectedness.

INTERACTIONS

Tribeca residents and immigrant workers make interpersonal connections in a surprising number of ways. In most cases, time and repeated contact are required for residents to become
familiar with and want to get to know immigrant workers. In addition, factors such as
individuals’ investment in the local neighborhood are important, along with interest in learning
about one another’s language or culture, and seeing one another outside of the work context
where contact typically takes place. Job-related factors also influence residents’ and immigrants’
ability to connect. Jobs that allow immigrants to have more unstructured interactions with
clients/customers, or occupational cultures that encourage workers to engage with
clients/customers personally, aid in the process.

Interpersonal contact between residents and immigrants is also facilitated by the local
culture in Tribeca. Tribeca residents, like those in many gentrifying neighborhoods (Lees,
Slater, and Wyly 2008), identify as progressive and liberal when it comes to social issues,
including immigration. Carolyn, a longtime resident, summed up Tribecans’ political alignment
by stating, “Basically politics downtown are Democratic politics.” Her assessment aligns with
what many residents shared with me, unprompted by questions about their feelings about
immigrants or immigration reform: they see immigrants as an asset to the country, those who are
anti-immigrant as disgraceful, and a more efficient and effective path to citizenship as necessary.

The vast majority of Tribecans are also members of the creative class, which is known
not only for tolerance of cultural diversity, but for also actively seeking it out (Florida 2002).
The creative-class-based local culture in Tribeca facilitates residents’ and immigrant workers’
ability to bridge some of the main boundaries that distinguish them from one another: those of
culture, language, ethnicity, and national origin. People on both sides exchange small material
items from their respective cultures and practice speaking in different languages. Over time,
residents also begin to inquire about immigrants’ lives, family members, and experiences they
had in their home country. In the context of service work, the interactions that residents and
immigrants have with one another can shift from simply transactional to interpersonal.

The positive relation(ships) that develop between immigrants and residents are significant
to nearly all of the immigrants I spoke with, but especially those whose families are far away,
either in the home country or scattered across the U.S. or globe. Lacking social or emotional
support from nearby family, familiar, friendly faces take on a familial element for them. This is
indicated by the fact that many immigrants refer to their regular clients or customers as “family”
or Tribeca as “home.” References to such intimate kinds of feelings for people or the
neighborhood speak to the enormous significance simple positive interactions can have for the
people involved.

Yet while interpersonal interactions between immigrants and residents can develop over
time, such relationships do not typically exist outside of the unequal context in which they were
bred. By and large, friendships between immigrant workers and Tribeca residents, in the sense
that they arrange to see one another outside of immigrants’ workplaces, are extremely rare.

BELONGING

I asked most of the immigrants I spoke with if they felt like they belonged in Tribeca,
New York City, and the U.S. Belonging, as it turns out, has different meanings and requisites
depending on which level is being considered. When it came to feeling like a part of New York
City, most of my informants told me that they felt like they belong, mainly citing the fact that
most people in New York City are from somewhere else, and that the city is so diverse that
anybody can become a New Yorker. César, a parking attendant from Ecuador said, “I really feel
like part of this [city]; yeah, I don’t think New Yorkers is only white people. We have
everybody. I feel like a New Yorker and I don’t care what other people says.” But when it came
to belonging in the U.S., I received a mixed bag of more complicated answers. To be American, many thought, one would have to either be born in the country, have papers, or both. As James, who is from Ireland and works in a high-end wine store, explained:

I don’t think you can ever feel like an American, or can you? I don’t know. Am I American? Uuuh… I don’t think you can be American until you have your citizenship. I mean, once you get the stamp, then you’re American. I think so; maybe I’m wrong. […] What will my child be? Will my child be American? They’ll be American if they’re born in America. I think you really have to be born in America to be an American.

Cristian, a building maintenance worker from Mexico, is undocumented. His lack of legal documents, or papers that officially state that he belongs in the U.S., prevented him from feeling as though he is a part of the country. When I asked if he felt like he is American, he paused. “No,” he explained in Spanish, “because I don’t have papers. If I had papers I would feel like an American. But I don’t have them.” In contrast, there is no official paperwork that makes a person a New Yorker. Additionally, as a city that has a long and celebrated history of multiculturalism and ethnic diversity (Foner 2007) it is easier for immigrants to feel a part of New York City than the country, in which anti-immigrant and other xenophobic sentiments are more common.

Like New York City, there is no official paper or stamp that indicates membership or belonging in Tribeca. This ambiguity in criteria for belonging makes it easier for people who might otherwise be considered outsiders to claim membership. In fact, contrary to my expectations, most immigrant workers typically do not feel out of place in Tribeca. This has much to do with how they are received by Tribeca residents. As New York City is, indeed, an immigrant city with well over a third of the population foreign-born, seeing immigrants working in service positions—and even immigrants in general—is the norm for Tribeca residents. There is nothing strange or odd to them about seeing immigrants in Tribeca’s parks, grocery stores, and
public spaces—even in their own homes. This helps immigrants to feel as though they blend in, rather than stand out.

Positive intergroup contact is significant because it contributes to making both immigrant workers and Tribeca residents feel as though they belong in the neighborhood in a social way. For some residents, immigrants are surprisingly central to their sense of belonging. For those who feel a lack of community and togetherness, or *gemeinschaft* (Tönnies 2002 [1887]), with other neighborhood residents because of real or perceived differences in lifestyle, family values, or local social investment, the immigrant workers they see regularly are perceived as warmer and more socially open and welcoming. Mary, a 35-year resident, for example, felt as though immigrants she encounters in Tribeca receive her in a more friendly and positive way than other people in the neighborhood:

> I like feeling, the atmosphere, of someone from another country, because people do have different atmospheres and different ways of communicating and being and, you know, interacting, and I get something from that. I like warmth and […] I get something here from interacting with immigrants who have a different warmth-meter [than Americans]. […] I like just a warm interaction. I mean, I think there’s something about that, that people can be present in a different way, or available in a different way, and I can really, you know, I get something out of that.

Immigrants’ “warmth,” which residents often attribute to their non-American cultures, adds to some residents’ sense of local community, filling a certain social void, and rebuilding their feelings of belonging in Tribeca.

