

# The Cultural Care of Children in Multiracial Families

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As a child of the 1980s, the only popular images of multiracial people I had growing up were of teary eyed talk-show guests who felt "torn between worlds."<sup>1</sup> Today, multiracial celebrities like Mariah Carey, Dean Cain, Keanu Reeves, and Tiger Woods have helped transform multiraciality into something sexually attractive. There has been an incredible shift in the way multiraciality is depicted and viewed in America's imagination; but our ideas of who multiracial people are, and of what it means to be multiracial in America, remain incomplete, romanticized, and one-dimensional.

Between 1960 and 1990, the United States Census reported that the number of interracial marriages in America exploded 900 percent from 150,000 to 1.5 million, resulting in an estimated four million multiracial children.<sup>2</sup> In the 1990 Census, 21 percent of Asians in general, and 40 percent of U.S.-born Asians, reported having spouses of another "race" or ethnicity. And a 1990 California survey reported, "25 percent of children with any Asian ancestry were

the product of both Asian- and European-derived parents" (Nash 1997, 17). This boom of interracial marriages and children is probably partially responsible for the more alluring way multiraciality has begun to be portrayed in the media and popular culture. It has opened up a space for scholars to begin researching and documenting the history of American intermarriages (e.g., Davis 1991, Nakashima 1992, Spickard 1989, Thornton 1992), and the issues and challenges that confront their multiracial offspring (e.g., Cauce et al. 1992, Nash 1997, Ropp 1997, Root 1997, 1999b; Williams 1997, Yoshimi 1997). The increase in rates of interracial marriage and the number of multiracial children has also inspired numerous multiracial individuals and their parents to share their experiences in autobiographical works (e.g., Azoulay 1997; Fundenberg 1991; McBride 1996; Page 1995). However, there has still been little empirical research on the dynamics of parents and children together in American multiracial families.

In an attempt to add some dimension to our understanding of multiraciality in the United States, this paper examines how mothers "culturally care" for members of their multiracial Filipino-White families. Why and how do mothers "culturally care" for their multiracial offspring? What, if any, effects does this caring work have on these mothers' children, and for our general understandings of "race" and "culture" in the United States?

I use Sarah Ruddick's description of "maternal practice" as carework committed to children's needs for "preservation, growth, and social acceptability" to help me define "cultural care" as thought and practice committed to meeting people's needs for survival, success, and happiness as members of real and/or imagined cultural communities. As such, cultural care in multiracial families can involve any work that attempts to protect members against racism and rejection, and/or to equip members with knowledge about their cultural communities.

I find that cultural care given by mothers of Filipino-White children is informed by their own experiences with "race" and difference, and is often unconscious, invisible, and unacknowledged. I also find that multiple factors influence Filipino-White children's "cultural" self-identities. My data show that, although the multiracial families I studied simultaneously perpetuate and challenge the discourse that sees "race" and "culture" as related

and biologically inherited, their very being invites us to examine conventional meanings of "culture" and "race", and to begin interrogating how these disguise the hegemonic dominance of Whiteness in the United States.

## CULTURAL CARE IN MULTIRACIAL FAMILIES

Studying processes of cultural care in multiracial families can give us valuable new insights into the construction and meanings of "culture" and racial identity in America at the dawn of the twentieth century. We do not often think of having to negotiate our racial and cultural identities at home; but these processes might have more salience in interracial families, where members do not necessarily share the same racial and cultural identifications, and where the ways they are perceived outside of the home may compel them to be more conscious of how they racially and culturally identify.

I focus on how mothers culturally care for their Filipino-White children because most research suggest that women are traditionally designated to perform this work in their families (Briggs 1998, Billson 1995, Gabaccia 1992, Weinberg 1992). Social science literature also shows that women employ various strategies to culturally care for children. These include everything from "deciding which food will they prepare [and] which kin network will claim their labors" (Billson 1995,

122), to providing lessons on "self-definition and self-valuation" through "art, music, and dance, and if un-suppressed, in patterns of economic and political activity" (Collins 1986, 22). Ruth Frankenberg (1993, 125-35) and France Winddance Twine (1999) write about how White mothers of Black multiracial children in the United States and Britain, respectively, choose social networks and residential communities to make available Black role models and communities to help them learn Black cultural knowledge. Finally, Jean Briggs writes that although we often imagine "culture" as being transmitted through organized rituals and lessons, it is just as often, if not more so, learned through "dramas," or "spontaneous interactions out of naturally occurring incidents in everyday life," which mothers regularly supervise and help their children to interpret. Briggs describes how the child she studied extracted cultural lessons on the values, dangers, and roles in her community and family through everyday dramas, which included playful games, arguments, and being fed.

Bearing in mind this literature on mothers and "culture," I examine the motivations, strategies created and employed, and consequences of mothers' cultural care in multiracial families. I explore if, why, and how mothers of mestizo families perform cultural care by consciously and unconsciously directing, managing, and interpreting their families' daily and ritual, spontaneous and informal,

activities and behavior. I am interested in learning how this work might affect them, their children, and the ways "race" and "culture" are generally imagined.

Studying how mothers and their children respond to cultural care in multiracial families can reveal valuable knowledge about processes of racial and cultural identification, and about our notions of "race" and "culture," in general. Among other things, cultural care in the family informs individuals of how we are measured by the world, and of how we should measure ourselves (Briggs 1998, 116; Nakano-Glenn 1994, 18). Therefore, cultural care should play a significant role in how the members of families create and recreate themselves racially and culturally. The cultural care of mestizo families can have considerable demographic and ideological consequences. Filipinos have a long history of intermarriage to Whites in the United States, and now have the highest rate of intermarriage between Asian and Pacific Americans (quoted in Root 1997a, 86). Recent studies suggest that this rate will continue to climb, as more Filipinos move "into neighborhoods and workplaces that are middle class and primarily white" (Root 1997a, 87). Thus, the ways Filipino-White families may choose or feel compelled to racially and/or culturally identify in response to the cultural care they receive can change the racial and ethnic composition of American families, and can affect the meaning of the terms "Filipino American" and

"Asian American." Writing for the Population Reference Bureau, Sharon Lee writes,

The future size of the U.S. Asian population depends in part on whether the children of [interracial] marriages consider themselves Asian—and identify themselves as Asian in censuses and surveys. If they do, the Asian population will increase faster than projected.

Mixed people's racial and cultural identifications can also affect existing ideologies of "race" and "culture" in American society. Multiracial families can help challenge ideas of "race" and "culture" as fixed, unchanging, and biologically inherited, and can highlight how both are actually learned and fluid. This is especially true of Filipino-White families, since almost all "monoracial" Filipino and European Americans already have mixed racial and/or ethnic backgrounds, and because these families are not as subject to the "one-drop rule" that defines people with any "traceable amount" of non-White ancestry as only the "race" of their non-White parent. By demonstrating that unions between "races" are possible, and can produce physiologically and emotionally healthy children, the families I study can help disprove the idea that there exist pure racial categories that cannot be crossed. They can also help show that "culture" is not inextricably linked to "race" by biology, and is continually being reconfigured. The multiple ways in which family members

may culturally identify can dispute the view that culture is transferred through biology, and that "race causes culture."

