Racial Safety, Cultural Competence, and Cultural Maintenance: The Child Care Concerns of Employed Mothers

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*An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Pacific Sociological Association Meetings, San Diego, California, 1994. I would like to express my appreciation to: Patricia Zavella, Nancy Stoller, Gloria Cuadraz, Josie Mendez-Negrete, Lynn Weber, and Elizabeth Higginbotham. Correspondence to: Uttal, Center for Research on Women, The University of Memphis, Memphis, TN 38152 Copyright Lynet Uttal, July, 1994.
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Abstract

Despite current media attention, we know very little about child care as a social process, particularly how mothers choose their child care arrangements, what happens once these arrangements are established, and how they break down. Indepth interviews with 8 Mexican American, 7 African American and 17 Anglo American employed mothers reveals that they have concerns about racial safety, cultural competency, and cultural maintenance when they tried to meet their cultural and class based preferences for child care arrangements. These concerns were shaped by a political economy of child care that is structured by race and class, by the racial-demographics and the availability of kin and ethnic group networks in the region in which they are seeking care. Efforts to find satisfactory care were further complicated by changes in socioeconomic status.
Introduction

Much of the previous research on child care is constituted of sociodemographic studies of the prevalence and types of child care (Hofferth et al. 1991; U.S. Bureau of the Census 1987; U.S. Congress. House of Representative. 1986; Dawson and Cain 1990), maternal characteristics that predict the type of care used (Lajewski 1959; Ruderman 1968; U.S. Bureau of the Census 1983; U.S. Bureau of the Census 1987; Dawson and Cain 1990; Hofferth et al. 1991), the impact of early childhood child care experiences on young children (Blum 1983), public policy on child care (Kanter 1977; "Work and Family in the U.S.: A Policy Initiative" 1985; Ferber and O'Farrell with Allen 1991), and mothers' satisfaction levels (Low and Spindler 1968; Pleck et al. 1978; Hofferth et al. 1991). In addressing the difficulties mothers faced with their child care arrangements, policy makers have focused on issues of affordability and availability (Ferber and O'Farrell with Allen 1991), with some recent attention to quality concerns that shape mothers' preferences (Hofferth et al. 1991).

These demographics do not tell us about child care as a social process, particularly how mothers choose their child care arrangements, what happens once those arrangements are established, and how they might break down. Furthermore, knowing how children are distributed into different child care arrangements by their racial and social class characteristics says little about how child care is a social process that is itself shaped by race or class, or institutionally and economically organized by race and class, or
how it is experienced by individuals of different race and social class locations.

That race and class are significant factors in mothers' uses of child care is suggested by the recurrent finding that African American, Hispanic¹ and White children do not have the same rates of use of different kinds of child care arrangements. According to the 1990 Child Care Survey (Hofferth et al. 1991), the most commonly used arrangement for Black children under five whose mothers are employed is care in institutional daycare centers (45%), which was almost twice as high as the rate for Whites and Hispanics (26% and 23%, respectively). The next most used child care arrangement for Black children is care by non-parental relatives (27%). Only 14% of Black children were cared for by their mothers or fathers in 1990. In contrast, Whites had the highest rate of care by parents (31%), followed by a rate of 25% for Hispanics. Hispanics, unlike Whites, yet like Blacks, relied even more on non-parental relatives for child care (30%). Of these three racial/ethnic groups, White children were the most likely to be cared for in private homes by individuals who are paid to take care of children (family day care homes) (22%). Only 11% of Black children and 15% of Hispanic children were in family day care homes. These statistics demonstrate that there are systematic differences in use patterns of child care by race.

When income, but not race, is controlled, children from higher income families are more likely to be cared for in their own homes

¹Throughout this paper I use Black, African American, White, Anglo American, Hispanic, Mexican American interchangeably, depending on the source of where the information originated (e.g., census studies, my respondents, or my analysis).
by a private provider in their homes, in a family day care home, or
day care center. Children from families that make less than $35,000
per year are more likely to be cared for by a non-parental relative.
With the exception of the very wealthy (more than $50,000 per year
family income), all children are just as likely to be cared for by
their father when their mothers work (21% compared to about 30%,
respectively).^2

The studies on racial and socioeconomic differences in child
care have focused on the type of child care used by families. A
handful of studies have also found that there are race and class
differences in what parents want in terms of the nature of the care
that their children receive from their child care arrangements.
Carole Joffe (1977) found that parents' expectations of what child
care should provide their children varied systematically along
socioeconomic and racial/cultural lines. Based on participant
observation and in-depth interviews with parents, child care
providers, and administrators at a parent-nursery in Berkeley,
California, Joffe found that Black parents viewed this kind of child
care primarily as an educational setting more than did White
parents. Her findings echoes the findings of earlier research that
African American parents and parents in service, clerical and
manufacturing occupations (regardless of race) express a preference
for child care arrangements which provide academic and structured
programs for pre-school aged children. In contrast, Anglo Americans