This dynamic is reflected in how residents interact with immigrant workers, in that many see the immigrants as belonging in the neighborhood—which, in turn, facilitates and reinforces immigrants’ own sense of belonging there. Many Tribeca residents not only see immigrants as structurally belonging, or belonging in a functional way, but also socially. In turn, immigrants see themselves as being a social part of the neighborhood.
Immigrants are quite comfortable working in Tribeca. Most like, and even prefer, working in Tribeca to other neighborhoods with which they are familiar, at least in part owing to the positive intergroup contact they experience at their jobs. But there are additional factors. For one, many service jobs in Tribeca are in the mainstream labor market, so immigrants often earn higher wages, tips, and salaries there than in ethnic economies and neighborhoods. The neighborhood’s status is also appealing to immigrant workers. Since Tribeca is overwhelmingly white and native-born, and is well-known throughout the city for being very wealthy, Tribeca has a social status that immigrants can also claim for themselves. They gain prestige within their own social circles through their work in and association with this highly esteemed neighborhood. In looking down on even their own immigrant, minority, and working-class neighborhoods, it is apparent that immigrants have adopted Americans’ system of privileging and preferring people who are white, native, and/or affluent.

COMMUNITY

Many residents and immigrants, themselves, believe that immigrants who work in Tribeca are a social part of the local community. Indeed, this fits Anthony Cohen’s (1985) observation of community, in that concepts and definitions of community are often flexible enough to include many different people without making them feel as though they have to change in order to be a part. In this respect, the only boundary between immigrants and residents in Tribeca that has shifted, or changed, as a result of their interactions is the one defining who is included in the community.

Tribeca’s unexpected inclusive community is created by a combination of factors that are specific to the neighborhood’s context. Even though residents, as members of the creative class, value cultural and ethnoracial diversity, Tribeca is largely lacking this kind of heterogeneity in
its residential population. Immigrant workers, however, bring a regular stream of diversity to the neighborhood. Residents, therefore, appreciate immigrants’ ability to fulfill their desire to live in a diverse place. Another factor that contributes to the inclusive definition of local community is the national tragedy that occurred on September 11, 2001. It was, for Tribecans, also a local tragedy, as the neighborhood sat quite literally in the shadows of the Twin Towers. The events of that day helped people in the neighborhood to connect with others they saw as a part of the community, including those who worked there. Tribeca’s inclusive community is also a product of the neighborhood’s gentrification and the social and economic boundaries that divide the residents from one another. Many longtime residents feel socially distant from their newer, wealthier neighbors—some even outright resent them—which then prompts newcomers to also feel negatively about longtime Tribecans. This mutual “othering” between residents leads them to seek a sense of community with other (non-resident) people in the neighborhood. In this case, it is the immigrants working in Tribeca who seem more interested in being friendly and building a community-like atmosphere with them. Finally, few if any residents are in economic competition with immigrant workers. Because immigrants are not perceived to be an economic, cultural, or other kind of threat, this eliminates a problem that could impede positive relations and an inclusive sense of community.

BOUNDARIES

Just as macro-level boundaries and social constructions of difference influence how people interact on the micro level, micro-level interactions and boundary alterations have the potential to change the way difference is constructed on a larger or macro-scale over time (Ruddick 1996). But macro-level boundaries are not being challenged by the contact immigrants and residents have in Tribeca—at least not yet. The myriad boundaries that stand between them
are too bright and strong for them to be shifted, blurred, or crossed by any of the social actors involved. Instead the boundaries stand firm, with immigrant workers on one side of the ethnoracial, socioeconomic, and cultural divides and Tribeca residents on the other.

The existence and impenetrability of the many boundaries that separate them explains why the relation(ship)s between immigrants and Tribecans are superficial. While they can—and do—engage in interpersonal interactions, real (social) and perceived (symbolic) differences in race, ethnicity, culture, national origin, language, occupational status, and social class inhibit residents’ and immigrants’ ability to connect with one another in a way that is not only interpersonal and significant but also a challenge to those boundaries. True friendships tend to develop only between people who experience less social distance and fewer bright boundaries; Western European immigrants, for example, or small business entrepreneurs are the most likely to experience such kinds of relationships since they are seen as being less different from Tribecans in ethnoracial, cultural, and/or socioeconomic terms than most other immigrants who work in service jobs in the neighborhood.

Symbolic boundaries between immigrants and residents also are not being questioned because most of their interactions are structured by service work. Initial contact between immigrant workers and Tribeca residents always takes place in the context of service provision, so the customer/worker hierarchy sets the tone for all future interactions. In some work contexts, it is more difficult to break out of these status roles than others. Caregivers, for example, are less likely to have interpersonal relationships with the Tribecans they know most, their private employers, than those in the restaurant or beauty industries. Caregivers’ interactions with the Tribecans they work with are restricted by the employee/employer relationship and the responsibility of co-raising children, while waitresses, bartenders, barbers, and hair washers
work in occupations that encourage more personal banter. But even when interpersonal contact is not considered inappropriate between workers and regular clients/customers, that work-based boundary holds firm.

I was reminded of this months after my data collection had ended and I was fully immersed in the writing stage of my dissertation when I stopped in a small sandwich shop in Tribeca. As I waited at the cash register to pay for my lunch I watched an exchange between an employee and a young, pretty brunette. They smiled and laughed with each other in their brief interaction and, based on the content of their conversation, they had clearly talked with one another in this manner on previous occasions. The woman left and I approached the register to pay. The man working sighed. “She’s great,” he said to me. “You know, if I could make her my girlfriend I would be the happiest person in the world.” “Well,” I responded, “she seems to like you.” “Yeah, but I don’t know.” He was hesitant. “I don’t want to cross that line.”

That “line”—the service provider/service consumer boundary—is one of the most difficult to bridge in any context, not just in Tribeca. Breaching such a boundary could be a threat not only to the interpersonal relationship with the customer, but to the workers’ job and economic stability as well. This is a major reason why so many positive relationships that develop between immigrant workers and Tribeca residents fail to ever blossom into anything more than superficial acquaintanceships. Professionalism, I was told by the immigrants I spoke with, always has to be maintained with clients and customers regardless of how long they’ve known one another or how much the client/customer engages the worker interpersonally.

