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The Role of Maternalism in Contemporary Paid Domestic Work

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ABSTRACT

Various studies of domestic work have identified close personal relationships between domestic workers and employers as a key instrument in the exploitation of domestic workers, allowing employers to solicit unpaid services as well as a sense of superiority (Rollins, 1985; Romero, 2002; Glenn, 1992; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001). Likewise, other scholars have pointed out that close employee-employer relationships may actually empower domestic workers, increasing job leverage (Thorton-Dill, 1994). Ultimately, these lines are blurry and ever changing as employers continuously redefine employee expectations. Drawing from a larger study involving thirty interviews with white upper middle class women who currently employ domestic workers (mostly housecleaners) this paper explores employers' interactions with domestic workers. Through these interviews this research elaborates on how employers and employees interact, how employers feel about these interactions, and explores to what extent these interactions are informed by the widely reported maternalistic tendencies of the past, while also considering the consequences of this.

KEYWORDS

Domestic Work; Maternalism

Cite this paper

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