^2Hofferth et. al's study is based on population estimates of 5,436,000 Whites, 989,000
Blacks, and 664,000 Hispanics. Since family income is not controlled by race, and
there is the possibility that the large numbers of Whites masks possible African
American and Hispanic variations.
in managerial and professional occupations preferred loosely structured, non-academic programs which would expose children to different activities but would not regiment their participation (Ruderman 1968; Steinfels 1973; Auerbach-Fink 1974).

Joffe (1977) also found that Black parents were more likely to advocate the use of authoritarian disciplining styles such as physical punishment and authoritarian commands by child care providers. In contrast, the White parents in her study would not support parents who were calling for the use of corporal punishment in the daycare center, even though privately the White parents may use corporal punishment at home.

Another important aspect of mothers' child care concerns is their preference for the maintenance of certain racial/cultural practices. For example, Chinese American mothers expressed concern about conflicting mannerisms taught at home and in the daycare center, such as whether it is appropriate to pick up bowls when eating and how adults are to be addressed by children (Auerbach 1975). Furthermore, early childhood education research has identified that presentations of ethnic images are important in the formulation of self-images and for the transmission of cultural values (Hale 1991).

As I will show in this paper, these preferences are more than simply a matter of taste or lifestyle, but also reflect how child care is organized by race and class. Previous research has not given as much attention to how child care choices and use patterns are shaped by race and class, both in terms of the racial and class organization that affects the availability of different types of care,
but also how mothers’ preferences are shaped by their race and class social biographies and locations. These concerns take on particular importance in the area of child care, a place where mothers transfer to others the childrearing responsibility for reproducing cultural and class-based values of racial/ethnic and class-defined groups.

In this study, I focus on examining how employed mothers’ perceptions of child care were shaped by their expectations and values and the political economic context in which they made child care arrangements. I examine how the social relations of child care were shaped by two major social forces—first, the political economy of child care which created constraints (e.g. cost, availability, options) that limited mothers’ choices, and second, the mothers’ individual biographies which brought with them to child care with different criteria and personal preferences that they used to assess the quality of child care situations (Uttal 1993).³

In the following analysis, I begin by describing the types of concerns that mothers developed after they were in established arrangements when their expectations and childrearing values were not met by their child care provider. Second, I discuss Mexican American and African American mothers’ concerns about their child(ren)’s racial safety, and their views about providers who were not culturally competent. Next, I examine how the criteria and priorities of middle class Mexican American mothers changed when they could not find child care which could both maintain their

³I use the word “quality” with caution. The implication of this concept is of one best or outstanding model, yet what I want to convey is that “quality” when used to refer to child care is not about what is good or bad for children, but what mothers perceive to be meeting their criteria and preferences.
traditionally based expectations and provide privileged class-based opportunities. Finally, I discuss how these concerns reflect a political economy of child care which is shaped by region, race and class.

**Methods**

The analysis in this paper is based on an exploratory study of the social relations of child care which was conducted in 1990-1992. Using topic-specific indepth interviews with 32 employed mothers who had at least one child not yet in first grade living in a small Northern California county, it examined these mothers' perceptions of child care. Following the principles of maximum variation sampling (Lincoln and Guba 1985), I recruited for interviews mothers who were members of different racial/ethnic groups and occupational statuses in order to develop a rich understanding of race and class in the social relations of child care. Eight Mexican American, 7 African American, and 17 Anglo American employed mothers were interviewed. Eight were professionals, 14 were in administrative/managerial positions, 4 were clerical workers and 6 were in service/manufacturing occupations (See Table 1).

This county is a collection of small towns that run shoulder to shoulder in a highly productive agricultural zone and also hosts a major university. It is situated close to the metropolitan areas of San Francisco Bay Area and San Jose, yet is geographically isolated by a mountain range. In 1990, the total County population was 229,734. The northern part of the county is more affluent,
predominantly Anglo American (85% White, 10% Hispanic, 1% Black), and based on a white collar economy. The southern part of the county is less affluent, more racially diverse (3% White, 51% Hispanic and less than 0.5% Black), and based on an agricultural economy (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1990).

The study included how employed mothers with young children made arrangements, how they perceived those arrangements, and their dyadic relationships with their child care provider(s). Most interviews ran 2-3 hours in length during which we interactively explored the mother's history of child care arrangements, her concerns, and issues that she raised about her child care arrangements and her relationships with her present and past child care providers.