Thus the boundaries I have discussed do not prevent superficial interpersonal contact between immigrants and residents. Most of those I spoke with knew at least one or two people for whom this kind of interaction is a significant social part of their everyday life in Tribeca.
Bridging occurs when boundaries stay in place, but become less relevant to the people who are interacting. This usually happens only on an individual basis, and often takes a long period of time and many repeated interactions to develop. But when bridging occurs, immigrants and residents begin to think of one another as individual people, not in terms of social, economic, or occupational categories.

Even though the bridging of boundaries is unlikely to change boundaries and social constructions on a societal level, this process is still important. The ability and willingness to bridge boundaries between oneself and others who are actually and/or perceived as very different has become the norm and a part of the local culture in Tribeca. Making personal connections with immigrants fits neatly with Tribecans’ socially and politically liberal identities and valuing of diversity, and takes those ideals one step further by acting on them. Tribecans’ interpersonal engagement of immigrants who work in the neighborhood and efforts to get to know them as people, not just as service providers, holds implications for how immigrants feel received there. Indeed, immigrants feel welcomed and a part of this community precisely because the people who live there have shifted the community in-group boundary in a way that includes them.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Although Tribecans are generally tolerant and inclusive of the immigrants who work in the neighborhood, tolerance and inclusivity do not necessarily lead to equality. In Tribeca the immigrant workforce is appreciated and incorporated into the social concept of community while a stratified system of inequality that keeps immigrants from reaching any sort of social parity with residents is accepted and maintained. This happens in Tribeca because the current social and economic structure benefits most residents; they have a privileged neighborhood with all of the amenities they need because of the immigrants who are working there, often for low wages.
At the same time, the neighborhood remains privileged precisely because immigrants are not entirely a part of the neighborhood or community; immigrants by and large neither live in nor send their children to school in Tribeca. Tribecans, therefore, enjoy all of the ways that immigrant workers improve their neighborhood by keeping it clean, giving them services, making it diverse, and, most importantly, going home to their own neighborhoods when their shift is over so the neighborhood, while appearing diverse, remains an exclusive, privileged citadel of wealth and whiteness.

The inequality that exists when it comes to residents and immigrant workers in Tribeca is reflected in the ways they interact. Although many residents and immigrants alike report positive relations with one another that are socially significant and personally meaningful to them, the relationships themselves are unequal. They are unequal because residents are the only people who have the power and agency to define what kind of contact they will have with immigrant workers, what kinds of information they will share and ask about, and even when they will see the workers. Immigrants, because they are constricted by their primary duties of doing their job, do not have any choice but to read Tribeca residents’ actions toward them and follow in an “appropriate” manner. Immigrants, therefore, can never interact on a personal level with a resident who is disinterested in them, while residents can at least attempt to forge interpersonal interactions with immigrant workers without risking their own status or position.

In addition, despite the common reports of positive interactions, immigrants still experience discrimination from Tribeca residents. How can this be explained in a neighborhood that believes itself to be open to and welcoming of people of diverse backgrounds? There is, in fact, often a disconnect between how people perceive themselves and their actual behaviors; those who are prejudiced can appear to be cordial and polite through following routine norms of
interaction, while liberal and open-minded people may avoid contact with the “other” (Valentine 2008). Duneier (1999) found such behaviors in Greenwich Village, a nearby neighborhood in New York City that is demographically and culturally very similar to Tribeca. There, he saw, women would ignore poor, black street vendors who solicited their attention, but were commonly saddled with white liberal guilt for doing so.

Charles, a longtime Tribeca resident, elaborated on this, explaining that because Tribeca has a liberal and progressive local identity, it tends to attract like-minded people. But this is not always reflected in how they act toward other people in the neighborhood. He described observations he has made of other residents in the neighborhood:

I think a lot of people who come here, or who came here, even wealthy people, if they came here, they were probably attracted by the nature of the neighborhood as it was then—that attracted them—and yet somehow some of them have this other attitude and are basically acting inconsistent with the thing that brought them here in the first place. […] Now all of a sudden they somehow think they’re better than a lot of other people. […] One of the things where I see the conflict is these same people, if you were to talk to them, if you were to find out how they vote, overwhelmingly they probably are enlightened in their voting patterns. But still they, on a one-on-one basis, express a superior attitude that is, in a sense, inconsistent with their political voting patterns, and also with the thing that attracted them here in the first place.

Liberal personal identity and local culture do not always mean that individuals will act in ways that are reflective of such ideologies.

This disconnect between some Tribecans’ liberal social and political beliefs and their actual interactions with the people they claim to welcome, or at least accept, can also be explained by their consumer preferences and their values. Many Tribeca residents would qualify as “bobos,” a term coined by the New York Times columnist and social commentator David Brooks (2000). According to Brooks, bobos have “one foot in the bohemian world of creativity and another foot in the bourgeois world of ambition and worldly success” (Brooks 2000:11). They are college-educated people whose professional aspirations, lifestyles, and belief systems
combine both bohemian and bourgeois elements. As a result, it can be hard for them to balance their bourgeois consumer preferences with their socially conscious bohemian values, which may result in dissonance between their beliefs and actions.

Many Tribecans also have very mixed feelings about the immigrants who work in the neighborhood. Although most like having immigrants working there and even have gotten to know some of them on a personal level, for many residents immigrant service workers are also symbolic of the changes that have been occurring in the neighborhood, many of which they dislike. Residents are fully aware of the causal relationship between the growth in the affluent population and the increase in the number of immigrant service workers in Tribeca. To many, especially longtime residents, immigrant service workers, especially those who are most visible, such as caregivers, nail salon workers, and food deliverymen, are seen as an embodiment of (what they believe to be) the negative effects of gentrification at its most extreme. Although these residents do not necessarily dislike the people in the jobs, the fact that there are so many jobs to serve the new, affluent residents is problematic for them and symbolic of what they dislike about Tribeca.

