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ACCESS TO CHILD CARE IN NORTH CAROLINA:
THE INTERACTION OF GENDER RELATIONS, CLASS,
AND GOVERNMENT POLICY ACROSS PLACES AND SCALES

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in
The Department of Geography and Anthropology

by
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December 1998

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In loving memory of my mother

Hilda Piper Morris

1929-1980
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION ........................................................................................................ ii

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ...................................................................................... iii

LIST OF TABLES .................................................................................................. viii

LIST OF FIGURES .............................................................................................. ix

ABSTRACT ........................................................................................................... x

CHAPTER

1 INTRODUCTION ......................................................................................... 1
1.1 Introduction ......................................................................................... 1
1.2 Theoretical Background ................................................................... 6
1.3 Approach ............................................................................................. 11
1.4 Organization ....................................................................................... 14

2 HISTORICAL CONTEXT: AN OVERVIEW OF AMERICAN CHILD CARE POLICY .................................................................................. 17
2.1 American Child Care Policy: An Overview .................................. 18
2.2 Recent Developments in Child Care Policy ................................... 24
2.3 Characteristics and Consequences of the Current Child Care System .................................................................................. 26
2.4 Explaining the Relative Lack of Federal Involvement in American Child Care Policy ......................................................... 28
2.5 Conclusions ......................................................................................... 32

3 CASE STUDY: NORTH CAROLINA ...................................................... 35
3.1 Female Labor Force Participation ................................................... 36
3.2 Smart Start ......................................................................................... 39
3.3 Geographical Variation in Employment Opportunities .................. 41
3.3.1 Data Collection ............................................................................ 43
3.3.2 Orange County ............................................................................ 44
3.3.2.1 Child Care Resources and Needs .............................................. 45
3.3.2.2 Smart Start’s Accomplishments ............................................... 49
3.3.3 Burke County ............................................................................... 50
3.3.3.1 Child Care Resources and Needs .............................................. 51
3.3.3.2 Smart Start’s Accomplishments ............................................... 52
3.3.4 Western Consortium ................................................................... 53
3.3.4.1 Child Care Resources and Needs .............................................. 54
3.3.4.2 Smart Start’s Accomplishments ............................................... 55
3.4 Conclusions ......................................................................................... 56
LIST OF TABLES

3.1 Income and education characteristics of selected North Carolina counties................................................................. 46

3.2 Percent of employed persons 16 years and over in Census-defined occupational categories for selected North Carolina counties........................................................................................... 47

4.1 Characteristics of multivariate groups................................................................. 73

4.2 Residences of seven multivariate groups............................................................ 74

4.3 How all respondents found their day care center or home............................... 81

4.4 Use of resource and referral services in finding child care............................... 83

4.5 Use of relatives in finding child care..................................................................... 85

4.6 Use of "other" sources in finding child care......................................................... 88

4.7 Use of employer in finding child care................................................................. 89

4.8 Influence of location factors on child care selection......................................... 91

4.9 Influence of timing factors on child care selection........................................... 92

4.10 Mean commuting times in minutes.................................................................... 96

4.11 Commuting arrangements.................................................................................. 98

4.12 Use of informal child care arrangements.......................................................... 100

4.13 Work-related difficulties with child care arrangements................................... 104

4.14 Financial assistance with child care expenses.................................................. 110

4.15 Employer-provided child care benefits.............................................................. 113

4.16a Awareness of the Smart Start program versus receipt of financial assistance with child care expenses................................................................. 115

4.16b Awareness of the Smart Start program......................................................... 116

4.17 Preference cited for using another type of child care...................................... 119
## LIST OF FIGURES

2.1 Chronology of U.S. governmental involvement in child care policy

3.1 Labor force participation rates of married women with children under age 6, 1960-1990

3.2 Study areas

5.1 Counties chosen for the first round of Smart Start funding
ABSTRACT

Access to child care is becoming an increasingly critical economic and social issue for American families as more and more women work outside the home. In addition to being an important economic and social issue, access to child care is also a significant geographical issue, in two senses. First, place is an important component of child care access; substantial spatial variations exist in child care services in the United States. Secondly, attention to issues of scale is important when examining child care issues since access to child care is shaped by both local and non-local forces.