Table 1  Mothers By Race/Ethnicity and Occupation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Anglo American</th>
<th>Mexican American</th>
<th>African American</th>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although I am an insider to this particular group that I interviewed in that I fit the criteria to be interviewed (an employed mother with children not yet in first grade living in this region), I
differed from all my respondents in terms of race and ethnicity (I am Japanese American/Russian Jewish) and was raised and currently live an academic middle class lifestyle, a characteristic not shared with any of my respondents.

Adequacy of Care and Value Differences

Mothers varied tremendously in how actively they had initially searched for and evaluated different child care settings (Uttal 1993). No matter how extensively they had investigated child care situations before selecting one of them, mothers discovered discrepancies between what a provider's statement of her care and her actual practices. Sometimes these differences were created by the providers' blatant disregard of the mothers' requests or by changes in their child care practices. At other times, the differences developed because mothers' changed their own expectations as their children grew and as they became more clear about their own expectations of child care.

The informational interviews which mothers had prior to committing to a child care arrangement were not always enough to ensure that there really was a fit between the mothers' expectations and what the provider would do. For example, Gloria Thomas, an African American grocery clerk and the mother of two girls, three years old and ten years old, had discussed with her family daycare provider about what kinds of foods were served at the family daycare. In particular, they had talked about Gloria's preference for providing the children with fresh juices instead of drinks with sugar
in them. Gloria said she told her African American family day care provider during their first interview:

No sugar. I didn't want Koolaid. I don't mind the kids drinking liquid, but I notice that child care providers, they'll buy them the cheapest stuff that will rot out your kids teeth because it's cheaper, like Koolaid instead of buying fresh juices.

Despite this initial discussion with the provider, Gloria came to pick up her kids one day and found her children drinking sugar drinks:

The kids were drinking one of those plastic bottles that have, artificial this, artificial that, nothing was real. And she looked at me and she [the provider] said, "I know that you don't give them that, but it was so hot." And they were just loving it. 4

Gloria was frustrated that in spite of her conscious efforts to avoid this kind of conflict, she still was not able to ensure that her preferences would be met.

At other times, conflicts emanated from issues which mothers did not anticipate when they entered into a child care arrangement. What had been important or insignificant when looking for infant care took on new meanings when the infant became a toddler, or a toddler became a preschooler. For example, Mary Taylor, an Anglo American secretary, had comfortably placed her infant son in a family daycare home. Yet when her son was four, she began to notice that her family day care had certain kinds of toys that she did not

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4Quotes have been edited for readability.
approve of and the television was frequently left on in the background. She said:

[The child care provider] started having he-man toys, I mean, she had toys and things, but the boys definitely were always [playing with] action figures, real violent kinds of stuff, games. Not that they were hurting each other. She always stopped that. But she didn't get that it would be weird imagery. And I started noticing the TV was on all the time.

These activities which were unnoticeable when her son was a baby became relevant to her child care preferences as he got older. Mary began to see her child care arrangement differently. Although it was both affordable and met her work schedule needs, she was concerned about whether its content was providing appropriate messages to her son. The environment which was chosen for an infant was no longer satisfactory as the child got older. Mary's experience reflects the unanticipated concerns that mothers developed as their children moved through developmental stages.

Discrepant expectations were also created when child care providers became less enthusiastic or attentive about the work of caring for children. Aurora Garcia, a Mexican American accountant and the mother of a four year old boy, recalled how she had become concerned as she watched the ability of her family daycare provider to provide adequate care for her toddler diminish. She said:

I think it was the second year that Joey was there that she was having a lot of problems with her own family.
happening. I'd pick up Joey and maybe his diaper hadn't been changed for awhile. I mean, you know when your kid hasn't been changed. Or he wasn't cleaned well. I think the nightmare for me was, is she really taking care of my kid? Is my child in danger? It's like, how do you ask someone, "what are you really doing?"

Like Mary, Aurora had felt that she had carefully chosen this provider and had established a trusting relationship that had lasted more than a year. She struggled with the contradictions between her sense of trust and her doubts until a fire in the home finally caused her to realize that the provider's care was seriously impaired. Both Mary's and Aurora's concerns demonstrate that child care was not a static choice, and that even when mothers carefully chose situations, it was no guarantee that the arrangement would remain problem free over time.