By doing so, mestizo families can move us to reevaluate static and ahistorical conceptions of culture. They can contest the notion of culture as a set of fixed and unchanging rules, values, and beliefs that uniformly shape the conduct and world-views of a group. They are uniquely positioned to highlight how culture is always consciously and unconsciously being invented, reinvented, negotiated, and transformed, often in response to various external and internal factors, including time-period, inter-group contact, government policies, immigration, discrimination, and individuals' personal subjectivities (Chodorow 1999,172; Rosaldo 1989; Sanchez 1993).

## THE STUDY

This paper is an exploratory study based on 20 in-depth, individual interviews I conducted with mothers and their Filipino-White children, between 1997 and 2000, in San Diego and in the Northern California Bay area. My San Diego subjects are three Filipina mothers, four White mothers, four daughters, and three sons. My Bay Area subjects are two Filipina mothers, one White mother, one daughter, and two sons. At the time of their interviews, the mothers' ages ranged between the late 30s and 50s; and their children's' ages ranged

between 18 and the mid-20s. All of the children and White mothers I interviewed were raised and educated in the United States. One of the Filipina mothers I interviewed immigrated to the United States as an adult and is a first-generation American. The remaining four Filipina women I interviewed can be considered "1.5 generation" Americans, because they either immigrated to the United States as adolescents, or had transnational childhoods, during which they were educated and spent a considerable amount of time in both the Philippines and America. All of the people I interviewed belong to nuclear families, and are long-term residents of their respective areas. Although I tried to solicit subjects by networking through different campus, professional, and cultural classes, organizations, and electronic mail listservs, I ultimately located interviewees through serendipity and referrals to possible participants by friends and friends of friends.<sup>3</sup>

My interview guides contained open-ended questions, designed to allow my interviewees to express the meanings they attach to *their* experiences in a mestizo family, and to the mutable notions of culture and race in their terms, and as free from my cultural assumptions as possible.<sup>4</sup> Before each interview, each respondent was told I was a Filipina-American student investigating multiracial Filipino-White families. Interviews with the mothers typically lasted two to three hours,

and were primarily intended to explore the historical context of their lives, their notions of motherhood, ethnicity, race, and culture, and finally, their strategies, if any, for "cultural care." Interviews with their children took about an hour-and-one-half to two hours, and were primarily intended to explore their ethnic self-identity (ies), and who or what they perceived as teaching them culture.

In order to best explore and represent my respondents' experiences I use tools from psychoanalysis and anthropology, as well as sociology, to approach and conduct my research. I use psychoanalysis to probe for different levels of "meaning" in what my respondents say and do. Psychoanalysis has equipped me to better deal with the contradictions and inconsistencies of my interviews, by helping me to recognize that people do not always say what they mean, and are influenced by the feelings aroused in them by the person they are speaking to. Contemporary anthropology reminds us that culture and the people who create and are created by culture are constantly changing, and being personally and collectively experienced and reproduced in multiple, and sometimes competing, "messy" ways. This has allowed me to better consider multiple explanations for how my respondents see the world, and how the world sees them, by helping me overcome my urgency to make my findings as "neat" as possible.

All these things have helped me yield a crop of provocative, and sometimes surprising, stories from my subjects. What follows is my attempt to accurately and sensitively represent these experiences. I try to relate them to my questions regarding how mothers of American Filipino-White families think about and practice culture, and the real and possible consequences of this work for mestizo family members, our general understandings of race, ethnicity, culture, multiraciality, and the ways these concepts organize our lives and American society.

## FINDINGS

Since mothering is care, that is, work committed to the growth, preservation, nurturance, and maintenance of life, I utilize Joan C. Tronto and Berneice Fisher's "phases of caring" as a framework to organize my discussion and analysis of mothering in Filipino-White families. Tronto and Fisher (1995,142) conceive of care as "a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our 'world' so that we can live in it as well as possible." They make this meaning more substantive by identifying and delineating four "phases of caring": (1) caring about, (2) taking care of, (3) care-giving, and (4) care-receiving. "Caring about" involves "noting the existence of a need and making an assessment that this need should be

met" (ibid.,106). "Taking care of" entails "assuming some responsibility for the identified need," and recognizing "that one can act to address these unmet needs" (ibid.). "Care-giving" consists of meeting needs for care, either directly through physical work and contact with the objects of care, or indirectly, through the provision of resources that will enable someone else to satisfy identified needs (ibid.,107). Finally, "care-receiving" signifies whether and how caring work is received and responded to by the recipients of care (ibid.,108).

Tronto and Fisher give the amorphous concept of care more definition, and this lends me a way to look at and describe how mothering in the families I interviewed is conceived, practiced, and received. Accordingly, discussion of my findings is arranged into sections. The first section describes how the mothers I interviewed care about and take care of (I combine the first two phases of caring because, as mothers, all of the women I interviewed automatically "take care of," or assume responsibility for identifying and addressing their children's needs).<sup>5</sup> Here, I look at if, why, and how my subjects consciously recognize their children as needing culture, and I argue that a mother's cultural biography conditions her to view culture and her children's need for culture in different ways. It is important to note here that all of the women who spoke to me most often use the term culture to designate "Filipino

culture" and/or "minority culture." They imagine culture as Filipino traditions, history, beliefs, and practices, which they perceived to be shared with other Filipinos. The second section of my findings looks at how the mothers I interviewed give care. Here, I describe the strategies they use, if any, to produce and rework culture for their multiracial children. The third section examines how this carework is received and assessed by both the mothers and their children. I find that, ostensibly, a mother's care-work appears less important than other factors in shaping her children's "cultural identities." Finally, I speculate on the consequences the cultural care-work in the families I studied can have for how culture, race, and ethnicity are generally imagined.

#### CARING ABOUT AND TAKING CARE OF: IDENTIFYING A NEED FOR CULTURE

Early and ongoing experiences with race and racism shape if and how the mothers I interviewed consciously identify their children as having a need for culture, by which they mean Filipino culture. I theorize that this is because each woman's race and cultural biography conditions how she perceives the world, and how she anticipates it will receive her children. This corroborates literature on mothering in monoracial families where both parents are from the same marked ethnicity, which claims that mothers

culturally care for their children to prepare them for what they might have to deal with away from home. For example, in *Inuit Morality Play* (1998), Jean Briggs writes that one of the primary goals of socialization in the indigenous family she observed was preparation for the dangers and relationships children would most likely encounter outside of home.

