

Sarah Arensman

Ethnographic Observation # 2

Date: Monday, July 14<sup>th</sup>, 2008

Time 5:00 – 6:30 pm

Place: Juniper Park, Middle Village, Queens

This park was different from the first one as it was entirely a playground for young children. I had only my two youngest, Cody (3) and Miriam (4) with me. The park was fairly busy – I would estimate about 50 people there total including children. The children ranged from about age 2 to 10. One thing I noticed immediately was how many fathers were there with their children. I expected to see more mothers – this is what I am used to at home. Although the fathers that were there were not Caucasian. I observed many different ethnicities: Asian, European, Middle Eastern, Hispanic, African-American. At one point I distinctly heard at least half a dozen languages being spoken between parents and children.

*One possibility for why there were mostly fathers there could be that many immigrants are two income families where the parents trade off the care of the children to avoid the high cost of childcare and work opposite schedules from one another. So maybe Dad works during the day and Mom works in the evening.*

The fathers seemed very engaged with their children, following them around on the playground, talking and playing with them. They did not really talk to each other though and seemed isolated from each other. Several men did smile and make eye contact with me. One man I met was originally from Poland. He was there with his two sons, age 3 and 5. He had moved to Hawaii some years ago and just this year moved to New York. He asked where I was from and why I was here. He knew U.S. geography well and even mentioned Cape Hatteras in N.C. He asked why I would ever want to leave a place that must be so beautiful! I asked him the same question about leaving Hawaii and he told me that he left because it was just too expensive to live there. I asked him about the expense of living here and he said it was also high but manageable. He told me that he lived in Rego Park, which is the next town away and that he came to Middle Village because there was no decent park for the children in Rego. He asked some questions about the South and about my impressions of New York. When I told him that I thought Middle Village was a beautiful place he seemed surprised. He said he thought the South was supposed to be more beautiful.

*I was impressed by how much this man knew about American geography and that he knew something about my home state. It was interesting to hear some of*

*his preconceived ideas about the South. It makes me realize how some of my preconceived ideas about New Yorkers were really generalizations and stereotypes. I was also impressed with his level of interaction with his children. He did not sit by on a bench on the sidelines watching them, but played with them and seemed to really love being with them. I admire that and realize that many times I am too busy or too tired to "play" with my kids.*

After a while I moved to a different section of the playground and observed a group of mothers with their children, all toddlers. The women were dressed in long sleeved muslin blouses with their heads covered with the customary Middle-Eastern scarf. They sat in a tight circle off to the side of the playground in the grass. These mothers talked animatedly with one another and their babies sat in the middle of their circle quietly. I wish I had been able to tell what they were saying. They seemed to be good friends talking happily.

*This was so neat to me because I realized that they are just like me and my friends. When I was a young mother with just one or two babies it was so important to me to get out of the house and be with other moms and chat about our babies, our homes, etc. I remember how much I needed to identify with others who were like me and how I needed that adult conversation. We (the peoples of the world) really are very much alike! What a strange observation in the midst of so much diversity.*