

# **Racial Safety and Cultural Maintenance: The Childcare Concerns of Employed Mothers of Color**

**Lynet Uttal**  
**University of Wisconsin-Madison**

When employed mothers of color transfer the care of their children to childcare providers, their needs and concerns reflect their status as members of historically subordinated racial ethnic groups in the United States. This paper introduces two new concepts--racial safety and cultural maintenance--to show how racial ethnic group membership and traditional cultural practices and values are critical concerns that influence the decisions and choices that employed mothers of color make about who will provide care for their children in their absence. This analysis is based on in-depth interviews with Mexican American, African American and Guamanian American employed mothers of infants, toddlers, and pre-school-aged children.

## **Introduction**

In the 1930s, doctors professed a single model of infant care that was promoted as superior to traditional ethnic infant care practices.<sup>1</sup> A similar movement is currently taking place today in the 1990s in the field of paid childcare services. Childcare advocates are pressing for the professionalization of childcare work and the practice of a single model of developmentally appropriate care. Underlying this proposal is the assumption that childrearing can be stripped of cultural values and practices, and that the type of care a child receives can be offered independent of the social and cultural location of the child's family.

This model ignores how membership in historically subordinated racial ethnic groups creates a different experience for people of color than experienced by the White population. Childcare research has identified systematic differences in preferences by socioeconomic and racial

ethnic groups. One difference frequently noted is that African American parents, specifically, and low income parents, generally, view childcare as an educational setting more so than do White parents. White parents, especially middle class ones, are more likely to view childcare as an opportunity for their children to have social interactions with other children.<sup>2</sup> African American parents express a greater preference for childcare that provides structured academic programs for preschool aged children, whereas middle class White parents prefer loosely structured activities that expose their children to different concepts through play. This high valuation of education is rooted in beliefs that early education will prepare children for kindergarten and create a stronger foundation for social mobility through education.<sup>3</sup> African American parents are also more likely to advocate the use of authoritarian disciplining styles such as physical punishment and authoritarian commands by child care providers.<sup>4</sup> In contrast, White parents are less likely to support the use of corporal punishment in daycare, even though they may privately use these methods at home.

One study found that African American parents expected the daycare center's staff to be aware of and sensitive to racial issues and objected when the daycare center's programming violated this expectation.<sup>5</sup> In another study, Chinese American parents expressed concern about the conflicting messages children get when what is taught at home differs from what is taught at their daycares,<sup>6</sup> such as differing beliefs about how to address elders and eating practices (e.g. whether picking up a bowl and eating from it is acceptable). These concerns are important to take into account because early childhood education research has shown that presentations of positive ethnic images are important in the formulation of children's self-images and for the transmissions of cultural values.<sup>7</sup> Yet, when childcare advocates propose a single model of developmentally appropriate childcare, they ignore the significance of membership in a historically subordinated racial ethnic group and cultural values in how childcare arrangements are chosen.

Racial group membership and cultural practices are important because they create a lens, or historical consciousness, through which child care is assessed. Historical consciousness, according to poet and scholar Janice Gould,<sup>8</sup> is the awareness of one's historical identity. In her discussion of Native American women, Gould states that historical consciousness is the historical awareness of 500 years of internal colonialism and genocide. Although individual Native American women come from many different tribes and lead very different lives, Gould argues that their historical consciousness informs how individual women live their lives out on a daily basis. Their historical consciousness reflects their social histories as members of particular gender, race, ethnic, and class groups.

Historical consciousness of their status as members of historically subordinated racial ethnic groups informs the types of concerns

employed mothers of color have about leaving their children in other people's care. In this article, I explore two expressions of this historical consciousness in employed mothers' views of their childcare arrangements: racial safety and cultural maintenance. The introduction of two concepts is central to understanding why parents of color seek out childcare providers who are members of their own racial ethnic group and how they view child care provided by persons who do not share their racial ethnic group membership and/or knowledge of their racial ethnic histories. Furthermore, this article not only identifies childcare problems related to overt forms of racism, but also discusses the problems that occur when well-intentioned White childcare providers lack the cultural competency to care for children of different racial ethnic groups.