Because of the high potential that mothers would encounter dissatisfaction with their child care arrangement, it is critical to consider how they coped when confronted with these concerns emerged. Some mothers raised their concerns with their child care providers and successfully found a resolution for them. Yet as Margaret Nelson (1990) has also noted, communication between mothers and child care providers is problematic because there are no clear rules about what type of relationship exists. Even when money is exchanged, which would suggest a market relationship, the nature of the work--caring for children--is based on emotional bonds. These bonds can create a social relationship between the mother and
the child care providers which is based on friendship and relatedness. The coexistence of market and social relations creates contradictions for both mothers and providers which complicate communication about even the smallest of concerns. I found that it was more common for mothers to rationalize away their concerns, than it was to address them.

Important questions are raised by the hesitancy of these mothers to discuss their concerns with their child care providers. What silences them? Why, for example, would Aurora Garcia, a powerful woman in her workplace, tell a lie instead of communicating her concerns with her child care provider? And in Gloria's case, since she had made a point of discussing her preferences about food and discipline before entering into the child care arrangement, why didn't she talk to raise these concerns again with her child care provider? And finally, what are the dangers in mothers failing to communicate with their providers about their concerns?

If the care was affordable and the schedule was desireable, it was especially difficult for mothers to make changes. Mary did not feel that she could press the television or toy issue with her child care provider because she also did not feel she could afford to ask for changes. She explained:

I do remember telling her that I didn't like TV being on all the time. I never criticized her. I mean, there was [this] thing, if I don't say anything, she'll treat my kid nicer or something. You know, she has to do what she has to do. I can only go so far in demanding a certain kind of
quality. My attitude [was that] this was a lower class situation. That was my circumstance. I had been brought up middle class and I was downwardly mobile. I had no right to criticize her unless she was doing something harmful, really harmful. And if I wanted something better, I had to pay more.

Similarly in her situation, Gloria did not push a resolution to the juice issue because her financial circumstances left her almost no option to change to a different child care arrangement. Since she considered herself lucky to have this particular arrangement, she did not want to jeopardize the arrangement by asking for changes. Yet, she was left feeling like she was a hostage to her provider's practices until she could afford to look for another situation. Both Gloria and Mary stayed in these situations and silenced themselves because of their financial circumstances.

In contrast, Aurora Garcia, who could financially afford to change day care arrangements, did so. Yet like Gloria and Mary, she silenced herself for a long time and avoided asking her daycare provider why her care was faltering. Finally, when she changed child care arrangements, she did so without letting her provider know the real reason. Instead, Aurora told her provider that she was quitting her job and would not need child care anymore.

Concerns about Racial Safety and Cultural Competency

A second set of concerns raised specifically by African American mothers and some Mexican American mothers was about how their child, as well as how they, as women of color, were
treated by Anglo American child care providers. Mothers explicitly discussed their concerns about racial issues that arose and the worries they had that their child might be mistreated or treated differently because they were not Anglo American.

Joffe (1970) noted that African American parents in the Berkeley day care center expected the program to be aware and sensitive to racial issues, so that for example, when the daycare showed a film in which the villain caricaturized a black man, the parents objected to the daycare center's lack of racial awareness. In this study, I found that the racial incidents that the mothers gave testimony to were less abstract and were issues of direct emotional and physical safety. They expressed feeling threatened and disturbed by direct experiences which happened to their children and themselves. Thus, they also had concerns about racial safety and not just racial awareness. For example, Frances Trudeau, an African American lawyer, removed her children from a preschool because her son was not protected when older Anglo American boys harassed him. She recalled:

My son would get chased by these second and third graders. And my boy's a small guy and he'd get chased and [the child care providers] wouldn't do anything about it. Or he'd get kicked by somebody. They would chase him, these two blond-hair blue-eyed second graders and [the child care providers would] say, "well, Jamal, just stop, if you stop they won't they can't chase you anymore" and Jamal's like "you got to be crazy, I am five years old, all of forty pounds and I'm going to stop to let
these two seven or eight year olds get after me?" So, I mean, just one too many times it happened.

Coping with the White parents of other children also created a racially hostile environment and distress for Frances Trudeau. One parent said to me, the day before I was taking Jamal out [of this daycare center] and she said to me, "oh you're going to Jefferson Daycare Center?" and it was like she almost hissed it at me. It's like, get out of my face, lady, 'cause if you're doing this to me, I know what you're saying to your kid and I know what your kid is saying to my kid so, thank you very much for sharing, we're getting out of here.

Another African American mother, Gloria Thomas, expressed concerns about the racial interactions with White child care providers at her daughter's day care center. She described her provider as not having "cultural skills:"

I don't know if she was used to [Black people]. I think she was kind of narrow minded. I didn't feel comfortable, me being Black, my kids being mixed. She looked like she put more energy into the White kids than the Black kids. I think she felt that I was on her because she said in a couple of days, or actually I said, this isn't going to work and she pretty much knew also that it wasn't going to work.