#### Mothers who Identify a Strong Need for Culture

Five of the mothers I interviewed strongly feel that their children need, as one mother put it, "cultural sensibility," or knowledge about and/or a sense of connection to Filipino ways of acting and knowing. Therefore, these women all feel that one of their motherly responsibilities is to provide culture for their mestizo families. Of these five women, four are Filipina and one is White. Two of the Filipina mothers in this group are the most recent immigrants I interviewed.

Helen Lehmkuhler, 54, did not immigrate to the United States until after 1965, and her story illuminates how a mother's cultural biography is central to her sense of her children's need for culture. Helen grew up in the Philippines where she says, "Race was not anything because we [Filipinos] were in the majority. We took it for granted." Race only became a salient part of Helen's identity after she married Rob. Helen told me that when she and Rob came to the United States in 1969, "I don't think we

experienced, as a couple, any racism. [But] I experienced, as a person, prejudice in the United States." For example, she shared that,

There's some subtle things that [her mother-in-law] does—you know, two or three things that (pause) I don't like (long pause). Like not introducing me. Once or twice, when there were people around, she just failed to introduce me. You just notice that. I mean this is a racist culture.

So, while Helen's Filipino-ness was "taken for granted" while she was growing up in the Philippines, it is now something that she is acutely aware of in the United States.

Heidi Wertmueller, 46, a Filipina San Diego school administrator, articulated her race consciousness when she told me, "I know that I am Filipino and I am female everyday. I am conscious of that as I am walking down the street, going into an affair, and speaking in public.... Everything that I am is Filipino."

Experiences as members of the racial majority in the Philippines and of a racial minority in the United States make it very clear to the Filipinas I interviewed that one's race is pivotal in determining one's everyday treatment in American society. For four of them, this has given rise to a sense of responsibility for providing their children with culture. I theorize that this is because the experiences of these four mothers has conditioned them to believe that race will probably

be a key issue in their multiracial children's worlds, and that knowledge of their marked culture is a "tool" their children will need to relate to America's racist culture successfully.

A mother does not have to be part of a recognized racial minority to feel a strong need for her children to know culture though.<sup>6</sup> Sierra Jacinto, 37, is a White homemaker raising her four children in a working class community in Southeast San Diego, who feels strongly about her children needing to know their marked culture, and having "some sense of roots."

I think that this is partly because, like the four Filipina mothers I discussed earlier, Sierra's keen identification with minorities has made her very sensitive to how race can organize one's daily life. Sierra grew up very aware of race and racism in American society, in large part because she grew up in the Midwest, where she met and identified more with poor people of color than with other Whites, since her family "didn't have enough money to be in the kinds of neighborhoods that White people lived in." She remembers feeling discriminated against because she was female, poor, and part Cherokee; and seeing neighbors and friends be mistreated because they were not White.

For Sierra, giving her children a "sense of roots" equips them for the challenges she anticipates they can expect as people of color. She tells me that before she was a mother, she thought about how it might be to



raise multiracial children. She says, "I thought about it. I thought about what or how people are going to be treating them and things like that."

Sierra's story shows how it is cognizance of race and racism's consequences, and not race itself, that really shapes and influences how the mothers I interviewed identify their children as having a need for culture. The following discussion of White and Filipina mothers who feel that culture, meaning, again, Filipino culture, is important, although not absolutely necessary, for their children; and of White and Filipina mothers who feel their multiracial children need to be protected from cultural difference will help underscore this point.

#### **Mothers who Identify a Valuable, but Not Essential, Need for "Culture"**

Two of the White mothers, Cathy Masakayan and Diane Bayani, I interviewed feel that culture is something valuable, but not essential, for their multiracial children to have. Like the women I have already discussed, these mothers derive their care-philosophies from their individual cultural biographies. More specifically, both women's experiences have taught them that cultural difference (for instance, having a non-White spouse, or being of non-White ancestry) is more interesting and exciting than it is constraining. Therefore, they feel that teaching their children culture can have benefits, but is not absolutely necessary.

Cathy, 43, lives in a quiet, mostly White and upper-middle class, Northeast San Diego neighborhood. She told me that although she was aware of race prejudice growing up, the most important thing she took away from her experiences with Asians and Latinos in her childhood California farming community was that differences derived from "race" are things to "appreciate," "enjoy," and "learn from."

Diane Bayani is 53, and teaches a bilingual Spanish-English class near the racially diverse, working-class community she lives in, in Northern California. Diane grew up in a culturally homogeneous, "White society," which sheltered her from feeling the effects of race until her marriage to her husband, Rick. Ruth Frankenberg (1993, 112) labels this experience as feeling the "rebound effect" of racism. She writes that White women often discover that they share or empathize with the pain of racism directed at their non-White partner or their partner's racial group, and that this racism can also have an emotional and material impact on their lives.

Diane told me,

Rick didn't get the first home or apartment that he'd asked for—probably because he was Filipino.... [The realtors] said it wasn't available. And then Rick had somebody go back and check it out, and it was available.

This incident of "rebound racism" was one of the first to show Diane how powerfully race can organize one's everyday life.

Still, it is clear from the rest of Diane's interview that she feels that her children's mixed race is more of a benefit than a need for concern. She told me that in her household, "Race is not anything big; it's not anything negative." When I ask her to describe her experience in a multiracial family, she tells me,

You're open; you're just more open. I'm more open to everybody. I have more possibilities for meeting other people, because my kids bring home other people. There's more ethnic groups coming that I meet, too.... I think being in a multiracial family has advantages—just more experiences with more people.

This view, that the pleasures of associating oneself with "culture" far outweigh the disadvantages, has led Diane and Cathy to feel that "culture" is not crucial to their children's survival, but can be enriching and enjoyable. Culture here is again associated with marked ethnicities.

I hypothesize that Cathy and Diane feel less strongly about their children needing "culture" because they feel less anxious about their children being perceived as people of color, and about the consequences this perception could have. One reason for this might be that they believe their

children can easily "pass" as mono-racial Whites. In fact, Cathy's children are very light-skinned, and Diane says that, her oldest son "doesn't look very Filipino." Contrast this with Helen's observation that her son Chris has probably had more "negative experiences," because of his "being darker."

They could also be less concerned about their children being identified as people of color, because unlike the first group of mothers, they have not consciously experienced any direct racism. Frankenberg (1993, 113) writes that White women's "departures from their own racial positions and identities" are usually "symbolic or temporary." In other words, the (rebound) racism White women in close relationships with non-Whites feel does not often have serious, long-term consequences.<sup>7</sup> This raises the possibility that Cathy and Diane feel it is not necessary for them to "culturally equip" their children, because they do not imagine that their children will face considerable or overwhelming challenges because of their race in the future.