### **Methods**

This paper is based on interviews with fifteen women of color (7 Mexican American, 7 African American, and 1 Guamanian American). The analysis presented in this paper is part of a larger research project that examined how employed mothers of infants, toddlers, and pre-school-aged children made, maintained, and changed their childcare arrangements. In-depth interviews were conducted with 32 employed mothers in a Northern Californian county during the period of 1990-1992. Because this study was exploratory, I used maximum variation sampling to ensure inclusion of a diversity of experiences. This sampling method was used to locate the sample because unlike snowball sampling which sometimes produces a tightly networked and homogeneous sample, maximum variation sampling interrupts the social links between respondents and the researcher, and diversifies the sample on several different factors. In this study, mother's ethnicity, occupation, and type of child care were the three criteria purposefully diversified. This sampling practice results in an analysis that represents a broad range of experiences, rather than one that is limited to a homogeneous sample. Most mothers were interviewed only once and interviews lasted from 2-6 hours. Every interview began by asking the employed mothers about the history of their child care arrangements. During the first wave of interviewing, mothers were encouraged to talk about any issues that came to mind. In the second wave, in-depth probing focused on three topics: the meaning of childcare, concerns about their current situations, and their relationships with their childcare providers. In the final wave of interviewing, employed mothers were also asked to respond to my developing analyses. I analyzed data as an ongoing process, and new information was constantly compared with previous interviews to push for the development of categories and explanations that generalized from the synthesis of several individual experiences.

According to the 1990 U.S. Census, the Northern California county in which this study was conducted was 85% White, 10% Hispanic, 4% Asian American and less than 1% Black.<sup>9</sup> The childcare economy of this county is organized around two sectors: the formal sector composed of licensed family daycares and non-profit (not church-based) and federally funded child care centers, and the informal sector composed of an underground economy of care provided by relatives and unlicensed individual caregivers, including a labor pool of Mexican and South American immigrant women. The division of the childcare economy into two sectors, a formal and an underground one, is a common characteristic nationwide.<sup>10</sup>

The availability of a labor pool of low paid, women of color is also typical; in other parts of the country these women would more likely be African American. However, the extremely small population of African Americans in this county (less than 3,000) limited the availability of African American childcare providers and African American mothers reported great difficulty in locating same race providers. In contrast, due to the sizable population of Mexican Americans, Central and South American immigrants in this county, Mexican American mothers, like White mothers, had less difficulty locating a pool of providers of their same racial ethnic group.

### **The Concern for Racial Safety**

According to Harriette Pipes McAdoo, "the 'extreme' difficulties which White society imposes on Black people by denying their identity, their values, and their economic opportunities are not unusual or extreme but 'mundane,' daily pressures for Blacks."<sup>11</sup> McAdoo compares living with racism to living in a harsh physical environment. In order to survive, historically subordinated racial ethnic groups have to adapt their cultures and material and social structural arrangements to accommodate the daily pervasiveness of this harsh environment. McAdoo identified how racism affects job opportunities, housing, and health care for African Americans, and we know that these conditions are also imposed upon other historically subordinated racial ethnic groups, such as Latinos, Asian Americans, and Native Americans.<sup>12</sup>

Awareness of racism in U.S. society was a common topic when mothers of color talked about their childcare arrangements. Because of their own experiences with racism, they were concerned about how their children would be treated when the childcare providers were White. Often times, mothers discovered these problems only after they established childcare arrangements. For example, Gloria Thomas,<sup>13</sup> an African American waitress and mother of two children, observed behaviors that she defined as racist. Gloria said:

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. [And] she looked like she put more energy into the White kids than the Black kids. I think she felt that I was on to her, because she said in a couple days, or actually I said, "this isn't going to work," and she pretty much knew also that it wasn't going to work.<sup>14</sup>

Gloria expected White childcare providers to have knowledge of how to negotiate cross-racial interactions. She said:

If you are dealing with my kids, I hope you do have some cultural skills. I don't like prejudiceness at all... You have to be not dumb. Some white people can be really stupid. They say the stupidest things.