Even though this care was affordable, available and convenient, it was not acceptable to Gloria because it did not provide her with the assurances that her child was safe and would be treated fairly by
provider's ability to provide a racially safe environment by two indicators: how she, Gloria, felt when she interacted with a White provider and whether the provider had other Black or Brown children in her care.

Sometimes the discomfort was not due to overt racial hostility, but to a lack of cultural competency. Both Mexican American and African American mothers in this study reported difficulties associated with cross-racial interactions in their child care arrangements. In reference to cross-cultural contact, the National Maternal and Child Health Resource Center on Cultural Competency (1994) defines cultural competency as "a set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together on a continuum in a system, agency, or individual that enable that system, agency or individual to function effectively in transcultural interactions."

It is exactly the lack of this effective functioning which African American and Mexican American mothers became aware of when they were in the racial/ethnic minority at their day cares. Deidre Lewis, an African American dental hygienist and mother of three, who had relocated to this County for her husband's job, worried that her son was being treated as a "mascot" at his daycare center. She felt his White caregivers were well-intentioned, yet because they had little regular contact with African Americans, they drew more inappropriate attention to him in their efforts to demonstrate they were color-blind to race. The caregivers' efforts
to be racially aware were ineffective because they lacked cultural competency.

Similarly, when Aurora Garcia resolved her child care concerns by switching from the Mexican American family daycare provider to a daycare center that was staffed by White child care providers, she discovered:

They're all White, and they come from that perspective. And that's just a tradeoff for me right now. They have blind spots, I don't know how else to put it. They're coming from their perspectives and their reality, their experiences, and so to change that, you have to ask them to. You have to help them do it, too.

According to Harriet McAdoo (1986), "the "extreme" difficulties which White society imposes on Black people by denying their identity, their values, and their economic opportunities are not unusual or extraordinary but "mundane," daily pressures for Blacks (p. 189)." The difficulties in finding and maintaining a culturally competent and supportive child care can be understood as one of the societal stressors of racism on African American and Mexican American families which creates a mundane extreme environment. Alleviating some of the pressure from this mundane extreme environment is possible only when mothers and child care providers communicate effectively with cultural competency in cross-racial/ethnic interactions.
Cultural Maintenance and Class Conflict

The existence of a Mexican American community and kin networks insulated some Mexican American mothers from cross-racial interactions while the demographics of this Northern California County left African American mothers vulnerable to cross-racial contacts. Mexican American mothers from the area were able to call on kin and long-time friends to provide culturally competent and racially safe child care.

Yet the existence of a Mexican American community was not as supportive to newcomers to the area. In particular, professionally employed Mexican American mothers expressed the difficulty of finding child care arrangements which maintained their traditional cultural practices and values and reinforced the class-based values that their recently achieved upward social mobility offered them.

Aurora Garcia had originally chosen a Mexican American family daycare provider because it was initially most important to her to find someone who reminded her of the kind of child care she had known when she was growing up. Her mother and aunts had taken care of the children as if they were part of the family. And in addition, it was also important that her son be exposed to his cultural traditions in his daycare situation. So she purposefully chose a Mexican American family daycare provider in order to establish a situation that would provide cultural maintenance. She said:

Given that my child would be in the household for a significant number of hours during the day I was hoping that there be some similarity, you know. Not that I'm
traditional, I don't consider myself traditional, but those values I wanted, kind of implanted, you know, issues of discipline, you know, being really caring and nurturing and being familiar with Spanish.

Aurora was not alone in her view that child care was a source of traditional Mexican cultural maintenance. Another Mexican American mother, Elena Romero, a nutritionist who had like some others moved to this County for her husband's job, initially sought out Spanish-speaking providers. Elena, like Aurora, was confronted with class differences that her upward occupational mobility had introduced into her life. She found that class differences between herself and the Spanish speaking immigrant and Mexican American women she hired bothered her no matter how much she wanted her two children to be in their cultural milieu. Unlike African American mothers, Elena had no difficulty locating Mexican/Mexican American providers through Spanish language radio. But she was not satisfied with childrearing practices she saw being used. She described an upsetting incident:

I had [a lady] come to the house. And she was a young mother herself of a two year old. She wasn't really educated. She was really, really nice, but she wasn't educated. What she was doing [with my baby] was like bribing him with sweets. He was only like eight months.