I use both horizontal and vertical dimensions of inquiry in order to address the central question of this study: how do gender relations, labor market position (occupation and income), family structure (dual-parent versus single-parent), race, and governmental child care policies interact in particular locales to shape parents' access to child care services? I use a comparative framework to examine the child care situations in three areas (Orange County, Burke County, and a consortium of western counties) of North Carolina that differ along social, economic, and geographical lines. I also consider child care access issues at multiple scales: the everyday household experiences of child care access, local contrasts in child care needs and resources, the effects on child care access of a state-led initiative ("Smart Start") to improve child care services, and the broader context of federal legislation regarding child care. I use a triangulated methodological approach, combining both qualitative (e.g. interviewing) and quantitative methods (e.g. survey techniques) to analyze child care access.

Results from my empirical work indicate the following. First, women shoulder the greater responsibility for arranging and managing child care.
Secondly, child care is a crucial link between home and work and often shapes parents' employment possibilities. Thirdly, child care is viewed by many employers as a private issue outside the realm of work. Fourthly, child care arrangement for many families are fragmented, complex, and precarious as a result of having to forge individual solutions with little help from employers or government.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Day care is provided from 8:00-5:00, therefore my work hours are 8:30-4:30.
(Tina, 28, health educator)

In my field of work I have clients that usually walk in about 5 minutes until 5:00 and it is very hard to get "rid" of that client in time to pick my child up by 5:30.
(Anne, 25, office manager)

It is so hard to make sure your child is sufficiently cared for when you have to work.
(Terry, 23, licensed nurse practitioner)

It is difficult to find daycare workers who stay in their positions very long. Low pay and lack of benefits make it almost impossible to find and keep caring, qualified people.
(Sarah, 31, case manager)

[We need] help for those of us who have to work to support a family but who make too much money [to qualify for assistance]. I pay more for child care than I do my house.
(Mary, 27, school psychologist)

I would like to stay home and care for my kids myself but our household needs both incomes.
(Tammy, 23, clerical assistant)

Most companies do not care about their employees who are mothers. They think that your family should be last on your list of priorities, and the company first.
(Kathryn, 33, lending/collection administrator)

We need the government to realize how crucial quality daycare is needed.
(Amy, 28, teacher)

1.1 Introduction

The above comments from parents surveyed for this study reveal at least three key child care issues and problems in contemporary American society. First, the presence of only women's voices is very telling. Although
child care is a familial and social obligation, women are still expected to be the primary caretakers of children. Second, as these women suggest, child care is a clear linkage between home-life and work-life. For example, child care schedules and locations can affect parents' employment hours and options, and the availability and affordability of child care can determine even the possibility of working. Many parents end up settling for child care that is mediocre in quality, in part because widespread low pay and lack of benefits in the child care industry fail to attract and retain enough highly qualified teachers. In addition, child care is a heavy financial burden for many parents. Third, child care is still seen in American society as a "private" responsibility. Most employers do not help their employees with financial or other assistance with child care. Government too has been reluctant to offer substantial child care assistance.

However, child care is an economic and social necessity for an increasing number of American families. It is also an emotionally-charged subject since all parents need to know that their children are well cared for in their absence. In this dissertation I seek to understand how these three main child care issues and problems differentially affect people in various locations and socioeconomic circumstances. As I argue in the following chapters, both place and scale are significant factors in understanding child care access. I also suggest that gender relations and government policies are important factors in shaping child care access for these different groups of people. I will examine these child care concerns in North Carolina, a state with an extremely high percentage of employed women and a new state-led initiative to improve child care services.

My detailed examination of child care access in an American context is particularly timely for a number of reasons. Access to child care is becoming
an increasingly critical economic and social issue for American families as more and more women work outside the home. The percentage of women in the labor force increased steadily from 37.7 in 1960 to 57.3 in 1991 (U. S. Bureau of the Census 1992a). This increase is the result of a combination of factors such as declining wages for men, higher divorce rates, and increased job opportunities for women in the service sector (Ammut and Mattaei 1991). Furthermore, the fastest growing segment of the labor force is women with young children (England and Browne 1992; Weiner 1985). Child care is therefore a pressing issue. However, the provision of child care services has not kept pace with the social and economic reality of women's growing labor force participation. Child care is often expensive, inconvenient in terms of location and/or hours, of poor quality, or simply unavailable. Many families struggle to meet their childrearing and wage-earning responsibilities (Balbo 1987).