Unlike the mothers who believe that their multiracial children absolutely need culture, Cathy and Diane's cultural biographies have not conditioned them to believe that the possibility of their children being perceived as people of color presents a considerable impediment to their children's happiness and success. They do not feel strongly that culture is a tool their children need, and that they must

provide. Cathy and Diane hold that culture is nice, but not essential, for their children.

### **Mothers who Identify a Need for Protection from Racial Difference**

Unlike either of the two groups of women I have already discussed, the last three mothers I talk about neither identify their children as strongly needing, or likely to benefit from familiarity with culture, by which they mean Filipino culture. Again, I believe that this care philosophy is something that these mothers inherited from their own personal encounters with race and difference growing up. Each of these three women has a distinct cultural biography—Patricia (Tricia) Santos identifies as “Caucasian,” Eleanor Agbayani is half Jewish, and Ana Brinker is of Filipino descent—but all three of them relate painful experiences with difference as children. I believe that this has compelled them to identify their children as having a need to be protected from cultural difference.

Eleanor Agbayani, 53, is a high school counselor in San Diego, and identifies herself as a non-practicing Jew. Although she told me that she grew up in an all-White, upper middle-class neighborhood, and that cultural difference was something she “hadn’t dealt with growing up,” it became clear over the course of our interview that Eleanor’s “Jewishness” has probably always powerfully shaped

her attitudes and ideas, although this is something she does not (and probably cannot) explicitly articulate.

In the middle of our interview, Eleanor revealed to me how her Jewish mother and Catholic Italian father crossed traditional ethnic and religious boundaries to be married in 1935, “something that was considered very rebellious back then.” She explained that her father’s subsequent conversion to Judaism estranged him from his family, and was something that “we weren’t supposed to tell people.” She said, “I think part of the reason... is that people—and this may really sound strange to you—but there’s people that, you know, are prejudiced against Jews.”

I think that Eleanor’s upbringing in her culturally homogeneous, WASP community; her confrontations with discrimination as a Jew, and her parents’ “secret” interethnic marriage may have taught her that difference is something that should be downplayed. Thus, Eleanor does not think it is necessary, and does not go out of her way, to place an emphasis on culture for her multiracial children at home.

I was surprised to discover that one Filipina mother, Ana Brinker, 48, does not identify her children as having a strong need for culture. At first, I thought this was because Ana might somehow perceive race and culture as insignificant; but now I believe that Ana has a desire to shield her children from the negative effects

of cultural difference she has experienced, as a person of color.

Ana was born in the Philippines, and immigrated to San Francisco as a young child, with her parents, nine brothers, and two sisters. Although Ana tried to make it sound as if her adaptation to American culture after immigration was not too painful by saying "it didn't take long," and that it required her "adjusting" to "just the little things," I think it was actually a very salient experience for her. At one point in our interview she remarked, "It was traumatic coming over here," betraying how significant her move from the Philippines must have been. Ana's move required her to learn a new language, become accustomed to not being around other Filipinos, adjust to a whole set of values she was unfamiliar with, and probably face a fair amount of prejudice and/or racism. I hypothesize that she has unconsciously chosen not to teach her children about Filipino culture, because she relates some of the "trauma" she had adapting to American institutions to her being "too Filipino." This is interesting because it shows how, like the other Filipina mothers, Ana is aware, from experience, of how powerfully race can organize one's experiences, but chooses not to accentuate it within her family. It may be that, for Ana, emphasizing Filipino culture does not prepare you to deal with society; it hinders you from being able to meet your full potential in your interactions with other Americans.

The difficult experiences Ana, Tricia, and Eleanor had with difference growing up, have conditioned them to believe that drawing attention to difference makes one vulnerable to discrimination in society. Therefore, in contrast to the other mothers who view their children as needing "culture" to "survive" as people of color, or as something that makes them more "interesting," Ana, Tricia, and Eleanor may feel that their multiracial children need to be protected from the dangers of being perceived as culturally and/or racially distinct. While mothers who feel that their children have a strong need for culture believe this because they anticipate their children will be identified as racial minorities, Ana, Tricia, and Eleanor's philosophy of care seems to rest on the hope that their children being "mixed" will allow them to be treated as typical, White, "American kids."

### **Caring about and Taking Care of Multiracial Children's Need for Culture**

The ten mothers I spoke to do not feel uniformly about culture, or their multiracial children's need for it. Five mothers identify their children as having a strong need for culture; two mothers feel that culture is beneficial, but unnecessary; and the remaining three mothers believe their multiracial children need to be protected from feelings of cultural difference. These variations occur because each

woman's unique cultural biography conditions her to understand the salience of being Filipino (that is, of a marked race and/or culture in the United States) and how this might play out in their Filipino-White offspring's lives differently. Those mothers who have experienced race only "temporarily and symbolically" are inclined to think that culture is something that can enrich their children's lives, although it is not essential. Those mothers who are more racially cognizant because of first-hand experiences with race discrimination either feel that their children must have knowledge of their marked culture so that they can confront the challenge of being treated as minorities, or they feel that cultural difference should be downplayed, in order to protect their children from the threat of pain and alienation they feel this poses.

Although the mothers I interviewed do not feel the same about their children's need for culture, as mothers of multiracial children, they face a common challenge in assessing whether their children have this need. Unlike their own mothers, or mothers of monoracial children, the ten mothers I interviewed know that they can never completely rely on their cultural biographies to accurately predict what their children might encounter in society because, aside from being raised in a different time period, multiracial children will not always identify or be identified as the same race or culture as their mothers. So, in assess-

ing their children's need for culture, the mothers I interviewed have no real reference for imagining how their children will view and be received by others because of their "mixed race," and can only "guess at" what tools their children will need to be successful in this world.

#### CARE GIVING: ADDRESSING A NEED FOR CULTURE

The approaches mothers of multiracial children take for addressing their children's perceived needs for culture depends on if and how strongly they identify the need, and how capable, or "culturally competent," they feel to deal with it.

For the most part, the ten women I interviewed agree that if and when culture is learned at home, it is taught simply by the way their family lives their lives. Flora Gonzalez, a 50-year-old Filipina mother, reflected that with culture, "You sort of live it; you can't just tell your kid. You sort of have to live that life." Our interview took place in Flora's home, a cozy building nestled on an old street in the Bay Area college community she has been a part of for over thirty years. Her living room bookshelves overflow with Filipino and Filipino American novels, history books, and art books. Furniture, paintings, and curios that are distinctly Filipino tastefully decorate her living room, and adorn its walls, cabinets, and shelves. Remarking on the décor, Flora told me,

We [her husband and she] like to collect objects because of their cultural and historical meaning for us, and the spiritual meaning for us. And I think that's something that [her son, Tom] has, hopefully, taken by osmosis.