When it was clear that childcare providers lacked these skills, mothers removed their children from the childcare setting. Frances Trudeau, an African American lawyer and the mother of two children, responded this way when the teachers and administrators at her five year old son's preschool-elementary school failed to acknowledge and address that the name calling and chasing of African American children was racism. When she and other parents spoke to the director, they were told that the school could not develop a policy to address these problems because families came from so many different walks of life and the school did not want to tell people how to behave. This response reduced cross-racial interactions to individual interactions and personal disagreements and failed to acknowledge the more systemic nature of racism. Mothers of color found this kind of response inadequate and frustrating because they are aware of the pervasiveness of the problem of racism. Because they know racism's regularity, commonness, and reoccurrence, they do not define unpleasant cross-racial interactions as occasional, individual disagreements, even in childcare settings.

The mothers of color also experienced racism when they used predominantly White childcare settings. Gloria Thomas described one such encounter:

This one woman was pretty annoying. She asked me this question and to this day I still want to ask her what did she mean by it. She said, "Oh, are you a single parent?" And I said, "Yes." And she goes, "Oh, do you live around here?" And I said, "Yes, I live right around the corner." You could tell her mind was [thinking], "She goes to this daycare? She's a single parent, Black,

and she lives up here. How can she afford it?" It's really weird.

One of the strategies that the mothers developed to protect their children from racism was to find child care within their own racial ethnic communities. The use of kin and community networks protected the children and the mothers from having to deal with cross-racial interactions. When mothers of color were able to make childcare arrangements with childcare providers of their same racial ethnic group, the concerns about racial safety and cultural maintenance were eliminated. Yet, care within one's racial ethnic community did not guarantee a fit between the values and childrearing practices of mothers and childcare providers. Often times, mothers had several relatives and acquaintances from which to choose. When this was the case, the mothers carefully discriminated between their choices based on what they considered to be a good environment and good care. After assuring their child's racial safety and exposure to traditional cultural practices and values, they invoked additional criteria to decide which childcare setting was the best. Sylvia Rodriguez, an office manager and the mother of two children, chose her cousin over her sister-in-law. She explained:

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, watching the arguments and fights. I know they use bad language and that's another thing I don't like.

Like Sylvia, Lupe Gonzalez, an administrative assistant and the mother of an eleven month old, was discriminating in terms of which relative she chose to watch her young baby. She had two options: an elderly grandmother and an aunt who was the same age as herself. She was pleased that her aunt was available to care for the baby, although she would have left her baby in her grandmother's care if necessary, but her grandmother was elderly and was already watching several other grandchildren. Because of her grandmother's age, Lupe felt that she would not be as attentive or as physically able to pick up her baby. The advantage of care by the aunt was that her infant son would also be the only child for whom the aunt provided care.

Although Gloria Thomas had left a White childcare provider because she felt the White provider was unable to negotiate the cross-racial interactions, she found that simply finding an African American childcare provider did not necessarily create satisfactory childcare ar-

rangements. Gloria had found a family daycare run by an African American woman, yet other factors prevented her from feeling comfortable with this arrangement. Gloria's views were informed by Black nationalism as well as the health foods movement. She expressed the political position that she would not hire a Latino immigrant because that resembled the racial exploitation of African Americans, and she also rejected high fat and high sugar cooking in favor of low fat and low sugar organic foods. She talked with the African American childcare provider about what kinds of foods were provided at the daycare and she expressed her preference that her children be provided with fresh juices instead of sodas or drinks with sugar in them. In spite of this initial discussion, it was not unusual for Gloria to come to pick up her kids and find them drinking sugar drinks. Gloria defined what her childcare provider was doing as an African American cultural practice:

Black people are raised different where they can eat the fried foods whatever. But I just wasn't trying to act like my kids were special. I was mainly just concerned about their nutrition, but it wasn't like I was acting they were more special. I was just doing it because I didn't want them to eat any sugar.

Unhealthy food was a piece of her cultural heritage that she did not want to continue to practice.

Similarly, Gloria and her provider had disagreements about what were appropriate disciplining practices. Gloria talked with her provider about these issues, but felt that her preferences were not validated by the childcare provider. She said:

Well, I did, I said, "I don't believe in hitting." And she said, "What do you mean by hitting?" I said, "just swatting," and she said, "I do, you know, a slap on the hand." And I said, "pretty much even that I don't want." But I could feel like that she didn't want to hear that.