In addition to being an important economic and social issue, access to child care is also a significant geographical issue, in at least two senses. First, place is an important component of child care access. Substantial spatial variations exist in child care availability, affordability, and quality in the United States. These variations are largely the result of the U. S. government's fairly minor role in child care policy. In the absence of a strong federal presence, child care initiatives tend to originate at state and local levels. As a result, the "landscape" of child care services is very uneven, and place-to-place variation in service provisioning and accessibility is great. Secondly, attention to issues of scale is important when examining child care issues for the following reason. Access to child care is shaped by both local factors (e.g. hours and locations of local child care centers, local employment opportunities and work regimes) and non-local forces (e.g. governmental
policies, prevailing gender ideologies). Therefore, we must consider multiple scales of analysis in order to untangle the complexity of child care access problems.

These two particularly geographical aspects of child care access -- place and scale -- shape the structure of this dissertation. Agnew (1987) identifies three major elements of the concept of place: locale, the setting for social interaction; location, the geographical area; and the sense of place, the intrinsic character of and human attachments to a place. I use the term scale to refer to the spatial level of analysis; in this study, for example, I consider issues at household, local, state, and national scales. I use both horizontal and vertical dimensions of inquiry in order to address the central question of this study: how do gender relations, labor market position (occupation and income), family structure (dual-parent versus single-parent), race, and governmental child care policies interact in particular locales to shape parents' access to child care services? This comparative and multi-scaled approach allows me to address more fully the complex issues surrounding child care access. In terms of a horizontal structure, I use a comparative framework to examine the child care situations in three areas of North Carolina that differ along social, economic, and geographical lines. My comparisons of Orange County, a thriving research and high-technology region; Burke County, a declining industrial area in the piedmont textile region; and a western county consortium, an historically poor mountain region, will highlight the importance of place. I will argue that class is an important distinguishing factor between groups. Parents at the lowest socioeconomic level, predominantly located in western North Carolina, face the most serious child care accessibility problems. Their child care options are more restricted by space-time logistics, and their child care routines are
complex and fragmented. The most significant child care issue for the working middle class, largely located in Burke County, is affordability. These parents' incomes are too high to allow them to qualify for financial assistance with child care expenses but too low to enable them to comfortably make ends meet. Parents at the highest socioeconomic level, heavily represented in Orange County, have fewer child care accessibility problems but do report high levels of work-related difficulties with child care arrangements. Despite the differences just described, the comparison of parents' experiences in different places reveals that in some cases the presence of child care problems cuts across geographical -- as well as social and economic -- borders. Many people in this study have child care difficulties of some kind, whether it be in terms of cost, distance, timing, lack of flexibility, or quality. The prevalence of such problems is significant and points to more general shortcomings of the child care "system" in the United States.

From a vertical perspective I consider child care access issues at multiple scales: the everyday household experiences of child care access, local contrasts in child care needs and resources, the effects on child care access of a state-led initiative to improve child care services, and the broader context of federal legislation regarding child care. I will argue that at least three of the major themes of this dissertation -- the social construction of a public/private dichotomy, the gendered division of labor in child care, and the indirect nature of much child care legislation -- emerge at multiple scales of analysis. First, the enduring notion of a public/private dichotomy -- or the view of child care as a distinctly private (i.e. family) as opposed to a public (i.e. governmental or workplace) concern -- continues to shape the decisions of policy-makers at national and state levels, and employers at local levels, regarding support and assistance for child care. The result for parents is a
fragmented and underfunded child care system. Second, the gendered division of labor that is implicit to this view of child care as a private responsibility also appears at multiple scales of analysis. Women are expected to be the primary caretakers of children. This assumption informs federal and state child care policies (or relative lack thereof). This expectation also reflects current local and household realities uncovered by my field research. The overwhelming majority of day care personnel are women, and mothers shoulder most of the responsibility for arranging and managing child care. Third, the fact that the explicit goal of national and state child care legislation is seldom to help parents (mothers in particular) manage childrearing and wage-earning obligations only reinforces this gendered division of labor. In addition, the indirect nature of this legislation suggests an ambivalence in American society about mothers' participation in the paid work force and about the use of child care services in general.