Despite the fact that culture is *most often produced and reproduced in unconscious and unextraordinary ways*, the mothers I interviewed also have various strategies for trying to consciously attend to what they perceive as their children's need for (Filipino) culture.

### **"Intentional" Mothering**

All four of the Filipina mothers who identify their children as having a strong need for culture make conscious efforts to expose and teach their children Filipino culture. Helen Lehmkuhler told me, "I have really been an intentional parent, picking my own values—you have to do it wisely, because you can't fight the whole [racist] culture."

The mothers who identify their children as having a need for culture have been "intentional" about such things as "role modeling to give the kids firmness as Filipinos," cooking Filipino foods, decorating their homes with Filipino objects, organizing trips to "take the children home [to the Philippines] to be familiar with the food and family celebrations, choosing to live in a neighborhood that allows

their children to be around a diverse peer group, and participating in Filipino organizations and activities to give their children a sense of "being connected" to their culture, meaning Filipino people, worldviews, and practices.

In being "intentional mothers," these women face at least two challenges. First, they feel the responsibility, and sometimes the loneliness, of being the sole person in the nuclear family who can teach their children Filipino culture. Since their White husbands are not, or are not as knowledgeable of Filipino "culture" as they, and since men are not typically expected to be "keepers of culture," these women rarely can rely on them to help provide their children with "cultural lessons," even if they are supportive. As Helen states, "I've contributed to the development of my kids' Filipino sensibility alone." Second, a child's mixed race heritage and ambiguous phenotype can make the task of teaching culture more difficult for any monoracial mother. Sierra Jacinto, a White mother, shared with me,

Sometimes it hurts my feelings that [her multiracial children] don't like White things, you know. It hurts my feelings to know that most of their friends are Filipino, and then they don't have White friends like that. Sometimes that hurts me. It's like, 'Never mind that your mom is White.'

Non-Black multiracial children's racial ambiguity gives them the option of rejecting their parents' "cultural lessons." Children with biological parents who identify or are identified as sharing the same "race" or ethnic background usually identify and/or are identified with their parents' "race," so it is much more difficult for them to choose not to identify with their mothers' "culture."

### Teaching "Ethnic Options"

While the four "intentional" Filipina mothers' central concern in culturally caring for their children is to transmit Filipino "culture," Sierra Jacinto, the White mother who believes her children have a strong need for "culture," and Cathy Masakayan and Diane Bayani, the two White mothers who feel that "culture" is beneficial, but unnecessary, for their children, are more concerned with teaching their children to utilize "ethnic options." Sierra, who makes a conscious effort to equally expose her children to interesting things about the "Cherokee" and "Filipino" "cultures," has an attitude that is characteristic of these White mothers.

You pick and choose parts of your own culture. Things you want to keep. Things you don't believe in. Every-body does. Being mixed doesn't change you. There's just more to choose from.

Sierra's attitude is that "culture" is something one can "choose." In

*Ethnic Options*, Mary C. Waters (1990:157) writes that most later-generation European Americans can, in fact, choose whether or not to recognize their ethnicities, and do so at no social cost. Apparently Sierra, Cathy, and Diane believe that their children can enjoy the same "ethnic options" as they do (despite the fact that they have one parent of color), so their "cultural lessons" have been geared to show their children that identifying with a particular ethnicity can be voluntary, and can be advantageous or disadvantageous, depending on the situation. In contrast, the Filipina mothers I interviewed have been socialized with an understanding that ethnicity is not something voluntary, but simply something you are. Their divergent experiences and philosophies concerning ethnicity help explain why the Filipina and White mothers who spoke to me have such distinct approaches to their children's cultural care.

I theorize that another reason the White mothers I interviewed feel less pressure to keep culture than their Filipina counterparts is because their own mothers and communities did not raise them to consider this a critical maternal obligation. White culture is accessible to children and institutionalized in the media, popular culture, and at school.<sup>8</sup> Also, the societal goal of assimilation of White ethnic groups into mainstream American society has made White ethnic identities less and less important to "keep" over the generations (Waters 1990). There-

fore, it is highly probable that Sierra, Cathy, and Diane's mothers did not model keeping culture for them; and this why they do not feel it is something they must do for their children now. In contrast, I believe that the Filipina mothers I interviewed feel much pressure from Filipino family and communities to keep culture, because they recognize that if they do not keep culture, no one will.

I think that the perception of themselves as incapable of teaching Filipino culture is a final possible reason the White mothers I interviewed are not as determined to teach "culture" to their children. For instance, Diane expresses a wish to have been able to provide her children with more of a "Filipino background," but says that her limited knowledge of Filipino language made it difficult.

I wish that the kids had had a chance to learn Tagalog. And I wish I had. If they had, maybe they could have, and I would like to know Tagalog.... Having the kids learn some Tagalog, I think, would have been better.

I also think that the three White mothers probably feel less capable of teaching their children about Filipino culture because they feel that their "Whiteness" makes them less credible as "cultural teachers" to children. Because they view themselves as less competent at teaching culture than Filipinos, Sierra, Cathy, and Diane have all tried to rely on their husbands

and Filipino extended family to help them take care of "the cultural thing."<sup>9</sup> But since exposure to extended family is not constant, and since fathers do not typically "keep culture" in the families, the assistance these mothers receive only comes sporadically, in the form of occasional stories about the Philippines, or the preparation of Filipino meals.<sup>10</sup>

### Downplaying Culture

Tricia Santos, Eleanor Agbayani, and Ana Brinker are the three mothers who feel that their children need to be protected from feelings of difference. Not surprisingly, these women did not talk much about consciously trying to teach their children culture, or even "ethnic options." If anything, they actually seem to downplay culture at home.

Eleanor related to me a story that reveals how she downplays culture. Eleanor had her two daughters and son baptized to appease her Catholic mother-in-law, but tried to ensure that her children would not see the event as "culturally" significant.

I got Brian's [her husband's] cousin, Ev, and his—Ev's—wife, Winona, and I said, 'You know we've got to baptize the children. We don't want anyone to know. We don't want any gifts. We want nothing to commemorate this. We just want you to be there, because we need, you know, witnesses, or whatever.'



And so we went and took all three children, and I purposely made it so they wouldn't remember the day. I didn't take them out for ice cream or anything afterwards, you know. It was just very mellow, very casual. We took them in—we had our appointment, and we went in there, and they did the stuff and everything, and then... a few weeks later the real papers were mailed.... Kind of like getting papers on your dog or something....

(Laughs) What I thought was really funny is my kids, who had forgotten the ride on the elephant and some other things that we tried to make a big deal out of, said, years later, "Remember that time when we went in that room, and there was all those candles?"