Since Gloria also wanted something different than what she perceived as traditional African American childrearing practices, she moved her children into a daycare center where she was the only African American parent, as well as of the lowest socioeconomic status and background, and one of only two single parents. She often found herself irritated with what she perceived as a White style of interaction, yet, she felt the social, educational, and environmental advantages of the daycare center outweighed the need to have her child cared for by her previous African American childcare provider.

Young mothers often opposed some of the traditional childrearing practices used by the older and more traditional women in their communities. For example, Maria Hernandez, a Mexican American office manager and the mother of a four 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 [the parents] 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.

Occasionally, Maria would consider moving her child to a daycare center. Yet, when Maria weighed out all factors (i.e. convenience, location, flexibility, cost, quality of care, being within the family for child care), she decided that this care by her mother-in-law was the best choice, in spite of the differences about disciplining practices.

One of the formal sources of childcare referrals was through the County's childcare referral service. This service provided referrals to licensed daycare centers, family daycares, and unlicensed individual caregivers. However, given the structure of the childcare market into informal and formal sectors, and the racial demographics of the region, the referral service was not often helpful for African American and Mexican American mothers. Even though the service was provided in both English and Spanish, several Mexican American mothers commented that the service was not a good source for Latino providers. One Mexican American mother pointed out that when she visited the referrals given to her by the County's referral service, she saw only White childcare providers and very few non-White racial ethnic children in their care. Mexican American employed mothers reported that they had greater success locating Latino caregivers through informal sources, such as personal referrals and Spanish radio ads. Thus, Mexican American mothers often turned to their social and community-based networks to locate child care instead of using the childcare referral service. African American mothers in this study found it difficult to locate African American childcare providers in either the formal or informal sector of the childcare market.

Another consideration was that simply being of the same race did not guarantee racial safety. Gloria felt that her African American childcare provider was uncomfortable with the fact that her children's father was White. Being biracial located her children in a different category of race than being labeled as simply "Black." Similarly, other mothers found that their searches for child care were complicated by having



mixed race children. Julie Lopez described how her background complicated what she look for in childcare:

I'm bilingual, but I'm not bicultural. My father was Black, my mother was White, my husband is Mexican. My child is half Mexican, Chicano. My grandparents are Jewish. We had all these different types of people all there and I picked parts of different cultures...My child is going to get a different concept of different people.

Since within-group care was problematic, another strategy that the mothers used to protect their children and themselves against racism was to choose childcare settings that were multiracial. Frances Trudeau said:

Whenever we look at places for the kids, we always look at what's the number of minority kids, specifically black kids but also minorities. We're also Jewish so what's the make-up in terms of Jews...[He's going] to be spending most of his day with these people, what do they believe in? What is it that he's gonna get either subtle or not so subtle in terms of their teachings?

Several of the middle class, predominantly White daycares had made a formal commitment to diversify the ethnic composition of their staff and families they served, as well as to develop a multicultural curriculum. They offered full scholarships to children of color in order to diversify the race and ethnicities of the children in their care. Yet, even when the daycare center had a formal commitment to multiculturalism, childcare providers' behaviors and attitudes often demonstrated a lack of cultural competency that resulted in racially unsafe environments for children of color and their mothers.

Racist encounters ranged from outright hostile relations with childcare staff and other parents at the daycare to incompetent interactions with well-intentioned White childcare providers who lack experience with caring for children of color and negotiating cross-cultural interactions. Aurora Garcia, a Mexican American mother, explained how this happens:

They're all White, and they come from that perspective. . . And 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.

And indeed, one of the consequences of being a parent of a child of color in a majority White daycare was the increased need for parental involvement. Aurora negotiated her child's racial safety by becoming, informally, the daycare center's multicultural consultant. She intervened when the staff at her daughter's daycare center did not interrupt behavior that was racist and stereotypical, such as when a White child pretended to be an Indian and came to school stereotypically dressed in feathers and headbands, wielding a toy tomahawk, and whooping war cries. First, she brought to their awareness that certain behaviors and practices were racist and stereotypical. In the case of the White boy who came to school dressed as a stereotypical American Indian, she told them that she objected to the child's practice as well as the staff's encouragement of it by painting stereotypical Indian war paint on him. When the daycare center was responsive to her concerns and asked her to work with them on it, she talked to the children and staff, and recommended multicultural readings.