Elena found herself having to choose between whether she wanted her children to be in their traditional cultural milieu or to have opportunities which her current class status offered. Elena Romero checked out bilingual daycare centers, but found that her income was
higher than the eligibility requirements, but also, the bilingual
daycare had fewer materials, higher children to adult ratio and less
formally trained teachers than the middle class White daycare
centers she visited. In contrast, middle class White daycare centers
had more resources, more educational opportunities, and better
staffing ratios than the daycare centers for low-income families.
Sighing, she said

   It was hard. I felt real bad. But then I thought, what's
   more important? For our kids to be in a safe
   environment with lots of opportunities for developing
   into smart, healthier, I mean, good adults.

She decided to prioritize class-based opportunities over exposure to
Mexican traditional cultural maintenance because she believed that
they could get the latter at home. She explained:

   Well, by then, what [my husband and I] both said is that
   both of us are real proud of being Mexicanos, Chicanos,
you know. And we're both constantly involved in the
Movement kind of things. And we both have friends who
are bilingual and they have kids, and you know, our
families, if we have a birthday, we have a pinata and all
that stuff. So we decided well, that they would get it
from us.

She recognized that the quality of care (in terms of physical
safety, child-to-adult ratios, educational opportunities, materials
and resources, and the professional training of the staff) were
greater in more affluent daycare centers. Though she ultimately
chose to have her children in a predominantly White daycare center
moved her children out of care informed by Mexican traditions. And unfortunately, her decision does not allow for the transmission of cultural values which are facilitated by exposure to cultural images in child care settings (Hale 1991).

Although some professionally trained Mexican American women eventually chose child care arrangements which would not provide cultural maintenance (because that was only available in working class child care situations or to low income mothers in federally subsidized child care centers), they were not aspiring to assimilate to middle class White values. In the predominantly White day cares they encountered racism more often and constantly found themselves providing the training for cultural competency and cultural maintenance to sometimes willing, yet mostly unaware child care providers and center directors. Teaching the daycare providers, the Center directors, and other parents about multiculturalism, something which they wanted their children to get, usually happened only after some unpleasant incident. This quickly became an unanticipated responsibility which they came to resent, especially since it was an added burden which other parents did not share.

The ideal situation for these Mexican American mothers, had it been available to them would be child care centers with middle-class values about education, child-interaction and discipline styles staffed by culturally knowledgeable and competent bilingual Mexican American caregivers. These situations simply did not exist for Mexican Americans or African American mothers in this County. In
contrast, middle class Anglo Americans had an easier time of finding culturally satisfactory daycare situations in both family daycare homes and daycare centers.

The Racial Political Economy of Child Care

The awareness of cultural maintenance for Anglo American mothers was different than for mothers of historically subordinated racial/ethnic groups because of their different social locations in relation to the matrix of race relations in the U.S. An Anglo American mother could hire a Mexican child care provider and not worry whether her racial culture would be validated by the child care situation. Like air, the values and practices of Anglo American culture are everywhere. Thus, Anglo American mothers did not volunteer worries about racial and ethnic differences. In contrast, a Mexican American or African American mother could not cross racial lines and hire an Anglo American child care provider without being aware on some level that the provider may not provide the child's ethnic-specific cultural practices, expectations, and preferences.

Furthermore, the maintenance of a White racial culture occurred for Anglo American mothers without being consciously attended to or marked because mechanisms for finding this care were readily available. The formal sector of the child care economy in this County was a White child care market which provided easy access to a large enough pool of Anglo American child care providers even if mothers were newcomers to the area or embarking upon first time searches. Most of the formally licensed family day cares listed by a telephone referral service which was run by Anglo Americans.
Daycare centers were almost entirely staffed by Anglo American women. Even newspaper advertisements of available care were placed primarily by Anglo American child care providers. If Anglo American mothers had the financial resources, they could easily shift their child care arrangements to a variety of child care options if they perceived any kind of disjuncture between their expectations and their current situations.

Class-based issues more than race-based ones were more often remarked upon by Anglo Americans as the source of their concerns. Mary Taylor, the Anglo American mother who was uncomfortable with action toys and the amount of time the television was on, perceived this as a class difference. The difference between her concerns and those of Elena Romero’s and Aurora Garcia’s was that what she wanted existed and she was only limited by the lack of financial resources to move into her preferred type of care. Mary did eventually move her child into a daycare which expressed her preferences more closely along several dimensions, not just basic physical care and opportunities.

When Anglo American mothers in cross-racial/ethnic arrangements spoke about them, they spoke positively about how their children benefited from the differences. Latina caregivers were perceived to be more maternal and loving than Anglo American or European caregivers (Uttal 1993). Another cultural benefits of having a Spanish speaking child care provider was the opportunity

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5I am making a distinction here between when Anglo American mothers spoke hypothetically about what they thought were the differences between care by providers of different racial/ethnic groups and those who actually were in cross-racial/ethnic relationships.
for their children to learn Spanish and to learn about another culture. In addition, mothers who hired undocumented Mexican women for child care reported benefits for themselves, that is, that this kind of child care cost less and the child care providers would do housework at the same time as caring for children.