Eleanor's story is humorous and ironic; but it demonstrates some of the lengths these mothers have gone to subdue any sense of cultural distinction in their multiracial children. They are supportive of their children's choices to celebrate different parts of their cultural identities; however, I think that they consciously and/or unconsciously have tried to downplay difference at home so that their children will be sheltered from the

conflict and feelings of alienation they feel a sense of difference can bring.

### Giving Cultural Care

Taken together, my interviews challenge the idea that cultural care via mothers happens uniformly across Filipino-White families, or that this process is solely determined by a mother's race. It does appear as if my Filipina subjects are more inclined to sense a need for, and to attempt to invent and reinvent, culture at home. My findings, however, demonstrate that a woman's *cultural biography*—and her subsequent *racial cognizance*, not her race—are actually the most significant factors that influence if and how a mother keeps culture in her family. More specifically, a mother's cultural biography helps her assess how her children might be racially viewed by others, what "tools" her children will need to deal with how the world receives them, how capable she is of providing her children with "cultural lessons," what resources she can pool to help her "culturally care" for her children, and how urgently she feels the need to do so.

In my next section, I finally introduce these mothers' children, so that we can see how this care giving is received.

## CARE RECEIVING I: FILIPINO-WHITE CHILDREN'S CULTURAL SELF-IDENTIFICATIONS

In order to get a more accurate and complete portrait of how culture is taught and imagined in the families of the mothers I interviewed, I spoke to ten Filipino-White young adults—eight of whom are offspring of women in my study. I felt that their cultural self-identifications would be a good indicator of how their mothers' culture care has been received. Considering the differences between their mothers' approaches to caring for, taking care of, and giving care for their cultural needs, I expected to find a mother-related pattern in how these children culturally identify. Surprisingly, *my Filipino-White respondents identify in ways that seem little related to their mother's philosophy or strategy of care*. For example, one would predict that the children of the four Filipina women who strongly stress Filipino culture at home would be inclined to identify as Filipino. However, only one of these mothers' children self-identifies as Filipino; the other three do not identify more strongly with Filipino or White culture.

I organize the following discussion of my Filipino-White subjects around three loose categories that their cultural identities appear to fall under, in order to help us begin to think about what and who shapes their cultural self-identities. In short, I will be looking at the children's cultural biographies.

### "More Filipino"

Rodolfo (Rudy) Jacinto, Sierra's 18 year-old son; Gabriel (Gabe) Santos, Tricia's 18 year-old son; Christopher (Chris) Lehmkuhler, Helen's 20 year-old son; and Raul Bayani, Diane's 27 year-old son, all identify as "more Filipino."

This year, Rudy Jacinto is graduating from a high school with the largest Filipino population in San Diego. He is a varsity football player, an ROTC leader, and has been dating a Filipina girl from another high school for about one year. Like his mother, Sierra, he is frank and talkative. He told me,

I tend to identify more with the Filipino side... because that's how I grew up, you know, basically I've known my dad's side of the family. I've grown up with them... their traditions, their lifestyles, you know, the way they live. So, I know the traditions and stuff.

Like Rudy, Gabriel Santos is graduating from high school this year. His school has a diverse student population, but he told me, "Most of my friends are Filipinos." Among his closest friends are some young male Filipino martial arts classmates, and his girlfriend, who is also "mixed"—"half Thai and half White."

Before moving to the planned community where his family lives now, Gabe lived with his father's family.

I remember my grandma on my dad's side, when I was little, she used to take care of us [he and his brothers], and they raised us like we were Filipino. So I've always known this [Filipino] side; but I don't know a lot of... my mom's [White] side.

When I asked Gabe what it means to him to "be Filipino," he said,

Pretty much—you just share certain things [like] taking off your shoes[when you enter a house], eating rice with every meal. My [Filipino] friends' relatives pretty much act the same, strict parents—it's pretty much the customs, the culture.

Gabe and Rudy's stories suggest the significance of exposure to extended family in shaping one's cultural identities. We can posit that this is because close relationships with Filipino relatives make one comfortable with aspects of being Filipino, like "taking off your shoes," "eating rice," and having "strict parents." Familiarity with the mundane characteristics of being Filipino, coupled with the fact that neither of them really knows their White extended family, probably makes it easier for Gabe and Rudy to "identify with" Filipino peers. This is probably also important to them because Whites at their high schools actually have a lower social position than Filipinos. For instance, Gabe said that the Filipino boys at his high school

are seen as "smart," while the stereotype of White boys is that they are "stuck-up."

Christopher speaks Spanish and was raised in Latin America for the first part of his life. Thus, when asked to culturally identify her children, his mother, Helen, says they are "Filipino, Anglo, and Latino." When Chris first moved to San Diego in sixth grade, he tried to become friends with Mexicans, because all his friends in Mexico had been Mexican. But he was "outcast by the Mexicans," and "did not fit in" until "some Pinoy [Filipino American] dudes took me in." Soon after, Chris said he "chose to be Filipino, and shunned the White part," because he "wanted to fit in, to be liked." He recalled perceiving that "Filipino culture" had "more flavor," and was not as "dorky" as White culture. Now, he says, he definitely identifies with his "Filipino side" more, and explains, "I'm attracted to Filipino girls; Filipinos are my best friends.... I'm not White because I don't really like White stuff." Although Chris made it clear that he identifies as "more Filipino," at the end of our interview he shared that, since he graduated from high school, race has become less important to him, and that, recently, he has been trying to consider who he would be if there was a "lack of social pressure," and if he could "create a self from nothing." Chris's experience lends support to the idea that local perceptions of the social positioning of Whites and

Filipinos strongly influence how multi-racial Filipino-White people culturally identify. I think it also helps us to see that cultural identities are not set in stone once they are "chosen," and that they are susceptible to change.

Raul Bayani's story underscores the notion that multicultural people's identities are in flux, and can change. During high school, Raul's "mixed" ancestry was never an issue for him; but when Raul entered college he was forced to go through a "painful process" of "re-inventing" himself. As a freshman, he noticed "racial lines being drawn," and tried to fit in with the "White community," but found that he "didn't fit in that well." He recalled,

These bad things started happening to me, as a freshman, which I couldn't understand. Like, "Why were these people being so mean? (Laughing) Why were White people being so (pause) rotten to me?"

Raul became friends with more Black and Latino students; then in his second year of college, he registered for sociology and ethnic studies classes, because he wanted to "figure out what was going on." He said these finally gave him the language and concepts he needed to understand, "I was 'them'... a person of color."

During his second year of college, Raul visited the Philippines. He said,

Going to the Philippines was amazing—just all of these Filipinos.

(Pause) And I started realizing that those people were me also. I had something in common with these people. And this is my history,... And that's when I began having a consciousness of being Filipino.

Since then, Raul has become a very committed political participant and activist in the Bay Area Filipino community. He told me that his Filipino identity is especially salient for him, because people "will never see me as just White."