Aurora acknowledged the daycare staff's effort to improve themselves, but at the same time she was aware of the cross-cultural gaffes that were a regular part of taking her child to a predominantly White daycare center. She said:

They are very actively trying to deal with some of these issues, and to me that felt good, culturally, you know. They made some boo-boos. [Like] at one point one of these teachers was talking to one of the [Latino] kids in Spanish, and she said, "She's bilingual, right?" [The child wasn't.] Then you have to decode what you are and [let them know that] not all Chicanos speak Spanish. So, on one level, it was like you could ignore it. But I had to talk to her and explain who I am, and this has been my experience, and people assume that if you're a particular ethnicity then you're going to do what they perceive are the stereotypical things of that ethnicity.

Because of their awareness of racism in U.S. society, mothers of color were acutely aware of whether their children would be racially safe in their childcare settings. When one is a member of a historically subordinated racial ethnic group, finding child care that provides children with racial safety is an important concern. Yet, the search is complicated by other racial/ethnic factors than simply what is the child's race or ethnic group.

## **The Search for Cultural Maintenance**

Many of the mothers expressed interest in child care by racially and ethnically similar caregivers. For some, this was motivated by the desire to protect their children and create a racially safe situation. For others, it was an explicit strategy to ensure that their children would learn about their cultural heritage and histories. Many of the mothers had been young adults at a time in history when racial ethnic groups began to take pride in claiming their cultural histories and formed nationalist movements. Prior to the 1960s, historically subordinated racial ethnic groups were expected to socialize their children to the dominant Anglo Saxon Protestant values that undergird U.S. society. As far back as the 1920s, child care services were used to “Americanize” immigrant children and their parents.<sup>15</sup> Mothers of color were aware of these historical biases and purposefully sought out culturally similar providers because they saw child care as a site that would influence their children’s understandings of their cultural heritages.

Several Mexican American mothers sought Spanish-speaking Mexican/Mexican American caregivers for this reason. For example, when Elena Romero, a Mexican American nutritionist, first needed child care, she used this strategy and found a Spanish-speaking provider through a referral from her husband’s office. She said:

We found out about this [family] day care that was run by a preschool teacher that had decided to open up her own day care. And she was Chicana and...I really wanted him to know Spanish. Since birth I had [talked] to him [in Spanish]...Anyway, so I went to this day care and I really was impressed with the daycare center because...she was really organized...and I liked her right away, you know. Then she had like señoras, mexicanas...come in and cook for her and like they would make a big ol' pot of albondigas...a meatball soup, you know. So like they would make really good Mexican food.

Similarly, Aurora Garcia said:

I was hoping that, given that my child would be in the household for a significant number of hours during the day, that there be some [ethnic] 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 her being familiar with Spanish.

In describing what she looked for in child care, Julie Lopez, an African American mother whose ex-husband and stepfather are Latino, said:

There's a cultural thing...one of the things for me, and our family, it has been really important to have [my child] in a bilingual place where she can sit down with other kids and speak Spanish and have a teacher that speaks Spanish. They sit down at lunch and they speak Spanish together. And the writing they do is both in English and Spanish and the pictures on the walls and stuff, because that cultural thing to me is really important...I'm always more comfortable if they're bicultural as well, versus just being bilingual.

Thus, their concerns were not simply about language skills and types of food that their children would be eating, but also addressed a broader understanding that shared cultural practices were expressions of shared cultural values.

Another issue that confronted this group of mothers of color was whether to foster cultural maintenance and racial safety at the cost of middle class opportunities. In particular, mothers who had been raised working class and were now middle class grappled with this problem. When Aurora Garcia switched her daughter from a family daycare home with a Mexican American caregiver to a predominantly White daycare center, she felt like she had to make compromises. She said:

I'm not getting the ideal. I can't find the ideal...there are very few children of color there. I think diversity to them is Jewish. That's being diverse culturally...I mean, the ideal to me would be that she be in a school where she would be learning Spanish, she would be learning those things...And that's a tradeoff for me right now...I think of all the skills she's learning right now, but there's a cultural context to them that would be nice to have.