These findings speak to the value of a qualitative approach to understanding intergroup contact in a neighborhood characterized by bright boundaries and sharp differences. By talking with people, eliciting detailed narratives, and watching how people interact with one another in the neighborhood I gained insight and information that quantitative data, and even some qualitative surveys, might have overlooked or misinterpreted.

While this dissertation has been an in-depth exploration of one neighborhood, it offers a case study of how intergroup contact plays out in a service-based global city of the kind that Saskia Sassen (1988) has described. Tribeca is a prime example of a space where high- and low-
earning workers become economically interdependent on one another and, therefore, must work and live within close proximity. While I found that regular intergroup contact results in positive perceptions and even interpersonal relation(ship)s between the affluent and the service workers, it did not lead to an alteration of the symbolic and social boundaries between them. Instead, in the process of forging interpersonal contact, people bridged, or overlooked the significance of, boundaries and engaged with one another as people, rather than as “immigrants,” “rich people,” or other kinds of categorizations and boundaries were socially significant.

A question of course arises as to whether my findings also apply—and in what way—to other gentrified or gentrifying neighborhoods in New York City and elsewhere in the United States. This is clearly a subject for future research, as relations between residents and immigrant service workers has generally been overlooked in existing studies of gentrified neighborhoods. Such research allows us to develop a broader understanding of the factors that shape these interactions and relations. Like Tribeca, other places like Williamsburg and the Lower East Side in New York City have rapidly gentrified (or, in other cases like Bushwick or Harlem, have been rapidly gentrifying), but, unlike Tribeca, these neighborhoods have populations of longtime working-class and poor minority and immigrant residents. How do the economic pressures that longtime residents of these neighborhoods face as a result of gentrification influence interactions with new, and much more affluent, residents? And how do the new residents perceive service workers who may be demographically similar to many of their longtime-resident neighbors? Do strained relations between the longtime and new residents carry over into the interactions between residents and local service workers? And what about relations between longtime residents who both live and work in service jobs in a gentrified neighborhood and the immigrant service workers now catering to the needs of the new and better-off residents? Do these
longtime residents’ perspectives on immigrant service workers differ from those of their counterparts who work outside the neighborhood? Concerning relations between residents and immigrant service workers, does Allport’s (1958) contact hypothesis still hold true despite the potential for economic competition between many longtime residents and immigrant workers, or is contact insufficient to improve perceptions and relations?

Looking at intergroup contact between immigrant workers and residents in gentrified neighborhoods outside of New York City raises additional questions, perhaps most significantly, just how much New York City’s special history as an immigrant city and its demographic and institutional features matter (Foner 2007). While New York City’s local culture emphasizes its immigrant roots and the inclusion of people who are foreign-born, many other cities do not share this ethos. To what degree does the particular urban culture influence contact between immigrant workers and residents in gentrified neighborhoods, as well as the perception of boundaries? Gentrifying neighborhoods like St. Louis’ downtown or Arsenal Hill in Columbia, South Carolina are just two of the many possible research sites for investigating this question and, more broadly, seeing whether residents’ contact with immigrant service workers positively influences their perceptions of immigrants the way it does in Tribeca—and why. This study of Tribeca thus not only provides a detailed examination of immigrant workers in one gentrifying neighborhood in the nation’s quintessential immigrant city but, I believe, also brings out that it is important, more generally, to understand how immigrants are received in various contexts where high- and low-end service workers share space, where boundaries and perceptions influence and are influenced by intergroup contact, and where local culture and context shape interactions.
METHODS

WHY TRIBECA? SOME BACKGROUND ON HOW THIS STUDY CAME TO BE

I selected Tribeca as my field site mainly because it is an excellent place to study immigrants’ work in a wealthy neighborhood. However, I had an additional incentive to focus on Tribeca: I was already embedded in the neighborhood. I began working for a Downtown community newspaper called the Tribeca Trib as a listings and assistant editor in April, 2007, my first year of graduate school. Later, in 2010, I began working on a fellowship, and later teaching, at the Borough of Manhattan Community College, also located in Tribeca. I maintained both jobs throughout the duration of my fieldwork. Through my job at the newspaper, which involved, among other tasks, copy editing, running errands locally, aiding in the publication of a book of the neighborhood’s history, and, on rare occasion, light reporting, I learned a great deal about Tribeca.

My own experiences working in Tribeca actually led me to the topic of this study. While I liked the neighborhood and occasionally spent my free time there, I also, at times, felt like I didn’t belong. My socioeconomic background and status made me feel like a social outsider in such a wealthy neighborhood. This prompted me to wonder what work in Tribeca is like for other people who are not only socioeconomically distinct from most residents, but are also foreign-born and, often, non-native-English speakers and/or racial/ethnic minorities. Despite my position at a local newspaper, my contact with Tribeca residents was relatively minimal. Service workers, on the other hand, have constant contact with residents, adding further complexity to their experiences at work. This made me decide that I wanted to learn more about the work lives of the people who make Tribeca run.
METHODS

I employed an ethnographic approach for this study, using participant observation and in-depth, semi-structured and unstructured interviews. I chose qualitative methods because they are best for analyzing the dynamics of intergroup contact and can provide detailed information on immigrants’ experiences at work and in their reception in the neighborhood. My participant observation and extended presence in the neighborhood not only gave me an understanding of Tribeca’s local inner-workings, but also, I believe, elicited more honest and accurate information (Goffman 2001) than could surveys or isolated interviews. I took a grounded theory approach, as described by Kathy Charmaz (2001), simultaneously collecting and analyzing data, and allowing the data to refine the questions I was asking and help elaborate and build my theories and conclusions.