Raul's story shows that social environment and familiarity with Filipino culture deeply influence how Filipino-White individuals culturally identify. It also shows that this cultural identity is not fixed over a lifetime, and that it is something that they feel must be learned. This is consistent with the other boys' observations that Filipino culture is something that is "natural" and "just there" for their monoracial Filipino friends, but which they, as multiracials, have to actively seek knowledge about.

Here we see how members of non-Black multiracial families simultaneously challenge and uphold the idea that culture is absolutely tied to biology and race. If the assumption that "race causes culture" (Davis 1991, 24) were true, then the multi-racial children I spoke to would identify uniformly. Rudy, Gabe, Chris, and Raul could not say that they "identify as Filipino," or have cultural identities that are evolving, while other

people with one Filipino parent and one White parent claim different cultural identities. Furthermore their Filipino and White heritages would have accorded them "cultural competence in not just one culture (read race) but two cultures (read two races)" (Ropp 3). They would not have to learn how to "be Filipino;" and Helen could not imagine that her children, of Filipino and White ancestry, could be "Latino."

But while my subjects undermine the notion that there is a biological nexus between race and culture, they fortify it. Recall how Rudy, Gabe, Chris, and Raul still argue that their monoracial Filipino friends naturally have culture. And recall how all the mothers I interviewed still think about and use culture only to describe Filipino, Jewish, and/ or other non-European ways of thinking and acting. For instance, none of the mothers who spoke to me articulated how they invent and reinvent White culture for their families. All these women have celebrated Thanksgiving; however no one mentioned it as a way they provide cultural care. These ways of thinking and talking about culture perpetuates its racialization. They continue to conflate race and culture, and to uphold the idea that they are biologically inherited. This allows whiteness in our society to stay unspecified and privileged as normal. Ruth Frankenberg writes, "Whiteness [has an] unmarked, unnamed status that is itself an effect of its dominance"<sup>6</sup>

### "More White"

In contrast to Raul, Chris, Gabe, and Rudy, three of my multiracial subjects told me they identify as "more White."

Christina Alvarez, 19, is unrelated to anyone I interviewed. We talked at her home in a northeast suburb of mostly middle class Whites in San Diego, where she told me, "I live more of a White life than I do a Filipino life.... I act more White than I do Filipino." In high school, she was an athlete, and although her friendship circles were diverse, "all of" her teammates were White. She described her alma mater as having been "40 percent Asian and 40 percent White, [with] like very low percentages of all the other ones." She observed that, "A lot of people hated Filipinos at school. It was like, they're the rich ones, who are all into trends, and have the really nice cars." When I inquired about the attitude towards White people at her school, she said Whites "seemed more outgoing because they seemed like they were accepted." Christina's experience imply, once again, at the possible significance of peer groups and cultural stereotypes in the formation of Filipino-White cultural identities.

Devin, Eleanor Agbayani's 19 year-old daughter, is attending her first year of college away from home. She also identifies as "more White." With some amusement, Devin told me, "People who are not Filipino always try to guess what I am." She reflected

that, "I don't identify with [Filipino] traditions very well. My experience with White [culture] is more plentiful. It's pretty much a no-brainer." She elaborated,

I really don't know how I'm Filipino.... I don't speak Tagalog. I just don't feel Filipino among [Filipino] extended family.... [But] I feel completely at ease when with our extended family on this [Jewish] side. I guess because this ethnicity doesn't entail languages I can't speak, or certain traditions, rites of passage that are still being practiced by close relatives.

Devin's experience lends support to the argument that exposure to extended family, and subsequent familiarity with Filipino "traditions," help Filipino-White individuals form their cultural self-identities. Her story also suggests that phenotype is a significant factor. While Raul identifies as Filipino because he knows that people "will always see" him as a person of color Devin's lighter skin color allows her to exercise her option of "being White." Finally, Devin's experiences show how a subject's perception of White and Filipinos' social positioning is influential. Devin told me,

There seems to be nothing to associate [Filipinos] with—academically, socially, athletically.... Filipinos do not appear to be one the high scale

in society. [But] Whites, as you know, are different.

Devin's identification as "more White" could partly stem from her observations that Whites are socially positioned higher than Filipinos.

Thus, we have identified exposure to extended family, environment, phenotype, and perceptions of the social position of different races as possible factors in shaping the cultural self-identities of the "mixed" children I interviewed. We will see if this holds true for all my subjects after we discuss my last group of respondents.

### "Floating"

The last three multiracial subjects I interviewed said that they do not identify more or less with Filipino or White "culture."<sup>11</sup>

Tom, Flora Gonzalez's 21 year-old son, is light-skinned, has Flora's dark eyes, and, what he calls, his "father's Jewish nose." During our interview, he called himself a "hybrid of my parents," and said he has both "a Filipino side and an American side."

Barbara, 20, is Ofelia Stevens oldest child. She has creamy white skin, a sweet personality, and is in her first year of college at a racially diverse, local four-year university. Last year, this winning combination won her the crown in a pageant sponsored by one of the Filipino associations Fey is a part of. Because she seems so involved in her mother's "Filipino" activi-

ties (as a pageant queen, she has had to emcee and host countless local Filipino events in the last few months), I am surprised that Barbara does not say she feels "more Filipino." Barbara shared, "My mom is always pushing Filipino culture"—so much so that her father is now "a converted Filipino"—but that she sees herself as "floating" over cultures. When she was younger, Barbara says that she was "constantly trying to find a place to fit in," and was "bothered" that she "didn't know who to identify with." Now, she says, "I can't be one [culture]; I have to be both."

Finally, Rachel Poblador is a small woman, who says that she has been mistaken for everything from Latin to Russian. I interviewed her one night in the San Francisco flat she shares with her "half Peruvian-Chinese, half Norwegian-German" boyfriend. Rachel says she has been raised more by a "community of dancers" than her parents, because she dropped out of school and moved out of her parents' home at 16 to pursue her career with a ballet company in San Francisco. This may be why Rachel says she identifies "with issues," rather than particular "groups of people." Rachel claims she is "just an individual," and that her identity is "totally fluid." She passionately asserted,

I hate [race] categories; they piss me off. People shouldn't have to identify one way or the other. Like with Tiger Woods—it's not fair that people try to force him to identify with one parent.

Rachel Poblador's extreme case shows, once again, that social environment—she says, "Ballet shaped who I am as a person"—strongly affects how multiracial Filipino-Whites formulate their cultural self-identities. All three subjects who refuse to identify as more Filipino or White also help substantiate my argument that phenotypic ambiguity enables the multiracial people I interviewed to identify in various ways. The fact that neither Barbara, Tom, or Rachel mention having had much contact with Filipino extended family, or stereotypes that socially position Filipinos or Whites over each other, also indirectly lends credence to my hypothesis that exposure to both may incline Filipino-White people to identify more one way than the other.