Aurora acknowledged that because she used a predominantly White daycare center, she was raising her child in a White environment. However, she pointed out that her daughter was exposed to traditional cultural values because of who her parents are. She said, "I'm very much entrenched in who I am and what my cultural values are and my experience, and my partner is in his." Similarly, Elena Romero reconciled herself to the fact that her children would learn about their culture and history at home. She said:

[My husband and I] are both 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 that have kids, and, you know, our families. If we have a birthday, we have a piñata and and all that stuff. So we decided, well, that they would get it from us.

Yet Aurora and Elena both realized that placing children in White daycares removed them from being fully immersed in their traditional ethnic community. Aurora said:

It's the same for a child. I mean, it really is how you play, who you play with, what you play. It's what you eat, it's how people treat you, what they say to you...[Her teachers] are going to present it from a white perspective because they don't have bilingual teachers. They don't have African American teachers. So for me, it's a trade off.

Clearly, choosing to move outside of one's culture into a predominantly White daycare is not an easy decision. When they made the decision to place their children in predominantly White daycares, they continued to be conflicted about not being able to find a daycare for their children that could provide cultural maintenance and exposure to traditional cultural practices and values. Although on the surface it may appear that mothers of color who place their children in predominantly White daycare settings are rejecting their own cultural practices and turning their backs on their racial ethnic group, this was not the case. They were highly self-conscious that their children's child care was not fulfilling one of their major criteria for their childcare arrangements. By providing their children with the social opportunities and formal education which they had come to expect for any well-educated child of the middle class, they had to work harder at home to ensure their children learned about their cultures and histories. Furthermore, by placing themselves in predominantly White settings, they more frequently encountered racism and, more frequently and at a younger age, had to explain to their young children about race relations with White society and how to navigate them.

Both of these concerns--racial safety and cultural maintenance--reflect how membership in specific racial ethnic groups influence views of what constitutes appropriate caregiving. The concern of mothers of color for racial safety addresses their awareness that their children can be targets of racism by a society that has historically devalued their racial ethnic group. The concern for cultural maintenance reflects their

preference to retain and/or retrieve traditional cultural practices and values. They recognize that childcare arrangements are an important site that serves as a source of what their children learn about their cultural practices and develop a historical consciousness.

### **Conclusion**

Mothers' concerns about racial safety and cultural maintenance call into question the current social construction of the professional model of developmentally appropriate child care as culturally neutral. The views of the mothers in this study do not reflect rigid adherence to traditional cultural practices, but rather a recognition of the significance of racism in U.S. society and their desire to have cultural learning be part of the childcare curriculum. First, they are concerned whether the caregivers are competent to negotiate cross-racial and cross-ethnic social relations, and whether their children will be treated with the same respect and positive assumptions made of White children. In short, they worried about their children's racial safety. Second, they are concerned about whether the interpersonal interactions and formal and informal curriculum of the childcare setting supports and validates the cultural histories and practices of their racial ethnic group. This concern is beyond overt or subtle forms of racism, but also addresses the question of whether caregivers are culturally competent to positively educate children about their traditional cultures and practices.

These two concerns--racial safety and cultural maintenance--mark an important distinction between racial status, i.e. membership in a group on the basis of one's appearance, and ethnic cultural values, i.e. practices which are important because of how one was raised and hopes to raise one's children. Another important point is that while racial status may be assigned onto the mother or child, ethnic cultural values may be shed or reclaimed, as was the case of Aurora Garcia, who wanted her child to learn Spanish as part of knowing her traditional heritage, even though Aurora herself had not been raised that way.

It is of no surprise that race status and ethnic/cultural values are important criteria that shape mothers of color's views of their childcare arrangements. Hardly any realm of social life in the U.S. is not influenced in some way by racial ethnic stratification and racism. The existence of these dilemmas in childcare choices is another example of how people of color experience the mundane extreme environment of racism.

Even child care is influenced by the social organization of race in the U.S.<sup>16</sup> In some regions of the country, such as where where this study was conducted, some families are forced to go outside of their own racial ethnic group for childcare either because the racial demographics did not support same race child care, or because the conflation

of class and ethnicity make middle class parents of color ineligible for childcare with their own racial ethnic group. Because childcare is a racially and class segregated system, a range of choices in types of child care for parents of color is limited. This is especially true for parents of color who want alternative practices and/or have been economically upwardly mobile, yet desire their children to be cared for by members of their own racial ethnic group. Mothers of color often must choose between childcare settings that provide cultural learning without the middle class opportunities and those that provide middle class educational opportunities without the cultural learning. Clearly, race and culture have great significance when mothers evaluate the quality of their childcare arrangements and choices. This study points out the need to train childcare providers, especially White caregivers, how to effectively negotiate cross-racial interactions and to know about specific cultural practices.