1.2 Theoretical Background

Despite the clear geographical implications of child care service distribution and accessibility, relatively little research has been done by geographers on child care issues. This neglect is curious since sub-fields of geography (e.g. social, urban, and political) -- motivated by the discipline's increasing concern in the 1960s and 1970s with social welfare (see Coates et al 1977; Harvey 1973; Knox 1975; Smith 1977, 1973) -- have studied the distribution of and access to other social services and resources such as education and health care. Some suggest that geographers have paid less attention to child care than to other urban services because it is perceived to be a "women's issue" rather than a family, class, or societal issue and thus is less deserving of scholarly attention (Hanson and Pratt 1988; Monk and Hanson 1982; Pinch 1984; Rose 1990).
Most of the existing geographic literature on child care can be linked to one or more of the following geographic traditions: 1) location/allocation modeling, 2) time-geography, 3) public service provisioning, and 4) feminist geography. Some of the earliest geographic research on child care is based on location/allocation models which seek to locate facilities so as to maximize service to a population. For example, Holmes et al (1972) and Brown et al (1974) use such a model to locate day care facilities in Columbus, Ohio. Their concern is a purely spatial one -- to achieve equity in terms of service distribution across space for a particular city. Freestone (1977) expands this concern with the spatial aspects of day care location to include social considerations. In a study of child care facilities in Sydney, Australia, for example, he establishes the social, economic, and physical characteristics of various child care "resource-rich" and "resource-poor" areas, thus expressing an interest in social as well as spatial inequalities. Truelove's (1993, 1989) work on day care facility locations in Toronto, Canada also continues this thread of concern with the social-spatial equity of child care provision and expands the analysis by relating provision to government policies. The scale of analysis for all of these studies is a metropolitan area. The strength of the location/allocation research on child care is its focus on the spatial distribution of child care service provision. However, this tradition does not pay attention to the role of gender relations or the problems associated with balancing home and work responsibilities when considering child care accessibility.

A second category of geographic research on child care uses concepts of Torsten Hagerstrand's "time-geography" to explore the daily time-space constraints women encounter as they try to mesh paid employment and child care schedules (Hagerstrand 1969; Martensson 1977; Pred and Palm 1978;
Tivers 1988, 1985). Palm and Pred (1978, 100) devise a conceptual application of the time-geography model to demonstrate the constraints placed on young mothers and to "shed light on the question of why women may come to feel restricted and oppressed within the roles they perform." Tivers' work expands these themes with intensive empirical studies on the social and spatial constraints placed on women with young children. A major point of her research is that access to child care is a predominant influence on women's activities, including employment and their general "quality of life." Cromley (1987) echoes this point by stressing the importance of locating child care services within the activity spaces of the users. These studies tend to be very behavioral in approach and local in orientation; of concern are the activity spaces of individual women negotiating neighborhood and city structures as they try to combine childrearing and paid employment. Like the previous category of research, these articles incorporate social as well as spatial dimensions. However, they clarify the "social dimension" by introducing the role of *gender*. People have different constraints and activity spaces partly as a result of their gender roles. Women are spatially constrained because their traditional gender role of family caretaker keeps them closer to home. This spatial constraint then helps perpetuate the social constraint.

Although time-geography does a good job of incorporating gender relations and the spatiality of child care, what is often missing is the broader structural framework about child care services at different scales. A third category of geographic child care studies specifically addresses child care as a public service provision tied to urban development. Pinch (1987, 1984) examines inequalities in British pre-school provision and links this "territorial injustice" to the structure of the family, the structure of production, and,
most especially, to state policy at national and local levels. This category is
decidedly more political than the others. It deals primarily with issues of
state and community, though it does consider how views on women and the
family (i.e. gender relations) affect policy. A main conclusion of this research
is that governmental belief in and support of traditional gender roles has
resulted in a child care system which is fragmented, insufficient in provision
levels, and spatially variable. The level of analysis of these studies in the
municipality. This approach favors structural explanations over the role of
human agency.

The geographic tradition that has dealt most substantively with child
care issues, and which takes into account both structural and agency
perspectives, is feminist geography. Feminist geographers put child care on
the geographic research agenda by insisting that the social and the economic
are connected, and that child care is a crucial linkage between home and
work. Many scholars include in their discussions of geography and gender
issues the importance of child care for women's participation in paid
employment and in the public sphere in general (see Bowlby 1990; England
1989; Hanson and Pratt 1988; Mackenzie 1989; McDowell 1992; Pratt and
Hanson 1991; and the Women and Geography Study Group of the Institute of
British Geographers 1984). A key concept in this research is "linkages" --
between home and work, social and economic, private and public.
Consequently, feminist geographic research on child care employs a diversity
of approaches and scales of analysis. Holloway (1998a) argues that this
diversity of approaches stems from the fact that a variety of geographic
traditions have peripherally addressed child care; the topic, however, has
never been a central concern for any particular subdiscipline. Methods
include both qualitative and quantitative approaches, as well as those
informed by political economy and cultural views. Dyck (1990, 1989), for example, uses ethnographic methods within a structurationist framework to explore the ways that everyday mothering practices of women in a Canadian suburb are central to the integration of home, community, and the wage workplace. Yeoh and Huang (1995) examine the extent to which cultural perceptions, preferences, and practices shape women's child care options in multiracial Singapore. Holloway (1998a, 1998b) shows how a variety of socioeconomic and geographical factors structure access to child care within two different areas of Sheffield, England. The diversity of feminist approaches and scales of analysis in child care research is well illustrated by Kim England's (1996a) edited volume *Who Will Mind the Baby? Geographies of Child Care and Working Mothers*, which is the first book-length treatment of the subject of child care by a geographer. The authors employ several different approaches in order to explore child care issues at a variety of spatial scales -- national, regional, metropolitan, and neighborhood. In this volume England (1996b) and Fincher (1996) call for more multi-scaled research on child care within geography.