### **What Factors Shape how "Cultural Care" is Received**

Taken together, my interviews with multiracial Filipino-White individuals suggest that several major factors contribute to the formation of Filipino-White cultural self-identities. The first factor is consistent and frequent exposure to extended family. The second factor is phenotype. Geographical location is another factor. This establishes the demographics of the neighborhood and schools my subjects live in, and helps determine the racial makeup of their peer groups, as well as their local perceptions of Filipino and Whites.

I believe that my data suggest that two other factors might contribute to

my multiracial subjects' choice of cultural self-identities. One is situation. Recall how Raul's race consciousness evolved when his social situation changed. Also, consider that, although my respondents generally fall into one of three clusters ("More Filipino," "More White," or "Floating") they all say that, under certain conditions, their cultural self-identities can change, especially if they anticipate that doing so will carry certain benefits and advantages.

Christina, who identifies as more White, says that she marks the "Filipino box" when asked to "check off" her ethnicity or race on documents. She explained,

I just feel like if I pick one it would benefit me more than the other. It's not so much that I feel torn apart.... It just seems that they have more sympathy if you're one or the other, and it would benefit you more.

Here, an important distinction must be made between the types of ethnic options available to multiracials and those enjoyed by White ethnics. Since the physical appearances of multiracials can and do affect the identities imposed on them by outsiders, unlike their monoracial White counterparts, they are not always able to "choose" how and when to identify with their ethnicities. Consider Christina's story of how an outsider tried to racially define her.

I had a teacher—for the entire year he talked to me in Spanish. And I talked to him in Spanish and everything else, and I mean he never—and then, one day, he goes, 'Did you hear about those Mexican dancers down in Mexico City?' And I'm all, 'No, I didn't.' You know, and then he'd go, 'Then why don't you ask your mom and dad about it and find out if blah, blah, blah happened,' or whatever. And I'm like, 'I don't think they'd know about it.' He goes, 'Well, why?' And I'm like, 'Cause I'm not Mexican.' And he just felt dumb.

The imposition of racial definitions on multiracial individuals restricts their ethnic options, and weakens their ability to challenge the racial hierarchy because it limits their ability to cross "race" boundaries and to highlight their illogic and social construction.

Finally, I think my interviews also imply that gender may be a significant influence on choice of cultural identities for my subjects. I have insufficient data to investigate this, but there does appear to be a strong gender-associated pattern of cultural identification in my study. Three of the four multiracial individuals who identify as "more Filipino" are male, and have Filipino fathers; and the three individuals who identify as "more White" are female and have White mothers. Being that the majority of the



children's primary ethnic identifications correspond with that of their same-sex parent, the ethnic identity of a same-sex parent may provide a possible explanation for the primary ethnic affiliations of their multiracial children. Rudy hinted at this possibility when he said, "I say I'm Asian. I don't know, maybe it has something to do with my dad, because I associate with my dad 'cause I'm a guy." It might also be that the males' gender privilege makes it easier for them to identify as people of color.

In short, my interviews with Filipino-White individuals imply that mothering plays less of a role in shaping cultural self-identification than exposure to extended family, phenotype, geography, relationships outside of the family, popular cultural stereotypes, situation, and possibly, gender. This does not mean that multiracial children do not receive any culture from their mothers. After all, their mothers are probably pivotal in connecting the nuclear family to extended family members and functions, and in deciding where they live and attend school. It may just mean that the children I interviewed do not recognize, and are unable to articulate, how their mothers' care has shaped their cultural sensibilities. If this is the case, it underscores the point that female caring work is often invisible and unacknowledged, even by its recipients.

## CONCLUSION

Studying how mothers culturally care for their children in multiracial families gives us valuable insights into how and why mothers provide "cultural care" for "mixed race" children, into how this care is received, and into how this care might affect larger society. I have shown that the "cultural care" given by mothers is informed by their own experiences with "race" and difference, and is often tacit and unacknowledged. I have shown that multiple factors influence a multiracial person's cultural self-identity—that the children I interviewed "receive care" from the rest of the world, as well as their mothers. I have suggested future directions for work on multiracial families, examining fathers and/or the relationship between gender and cultural identities. Finally, I have shown that, the families I interviewed concurrently accept and defy the assumption that culture is biologically determined by one's race. They underscore the point that culture is fluid by exercising their ethnic options, and by refusing to be categorized. Multiracial families uphold and are limited by current discourse; but their very being begs us to stop taking our social universe for granted, and to begin interrogating the concepts and systems that disguise the hegemonic dominance of Whiteness in the United States.

## NOTES

1. Use of a term like "multiracial" perpetuates the notion that there are real, biologically inherited "race" categories; however, no other language is available for me to describe people who identify/are identified as "being of 'mixed' ancestry." Since I must use this language, here race and culture remind the reader that they are discursive and social constructs.

2. The 2000 Census, the first to allow self-identification with more than one "race," indicates there are now nearly 7 million multiracial Americans (<http://www.nytimes.com/2001/03/13/national/13CENS.html>).

3. Root (1992a, 183) writes that, "Recruiting multiracial samples will almost always yield selective samples," because multiracials are easily absorbed into the rest of the American population, both phenotypically and statistically.

4. Another reason I use race and culture is to remind the reader that the meanings I describe them as having here are those of my respondents' discourse.

5. Ruddick (1989, 17) writes, "To be a mother is to be committed to meeting [children's] demands by works of preservative love, nurturance, and training."

6. For a discussion of White British mothers who feel that their "Black transracial" children have a strong need for "culture," see France Winddance Twine, "Transracial

Mothering and Antiracism: The Case of White Birth Mothers of 'Black' Children in Britain," *Feminist Studies* 25, no. 3 (1999): 729-746.

7. In contrast, Twine (1999) has found that White mothers of "Black" multiracial children in Britain *do* experience "serious, long-term consequences" (i.e., limited residential choices, damaged relationships with White relatives). This suggests that the option the mothers I interviewed do not deliberately perform cultural care may be a privilege available only to mothers of *non-Black* multiracial individuals who are less often subject to rules of hypodescent, and/or of multiracial families within the United States.

8. This highlights, again, the racialization of "culture," by demonstrating the privileging of White culture as unmarked, because of its normalcy and hegemonic dominance.

9. Twine (1999) describes how White British mothers of "Black transracial" children form "caretaking alliances" with other Black women as one way of providing their children "with Black role models and cultural knowledge specific to the African Caribbean community." This work is intended to help these families "cope with racism" and develop a "sense of comfort" in the Black community.

10. I have inadequate data to describe or analyze the fathers' care-work here.

11. I deliberately title this section to highlight how individuals in this cluster express that their "cultural"

identities are something they "do," not simply something they "are."

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