I began collecting ethnographic and observational data in 2008, and interviewed informants between January, 2011, and September, 2012. I amassed a sample of 36 immigrants who work in Tribeca, six in each of the six occupational categories, which I will discuss later in this chapter, and 30 Tribeca residents (see Appendix B for detailed information on informants in each respective group). I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with all of the immigrant informants, lasting one-and-a-half to three hours. Most interviews were in English, although I conducted six interviews in Spanish, several others in Spanglish, and one in Mandarin with an interpreter. Interviews typically took place at the informant’s place of work, although I met some informants in coffee shops in Tribeca or at their homes outside the neighborhood. Additionally, I did follow-up, unstructured interviews, sometimes more than

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xxxiii I received a grant to compensate some of my immigrant informants $50 each over a 12-month period of my research. Instead of using the money as a way to attract informants, I did not tell them about or offer the $50 until several days after the interview. Because my informants were very busy with work, many did not have much time to dedicate to a formal interview, so the money was used as a way to compensate them for their time. While some accepted the money, many declined any form of payment.
once, with about half of the informants and conducted participant observation at most of my informants’ jobs. Participant observation spanned a range of involvement: in some cases I was only able to observe what was going on in the workplace, and in others, though not as many, I was able to actively assist the informant in his or her job xxxiv. Because most of the informants worked in public or semi-public settings, I could usually be a participant observer with little or no difficulty or disruption to the workplace.

Among resident informants I did in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Interviews lasted between one and three hours and took place in whatever setting the informant chose, which included their home, workplace, a public park, coffee shop, or restaurant. I also conducted participant observation at events that many local residents attended such as holiday parties and charity fundraisers held in businesses and private homes, and real estate open houses.

With informants’ consent, I audio recorded the vast majority of the interviews and formal follow-up interviews. I then transcribed, and, in the cases of Spanish and Spanglish interviews, translated them, and coded and analyzed the transcriptions using the qualitative data analysis software program Atlas.ti. I also took ethnographic field notes, sometimes during participant observation, but more often immediately afterwards when I got home.

Aside from the extended time I spent with many informants in Tribeca, my project is ethnographic because of my personal involvement in the neighborhood. Because my job, which is unrelated to my academic work, is in Tribeca, I spend a lot of my own time there. As a result, I have developed a complex network of social contacts and, in some cases, friends—both workers and residents—and, as my research progressed, that number of people grew enormously. So, in addition to making observations and spending time in the field as a part of my research, I

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xxxiv My active involvement tended to be minimal, such as watching the parking attendants’ booth while cars had to be parked or moved, and watching and playing with the caregivers’ charges. The most active role I assumed was with one of the housekeepers, with whom I split her duties cleaning a loft.
was in the field even when I was not directly working on my dissertation: while working, going to the doctor, running personal errands, and so on. This allowed me ample time not only to get to know the space and people, but also to establish myself as someone who many of my informants perceived as also being a part of the local milieu.

INFORMANT SELECTION BY OCCUPATION

I chose to sample immigrant informants by occupation with six informants in each of six occupational categories: workers in parking lots and garages, private households, hair care, residential buildings, restaurants, and retail. These six occupational categories are commonly found in wealthy, high-density, urban neighborhoods, where people live (buildings and domestic workers) and consume (restaurant, retail, and hair care workers), and where there is little street-level space to leave one’s car (parking attendants). Although Tribeca receives a fair number of tourists, especially with its burgeoning restaurant scene, many of the people utilizing these services are local residents, so workers in all six occupational categories must interact with and serve Tribecans while on the job. However, each category and job is different and involves varying forms and degrees of interaction between workers and residents. Therefore, to a certain extent, I have been able to compare how the particular structures of service jobs shape intergroup interaction.

Most of the six occupational categories can be further subdivided into specific jobs. Domestic work includes two housekeepers, three caregivers, and a private driver. Retail workers include people who work in high-end establishments (a wine store, a jeweler, and antique, refurbished furniture) and other kinds of services (a copy shop, a language school, and a greenmarket). Informants in residential buildings work as both doormen and in building maintenance; those in hair care work cutting hair in barbershops, and washing and styling hair in
high-end salons; parking attendants work in both indoor garages and outdoor lots; and restaurant workers, five of whom are servers and one bartender, work in a variety of establishments, including casual takeout, mid-price sit-down, and pub-style restaurants.

Most of the jobs have concentrations of workers by gender or race/ethnicity. All informants who work in parking or buildings are male, while domestic workers, with the exception of the driver, are female. Ethnicity is strongly correlated with occupation in parking, which is comprised entirely of Latinos; buildings, as most of the workers are Latino; and hair care workers, five of whom are from Uzbekistan or Russia. Only retail and restaurants have a diversity of workers in terms of both gender and ethnicity.

Seven of the informants are self-employed\textsuperscript{xxxv}, three work for a family member, six are employed by local residents, and the rest work for private employers. Most of the businesses are small and locally-owned, with the exception of those that employ several of the informants who work in buildings and parking, which are larger companies.

\textit{Work Structure}

In my sample of people who work in residential buildings, the maintenance workers are from Colombia, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, and Mexico; the doormen are Albanian and Panamanian. Although all are employed by the buildings’ management companies, the maintenance workers work relatively independently, and, as long as they complete their tasks, are relatively free to determine when they can take a break from work. They are less visible on the job, and have less contact with the people who live in the buildings they maintain than the doormen. The doormen, in contrast, are highly visible, but are free to socialize with residents, delivery workers, and other people who pass through the lobby, as that is part of their job.

\textsuperscript{xxxv} Six of the seven informants who own the business in which they work own small businesses and employ ten or fewer people. One of the self-employed informants works alone in his business.
Interaction with residents is constant and mandatory, even if it is as little as just acknowledging their presence with a nod. Over time, doormen learn with whom they can have more friendly, casual interactions, and whom they must give ample personal space (see Chapter 4).

Although most literature on buildings workers in New York City touts the strong union, 32BJ, only one of my informants is actually in the union. The buildings workers I spoke with tend to feel uncomfortable with joining the union, even if co-workers had done so. Fatmir, a doorman from Albania, explained that there were several reasons why he has not joined, one being that he feels as though “it’s not my moment to fight for these things.” Possible conflict with his employer, he added, is also a deterrent:

They don’t like me to be in [the] union and I don’t want to break the peace. So if I go in union I can get in union right away because I have all my paychecks; I can talk to them, they have to sign. Then they’re going to come to me, they’re going to [say] ‘Ooh,’ they’re going to try to find a reason to [make my job difficult]… and I can’t fight with my manager, so you have to be nice. They might not be nice with me, but I’m nice.

Union members in my informants’ buildings tend to be native-born and work daytime, weekday hours, which some of my informants do not.