Some Mexican American mothers were insulated from concerns about racial safety and cultural competency by the sizable population of Mexican/Mexican Americans and the community networks that provided the possibility of locating child care through relatives and friends. In parts of the county, Mexican Americans were residentially concentrated and occupationally segregated. Furthermore, the lower cost of care by relatives and friends (in comparison to daycare homes and centers) combined with a dominant message within the Mexican/Mexican American community that children should be cared for by relatives led to many Mexican American mothers finding child care within their kin and friendship networks.

The structure of the economic and racial economies which encouraged Mexican American mothers to remain within their kinship networks was absent for African American mothers in this County. The population of this County was so small (less than 1%) that there was no distinct African American child care community.

Although they could not rely on kin networks for care, several of the African American mothers recollected their own experiences with having been cared for by relatives. For example, Lois Powell, an elementary school teacher and the mother of a 6 month old girl, said that if a kin network had been available, she would have
utilized it for her current child care needs. Her preference reflected what other African American women interviewed also expressed, but were unable to achieve. Some had been raised in the County, but their families no longer lived nearby. Others had relocated to the area for jobs and lacked both community and kin network connections. Thus, they were pushed into more formal means for accessing care which meant that more than likely they would find Anglo American child care providers.

Mexican American mothers found that when they checked out referrals from the telephone referral service, they met only Anglo American providers. Mexican immigrant and Mexican American providers were more likely to advertise themselves through informal means, such as word of mouth, Spanish language radio, and personal referrals. For local Mexican immigrant or Mexican American mothers, membership in a community network was an essential point of access to a large but very informal child care market. The invisibility of this more informally organized child care infrastructure meant that Mexican/Mexican American newcomers to the County or Mexican Americans who had become disconnected from their ethnic community had an especially hard time locating child care providers who were of the same race and/or culturally similar.

**Within One's Racial/Ethnic Community**

Staying within one’s racial/ethnic community did not guarantee a fit between the values and practices of mothers and providers. Even when kin provided child care, mothers identified
constituted a good environment. For example, María Hernandez, a Mexican American office manager and the mother of a 4 year old boy, expressed dissatisfaction with the care provided by her Mexican American mother-in-law. She said:

I don't really like the idea of them being yelled at or spanked. I think if there is a behavior problem, they should be able to tell us and for us to deal with it. Luckily I have been in the situation where my kid is pretty mellow, but I've seen her spanking her other grandchildren. I wouldn't like that.

Maria also had a preference for additional educational activities which she did not expect from her mother-in-law. She said, for example:

I really believe in story reading and with her, I guess, she's not into the education part of it. Once in awhile she'll basically look at pictures just to keep them busy, or she would narrate sort of according to what it says, but she wouldn't read it to them.

Because of the economic advantages of care by kin and the cultural messages that care by family was better than care by strangers (e.g. in a daycare center where they might read or not use corporal punishment), María kept her son in his grandmother's care.

When Mexican American mothers had several relatives or friends to choose from, they carefully discriminated between these choices based on what they considered to be a good environment and good care. Sylvia Rodriguez, a Mexican American office manager and
the mother of two children, could choose between her sister-in-law and her cousin. She said:

it depends on who the relatives are. Like for example, you know, financially [my husband's sister] could have used watch[ing for pay] my son and my daughter at her house. She's real good about feeding them and things like that. But she has a lot of marital problems that I wouldn't want my kids to be around, or watching the arguments or fights. I know they use bad language and that's another thing that I don't like.

Like Sylvia, Lupe Gonzalez, a loan processor at a local bank and the mother of an eleven month old, was discriminating in terms of which relative she chose to watch her young baby. She was pleased that her aunt was available for care though she would have left her child in her grandmother's care if necessary. At her aunt's home, he was the only child and she felt safer with that arrangement than with her grandmother who was watching several grandchildren and was less attentive because of her age. In addition, she would have had to accept the grandmother's practices, whereas with her same-age aunt, she was able to instruct her how she wanted things done (such as what and when new foods could be introduced).

Conclusion

The United States lacks a comprehensive federal child care policy and provides only minimal guidance and support for employed parents' needs for child care. The political economy of child care is divided into an informal and formal sectors, both minimally
recognized and regulated (Tuominen 1994; Uttal 1993). In combination with the dominant ideology that mothers are solely responsible for their children's well-being, the consequence of this sociopolitical context is that locating and maintaining child care arrangements is troublesome for mothers (Uttal 1993).