Concerns about racial safety and cultural maintenance make reducing child care to a single universal model of developmentally appropriate care problematic. Parents will resist this model if it is not put into practice in a way that is sensitive to how racial ethnic group membership and traditional cultural practices and values are important dimensions of the childcare experience for parents of historically racially subordinated groups. Furthermore, an important part of a child of color's socialization in U.S. society depends upon learning to negotiate one's way in a society that is racially stratified. This socialization takes place all the time, and needs to be taken into account especially in childcare settings where today's children are spending much of their time.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Jacquelyn Litt, "Mothering, Medicalization, and Jewish Identity, 1928-1940," *Gender & Society* 10, 2 (1996):185-198.

<sup>2</sup> Carole E. Joffe, *Friendly Intruders: Childcare Professionals and Family Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977).

<sup>3</sup> Larner, Mary, and Anne Mitchell, "Meeting the Child Care Needs of Low-Income Families." *Child & Youth Care Forum* 21, 5 (1992):317-334; Rosier, Katherine Brown, and William A. Corsario, "Competent Parents, Complex Lives: Managing Parenthood in Poverty," *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 22, 2 (1993):171-204.

<sup>4</sup> Carole E. Joffe.

<sup>5</sup> Carole E. Joffe.

<sup>6</sup> Stevanne Auerbach, "What Parents Want From Day Care," in *Child Care: A Comprehensive Guide Philosophy, Programs and Practices for the Creation of Quality Services for Children, Volume 1. Rationale for Child Care Services, Programs vs. Politics*, eds. Stevanne Auerbach with James A. Rivaldo (New York: Human Sciences Press, 1975), 137-152.

<sup>7</sup> Janice Hale, "The Transmission of Cultural Values to Young African American Children," *Young Children* (September 1991): 7-14.

<sup>8</sup> Janice Gould, "American Indian Women's Poetry: Strategies of Rage and Hope," *Signs* 20, 4 (1995): 797-817.

<sup>9</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Summary Population and Housing Characteristics, California: Table 3*. (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1990).

<sup>10</sup> Mary Tuominen, "The Hidden Organization of Labor: Gender, Race/Ethnicity and Child-care Work in the Formal and Informal Economy," *Sociological Perspectives* 37, 2 (1994):229-245.

<sup>11</sup> Harriet Pipes McAdoo, "Societal Stress: The Black Family," in *All American Women*, ed. Johnnetta B. Cole. (New York: The Free Press 1986), 189.

<sup>12</sup>In this essay, I use different racial ethnic terms interchangeably. First, I use the terms that were given by the source of information (e.g. the Census Bureau uses Hispanic, different mothers I interviewed used different terms). As analyst, I try to use the most specific racial ethnic label that accurately reflects the group or groups I am referencing. What complicates this decision is whether I am addressing issues that have to do with membership in a particular racial ethnic group, or discussing cultural practices and values. Because of the significance of differences in cultural practices between different ethnic groups, it is important to specifically identify the ethnic group (e.g. Mexican Americans), rather than using global labels (e.g. Hispanic or Latinos), when speaking about issues of cultural practices and values. However, when talking about experiences that result from not being White, it is appropriate to speak of Latinos as a group, or people of color as a group.

<sup>13</sup>All names are pseudonyms.

<sup>14</sup>Quotes are only partially edited for readability. Words are inserted to clarify meaning but ungrammatical syntax is not changed in order to preserve the way ideas were expressed in the syntax used by the speaker.



<sup>15</sup>Julia Wrigley, "Different Care for Different Kids: Social Class and Child Care Policy," *Educational Policy* 3, 4 (1989): 421-439; Wrigley has argued that different kinds of childcare are provided for kids of different socioeconomic status: enrichment opportunities that support middle class culture are provided to middle class children, whereas it is assumed that low income kids need care that interrupts their family's cultural practices.

<sup>16</sup>Wrigley.