Workers in residential buildings earn regular, fixed salaries and hourly wages. They also earn tips from residents for doing various tasks, like helping to bring in new furniture or carrying luggage inside from a cab. These tips, my informants said, are an added bonus in their job. They do not expect residents to tip them for doing what they consider tasks that are part of their job description, and, overall, tips are not a large percentage of their earnings.

Parking attendants in my sample are from El Salvador, Colombia, and Ecuador and work in indoor garages and outdoor lots. While the duties of each job are about the same (with the addition for those outdoors of having to shovel and melt snow), the environments and interactions with other people are different (which I discuss in more detail in Chapter 4). The
men who work in the outside lot have considerable contact with passersby, including many local residents. However, since the lot is outdoors and does not operate 24-hours-a-day, local residents usually do not park their vehicles there. Most of the customers are people who work locally—often in high-paying white collar occupations that can afford the luxury of being able to drive into Lower Manhattan and pay an inflated price for parking—and tourists. Even though their customers are typically not residents, they have a lot of contact with Tribecans as they are highly visible, and they often get to know residents who pass by or through the lot on a regular basis. Indoor attendants, on the other hand, are isolated in their garage and have little, if any contact, with any people who are not their customers—many of whom are local residents, with a few local workers. All parking attendants earn an hourly wage, plus tips from customers, which can comprise a sizable amount of their income. All of the informants are also members of the Garage Employees Local 272 union, so they also have access to benefits like paid vacations and health insurance.

Those who work in private homes in my sample, from Mexico, Malaysia, and Croatia, work intimately with families and, often, their children. They tend to work independently and spend a lot of time apart from their employers while on the job; the caregivers leave the house with the children for much of the day, employers tend to leave the house when the housekeeper comes by to clean, and the driver spends most of his time chauffeuring the children, rather than the parents, to myriad activities. Therefore, while the work requires closeness and intimacy, some of the domestic workers, notably the caregivers, do not feel interpersonally close with their employers (although they certainly do with the children), a topic I expand on in Chapter 5. Most of the informants are paid by personal check or cash by the week or job. One housekeeper, however, is paid on the books; the employer pays the housekeeper’s share of payroll taxes in
addition to the agreed-upon cleaning rate, rather than deducting the taxes from the bi-weekly checks.

My sample of barbers and hair salon workers includes immigrants from Uzbekistan, Russia, and Italy. Three informants own or co-own their salon or barbershop; two work on commission and are paid by the haircut (one of the two works for his father); and one, who washes hair in a salon, is paid an hourly wage. They receive tips from clients, which tend to be about 20 to 25 percent of their overall earnings. Those who are not entrepreneurs work alongside their bosses, and their clientele is a mix of regulars, including many local residents and, especially in the barbershops, walk-in customers.

Restaurant and retail workers in my sample are by far the most diverse group in terms of nationality. Restaurant workers include three men, from Ireland, Mexico, and Pakistan, and three women, from Malta, Mexico, and Laos. Five are wage earners, with four depending heavily on tips. One woman works for her brother, who owns the restaurant, and, instead of earning a wage, is unpaid and lives with her brother and his immediate family. The female retail workers in my sample are from Korea and Hungary, and the men from Ireland, Hong Kong, France, and India. Four are self-employed, one works for her mother and is unpaid, and one earns a salary. The structures of retail and restaurant occupations are similar in that myriad people are able to patronize the establishment, including Tribeca residents, local workers, and tourists. For this reason, many retail and restaurant workers do not know exactly who many of the customers are. Over time, they get to know regular customers, but the customer must volunteer the information that they live locally.
IMMIGRANT INFORMANTS

I selected informants by occupation, rather than gender, race, legal status, age, or other demographic characteristics. I am unable to say with certainty just how “typical” the 36 immigrant informants are of workers in Tribeca as a whole, but in terms of their national origins they cover a broad spectrum. In fact, they come from all over the world, including East, Central, and South Asia; Central and South America; the Caribbean; and Europe. Between them, they speak more than a dozen languages, but, because of the requirements of their jobs, they all can communicate in English. Some have a basic working knowledge of English, others speak it fluently or near fluently as a second language, while for a remaining few English is their native tongue.

Seventeen of the informants are Latino and, in terms of racial categorization, three are white and one is black. The remainder is of mixed, including native, ancestry. Nine additional informants are white, two are South Asian, four are East Asian, and four are Middle Eastern. Few of the immigrants I interviewed are undocumented—only two of the 36xxxvi. The rest have green cards or are naturalized citizens (three became U.S. citizens during the period of my study). Informants range in age from 24 to 72, with a median age of 40, and have been living in the U.S for an average of about 18 years.

Contrary to common stereotypes of immigrant service workers, only five of the 36 never completed a high school education, compared to nearly two-thirds who attended some college, or earned a college or graduate degree. Most of the informants completed their highest level of

xxxvi This can be attributed to several factors: undocumented workers, for fear of their job and their personal security, were less likely to agree to participate in the project. But, at the same time, some of the jobs are strict about hiring employees who have a legal right to work in the U.S., including parking and residential buildings, both largely unionized occupations, and, in some cases, private residents. Carolyn, whose husband is an attorney, expressed to me her concern about the legal and social implications of employing a caregiver or housekeeper who lacks legal documents, which is why she always puts them on payroll.
education in their home country. One completed some college, while another finished a graduate
degree and another is working on a graduate degree in the U.S. The most common kind of
formal schooling immigrant informants had in the U.S. is English language classes, which many
attended at libraries, community colleges, community centers, or other private organizations
within the first year or two of living in the U.S. Informants typically stopped taking classes once
they had reached the level of competency they thought necessary to do their job, or when they no
longer had time to dedicate to school, which was often the case.

All but two informants commute to work in Tribeca from outside the neighborhood,
including from further uptown in Manhattan, Queens, Brooklyn, the Bronx, Westchester, and
New Jersey. The two who live in Tribeca are a retail business owner and the private driver. The
informants have been working in Tribeca for an average of seven-and-a-half years.