In this paper, I have addressed how race and class structure the child care options as well as how racial identity and cultural preferences and class are factors used to assess the practices and values of providers in existing child care arrangements.

The racial demographics of the region, cultural expectations about the use of kin for child care, and the structure of the formal and informal child care economy made it easier for Anglo Americans and Mexican Americans with local networks to locate care which fit with their expectations about what constitutes good child care. African Americans and Mexican Americans who had relocated to the area found it difficult to find child care.

Mothers tried to locate providers whom they believed reproduced their values, used similar methods of childrearing, and provided what they viewed as an appropriate environment for children. Cultural reproduction is a major part of mothers' ideals of what constitutes good child care but it is not always possible to fully evaluate this criterion until mothers' are in the midst of established child care arrangements.

Not surprisingly, mothers were faced with unexpected conflicts of values and child care practices whether or not they conducted extensive child care searches. Even when practices were discussed prior to entering into an arrangement, mothers discovered
that what they expected was not necessarily being practiced or other concerns took precedence over their initial priorities. The racial demographics of the region and the racialized structure of the child care economy meant that racial issues were a key concern for African American and Mexican American mothers. The presence of a sizable Mexican American community and kin networks insulated some Mexican American mothers from concerns about racial safety, as were Anglo American mothers buffered by the dominant presence of Anglo American culture. In contrast, African American and Mexican American mothers who had not established a community base and lacked a kin network more overtly confronted racial and cultural concerns. In addition, professionally employed Mexican American mothers expressed frustration about being unable to locate care which met both their interest in cultural maintenance and provide the class opportunities afforded to affluent Anglo American children.

These findings suggest an interplay between cultural values and the availability of types of child care to different racial/ethnic groups. It appears that Anglo Americans can rely on informal family day care homes with strangers more easily because the larger society unconsciously provides them with racial safety and their cultural values. Anglo Americans experience conflicts with child care, yet because of the larger Anglo American child care economy, Anglo American mothers have more options should they decide to change their child care arrangement and if they can afford it.

In contrast, the child care options for Mexican Americans and African Americans in the formal child care economy are limited
because the formal child care economy is dominated by the values of Anglo American culture. This may have created a greater reliance on kin and friendship networks for child care by Mexican Americans who access to them. For African Americans and some Mexican Americans who relocated to the area, using informal avenues to locate child care was less available.

However, African Americans also have the highest national rate of center care use. One reason may be that a disproportionate number of African Americans are low income and live in inner city urban areas with Headstart programs. Also, African American child care users may prefer and view child care more as an educational institution. Given the opportunity, they may choose the more structured, explicitly educational curriculum of daycare centers over the unstructured, family environment of the family daycare home or care by relatives.

The interplay between cultural values (such as preferences for educational opportunities), racial safety, and cultural maintenance, combined with the hierarchical afford ability of the difference kinds of care (relatives are less expensive than family day cares which are less expensive than day care centers or private in-home caregivers), may explain some of the racialized use pattern.

While on the surface it appears that racial safety and cultural maintenance might push African Americans and Mexican Americans into care in their own racial/ethnic communities, this would be an oversimplified understanding of the situation. Care by one's own ethnic community is also complicated. Mexican American mothers carefully discriminated between different relatives, and
traditionally based family day care providers and educationally oriented day care centers.

Day care centers are important because of the significance of education to historically subordinated racial/ethnic groups. This is an important issue which needs to be taken into account, especially for upwardly mobile Mexican Americans and African Americans. The importance of educational opportunities often push African Americans and Mexican Americans who can afford it away from racially safe care that provides cultural maintenance into predominantly White and affluent day care centers which can be racially and culturally abusive and require parents to take on additional responsibility to rectify the lack of cultural competency.

The findings of this research suggest that the problems of child care are far more complex than the current discussions over cost and availability of spaces would suggest. In addition, the difficulties of maintaining child care arrangements are related to the difficulties mothers have in maintaining current child care arrangements because of conflict in their expectations and what the child care situations are able to provide. These difficulties are created by a political economy of child care whose racial organization limits access to child care which is informed by traditional cultural values as well as class values. This economy both insulates some mothers within their racial/ethnic communities while at the same time it throws others into the lions' den of cultural, class, and value differences in how children should be cared for. The concerns about racial safety, cultural competency and
cultural maintenance are not simply matters of taste, but reflect how race and class structure access to one's own culture and social opportunities. The weight of these concerns in making and maintaining child care arrangements suggests that researchers and policy makers should consider more carefully cultural and class-based obstacles and preferences.
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