RESIDENT INFORMANTS

My sample of 30 Tribeca residents (12 men and 18 women) is representative of the wider
neighborhood population in many ways. All of the informants are white, except one East Asian
woman. Most are native-born, with the exception of three, who are from England, Australia, and
Hong Kong. The sample reflects a range of tenure in Tribeca, including residents who have
lived there for two to 38 years. They are also varied in age, from 21 to 76-years-old. Informants
are highly educated, with all but one having earned a bachelor’s degree, and more than half
having earned a master’s, professional degree, or doctorate. In terms of occupations, many work
in the arts, including music, writing, journalism, photography, fashion, holistic bodywork, and
acting. Others work in professional fields such as law, medicine, real estate, and social work.
Three work in administration for not-for-profits. Four are retired, and more than one-third are
self-employed. Thirteen of the 30 own the apartment in which they live.
Although I did have the opportunity to speak with several people who are new to Tribeca, most of my informants had moved to the neighborhood in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. These individuals often have a bit more free time than recent arrivals, especially the few I interviewed who are retired, self-employed, and/or work locally. Many have a background in academia and/or had worked on a master’s thesis or doctoral dissertation and, thus, could sympathize with the difficulty of completing such a project. Residents with longer tenure in Tribeca are also more socially integrated into the neighborhood and were more likely to refer me to neighbors, friends, or acquaintances. RECRUITMENT

Having spent a lot of time in Tribeca, I already knew several immigrant workers I could approach when I began the interview process, some of whom agreed to participate. I also recruited informants though one of my employers at the Tribeca Trib, a long-time resident of Tribeca who has a well-established social network of local residents, workers, and business owners. Several informants also came to participate in my project through a colleague at the Borough of Manhattan Community College, a columnist at the Tribeca Trib, and the director of a local community center. Some of those initial informants introduced me to friends, co-workers, or family members who also work in the neighborhood, allowing me to build a bit of a snowball sample. However, many more were uncomfortable with referring me to co-workers because of their professional relationships with them, so most immigrant informants were recruited by me or my non-immigrant worker contacts.

Social networks were critical to building the sample of immigrant informants. It was vital that I had some kind—any kind, no matter how marginal—of social connection to potential immigrant informants, as many were wary of me and the research I was conducting on

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xxxvii Toward the end of my data collection, informants started referring me to people I had already interviewed.
immigrants and, specifically, their work. While many were happy to spend time with me and participate in the project, others were leery. Some refused to be interviewed, often afraid of endangering their job or having their undocumented status discovered—even if they knew me personally xxxviii.

Recruitment of resident informants was similar in that I utilized my own social network, that of my employer, and snowball sampling. But, unlike my approach to finding immigrant informants, I also located residents through recruitment flyers that I posted in local establishments, such as coffee shops, drycleaners, and grocery stores, frequented by residents. While I encountered some residents who were hesitant or declined to participate, this was much less common, and social connections were not as necessary for access as they were for immigrant informants.

Some Tribeca residents were difficult to interview, however. While I aimed to collect a balanced sample in terms of tenure in the neighborhood, it was hard to find new residents, who had moved to Tribeca within the previous decade, who were willing to take the time to meet with me. This is mainly because these residents have a tendency to lead extremely busy lives; they, both men and women, typically work in professional fields that require long hours, and also have young children who take up the remainder of their time. Often these individuals explained that they simply could not spare the time to do a 90-minute interview. Additionally, because they are new to the neighborhood and do not have much time to socialize with other Tribecans, they are less socially integrated in Tribeca than more longtime residents. These factors made them particularly difficult to talk with for my study.

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xxviii Sometimes personal relationships were not even strong enough to bridge those fears, as was the case with one woman who I had known personally for about eight months prior to asking her to talk with me for my dissertation. Although she agreed to participate, we arranged to meet on three separate occasions, none of which she showed for.
BUILDING RAPPORT

I managed to build rapport with my informants in different ways. The main way was through mutual association: if the informant and I both knew the same, reputable person, this helped me gain his or her trust. My affiliation with the *Tribeca Trib* and my bosses, well-known and respected residents of the neighborhood, especially helped me build rapport with residents. In addition, because I work for a local, widely read newspaper many residents no doubt inferred that I was knowledgeable about their neighborhood, including the geography, local politics, residential population change, and history, which gave me legitimacy with them. While some immigrant informants were aware of the newspaper, this tended not to be an important factor in building rapport. More importantly was the fact that I, too, work in Tribeca. Like many of them, I also commuted to Tribeca from the outer-boroughs to make a living, which, I believe, helped to explain to immigrants why I was interested in learning more about those who work there.

My constant and consistent presence in Tribeca also helped me build trust with informants. Because I spent so much of my own personal, work, and dissertation-related time in Tribeca, it was common for me to run into both resident and immigrant informants on the street, in stores, or in other public places. We always took the time to stop and chat, which sometimes gave me additional rich data, not only in terms of learning more about what their daily life or work was like, but also sometimes hearing their further reflections on my project. I became a familiar face in the neighborhood, rather than just a researcher who disappeared after the data had been collected.

A NOTE ON REFLEXIVITY

It is important to address who I am, not only as a researcher, but as a person, because my own characteristics influence the way that other people interact with me and, therefore, also the
data that I collected (Emerson 2001). In ethnography, the researcher’s race, age, gender, education, speech, and so on cannot be disentangled from the study’s conclusions.

I am a white woman and come from a lower-middle to middle class background. When I began interviewing informants I was 26 years old, and was 28 by the time I completed data collection. I am highly educated, was born and grew up in the northeastern U.S., and speak English as my first language. Most of these characteristics, especially race, nativity, language, and education, give me commonalities with Tribeca residents, while making me distinct from immigrants who work in the neighborhood. This can produce power dynamics in ethnography in that owing to my national origin, race, and education, I am afforded privileges within American society that many of my immigrant informants are not.

As a graduate student, my social class put me in ambiguous territory. At the time of my research, I was earning a low income—actually less than many of the immigrants I interviewed.xxxix However, my earnings potential when I finish my degree surpasses that of somebody cutting hair, waiting tables, or parking cars. So while I did not have much disposable income at the time I was conducting research, my time in this income bracket was (I hope) temporary, which is not the case for most immigrants who work in these services.

As a white, American “researcher,” it is likely that many immigrant informants who did not know me prior to participating in my study did not view me as somebody like themselves. In fact, it is possible that I appeared to them as somebody like the Tribecans they serve at work. However, I always gave informants the opportunity to ask questions not just about my research, but also about who I am as a person. This allowed them to get to know me beyond my appearance and education. Immigrant informants with whom I had more regular contact over an extended period of time also learned more about me, and me about them, through questions and

xxxix However, I also worked far fewer hours per week.
informal conversation. Many immigrants who participated in my study discovered that I possess characteristics that I shared with them and made me very unlike Tribeca residents. As I have said, I work in Tribeca and live elsewhere. I lived in two neighborhoods during my fieldwork: first in Ridgewood, Queens, and then in Bensonhurst, Brooklyn. Both are working-class neighborhoods, about a 50-minute-to-hour-long commute from Tribeca, in which a very large proportion of residents are foreign-born. I was not living in popular, expensive, white neighborhoods in the outer-boroughs like Brooklyn Heights, so the modest neighborhoods where I lived were much like those of many of my informants.

Like many of my informants, I had learned a second language. While my informants learned English, I learned Spanish. Prior to the start of my research, I had been comfortably conversationally fluent in Spanish for about five years. I could communicate well with Spanish speakers in my sample who preferred to talk in their native language. These informants were somewhat surprised, but also appreciated the fact that I could accommodate them linguistically, especially since it was obvious, given my grammatical and lexical mistakes, that my ability to speak their language was often about the same as (or worse than) theirs in English.

ISSUES IN CONDUCTING ETHNOGRAPHIC FIELDWORK

While ethnographic research tends to yield high-quality empirical data, its requisite closeness the researcher must have to informants inevitably breeds complications. For example, the researcher must be sure to maintain a strong sense of self in order not to become engulfed in his or her role in the field site and to draw clear boundaries between oneself and his or her informants (Kondo 2001). I had to navigate these issues, and more, throughout the duration of my fieldwork.
Avoidance

Not only did my informants have lives in the neighborhood, but so did I, outside of my dissertation work. So, inevitably, when I was out and about in Tribeca doing things unrelated to my research, informants would appear at random in places and at times when I did not expect to see them. These encounters were nearly always welcome for both me and my informants. However, there were times when I didn’t have the energy to play the role of the researcher. If I was having a bad day, was in a rush, or was not in the mood to be social, I preferred not to have to talk with informants. Sometimes I would go out of my way to avoid running into them by walking on a street a block down from their place of work or home.

Being a Simultaneous Insider/Outsider

As is often the case in ethnographic studies (Zinn 2001), I was simultaneously an insider and outsider from the perspective of the informants. As I have indicated, for immigrant workers, I was an outsider because of my race, nativity, native language, education, and the kind of work I do (college instructor, office worker). But at the same time, I was also an insider because I, like them, work (multiple jobs) in Tribeca and live outside the neighborhood. My conversational competency in Spanish also helped me become an insider with Spanish-speaking informants, who were pleasantly surprised by my ability to communicate with them in their native tongue.

An incident concerning food with one informant, who became a good friend during the course of my fieldwork, illustrates my insider/outsider statuses. We had gotten dinner together one weekday evening near his work when he mentioned that we should try another nearby restaurant some time—but not that one, he said, pointing to an upscale establishment, that one is for people like you, referring to me, as a white American. However, that same evening, as we talked about food from Latin America he became aware of my knowledge of various kinds of
Latino cultures and foods. That, coupled with the fact that he learned that I, as a graduate student living on a limited income, often eat rice and beans, led him to jokingly conclude that I am “more Latina than white.”

I was also an insider and outsider with Tribeca residents. Because I do not live in Tribeca like them, I was an outsider. But, at the same time, my affiliation with the newspaper and the local social and cultural capital that came along with my job at the Tribeca Trib gave me, for some, the status of an insider. Local people I knew (the roster of which grew longer as my fieldwork proceeded), or knew of, gave me a social connection to many resident informants, and my knowledge of local events, politics, history, geography, and changes also made me knowledgeable enough about Tribeca and those who live there to be an insider.

Interestingly, what made me an insider for one group often made me an outsider for the other. Because I work in the neighborhood and live elsewhere, this gave me something in common with the immigrant informants who also work in Tribeca, while separating me from Tribecans in that I do not live in their neighborhood. But, my whiteness, native language, and level of education made me similar to Tribeca residents, but could act as a social barrier between myself and the immigrant informants.

Favors

Inevitably, I was asked favors by several immigrant informants, which is common in ethnographic studies (Kondo 2001). These favors typically revolved around either my English-language fluency, (perceived) ability to navigate American bureaucratic systems, or both. I was, for example, asked to write a letter to renew an informant’s son’s passport. Another informant asked me to help find programs that would certify her as an English-language instructor. I was asked favors because I was seen, to some informants, as a link to the American mainstream who
was neither a boss nor a client; I was someone they could trust for whom they had done a favor and felt comfortable asking for reciprocation.
Looking west on Duane Street toward Greenwich Street stand residential loft buildings, which once housed butter and eggs concerns during the Washington Market era, in the foreground and one of the three Independence Plaza North towers in the background. Photo by Jimmy So.
Badly damaged by Hurricane Sandy in late October, 2012, Pier 25, which includes an historic lighthouse tender boat (at right), mini-golf course, beach volleyball, a playground, and sports fields, was fully recovered and operational seven months later thanks partly to private donations from members of the neighborhood. Photo by Jimmy So.
Children play in Washington Market Park, a large, child-friendly park at Greenwich and Chambers Streets. Photo by Jimmy So.
The Bazzini Building housed A. L. Bazzini Co., a dried fruit and nut wholesaler, until it left the neighborhood for Hunts Point in the Bronx in 2010. Up until then, Bazzini was one of the last remaining Washington Market-era businesses in Tribeca. Sarabeth’s, a high-end eatery, now occupies the ground floor, with eight loft condominiums comprising the upper floors. Photo by Jimmy So.
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