My own research benefits from the insights of all four traditions in geographic research just cited. Of greatest relevance for this dissertation is the work of Fincher (1991), Rose (1993a, 1990), and Rose and Chicoine (1991). Of particular interest is their multi-scaled approach to studying child care access. These authors, all of whom work within the feminist tradition outlined above, link different scales of analysis -- from micro-scale issues of time-geography, to meso-scale issues of place and community, to macro-scale issues of state policy and economic restructuring. All three studies place child care in the context of community service provision, social policy, local political struggles, and the role of the state. Also common to their
research are concerns with the significance of gender and ethnicity in structuring child care access. However, because their work is based in Canada and Australia, many of their findings do not mesh with the American context due to the reduced role of the state in child care policy in the United States. This fact produces different dynamics in terms of the roles of business, community groups, and local government in child care provisioning and policy. Therefore, by using a multi-scaled approach in an American context, this dissertation addresses an existing gap in the geographic literature on child care. In addition to the insights offered by multi-scaled approaches in feminist geography, I also draw from the rich theoretical foundations laid by scholars in various fields studying the gendered public/private dichotomy in American society, and the more general multidisciplinary literature on gender and the welfare state. Finally, this dissertation is also informed by social policy research on child care services. In Chapters Two through Five, I make specific references to the pertinent work from these bodies of literature as they inform my research questions.

1.3 Approach

As previously discussed, a significant contribution this dissertation makes to the field of geography is a comparative and multi-scaled approach to address the question of how gender relations, labor market position, family structure, race, and governmental child care policies interact in particular locales to shape parents' access to child care services. In particular, I use a complementary combination of qualitative and quantitative methods to analyze child care access for distinct groups of people in different places. As I explain in more detail in Chapters Two through Five, at the household level of analysis, I employ participant observation, survey techniques, and interviewing. At the local scale I rely upon interview and archival research
techniques. For the state level I perform a qualitative content analysis of relevant newspaper articles. Finally, I interpret secondary sources to construct a national-level context for the issue of child care access.

Even though I believe this study demonstrates that qualitative and quantitative techniques used in combination are powerful tools of analysis, there is some disagreement about the history and use of quantitative methods in feminist geography. A recent focus section in Professional Geographer (1995) entitled "Should Women Count? The Role of Quantitative Methodology in Feminist Geographic Research" addresses this very issue. The main criticism of quantitative methods is that its practitioners claim that models and statistical techniques are "scientific," that is, value-neutral, objective, and generalizable. Consequently, quantitative methods historically have an assumed legitimacy within the academy. Second, the categories and variables used in quantitative research are viewed by critics as static, undertheorized, and problematic. And third, quantitative methods, in their claims to objectivity, appear to break the living connections between researchers and the people they study (Mattingly and Falconer-Al-Hindi 1995; McLafferty 1995). Because quantitative methods are related to the history of science more generally and have been viewed by many scholars as masculinist in approach (Barnes and Gregory 1997; Haraway 1991), feminist scholars often favor qualitative techniques such as participant observation, in-depth interviewing, and oral history. Lawson (1995) suggests that feminist geographers have tended to use qualitative methods because they enable us to hear women's voices -- voices that have been silenced in much masculinist scientific practice -- and because they address previously neglected scales of analysis such as the intra-household level.
However, as many feminist (as well as other) geographers point out, sometimes it is very useful to "count"; quantitative methods do have a place in feminist geography. Quantitative methods are useful for describing and analyzing the measurable aspects of women's lives (e.g., money, time, life expectancy), for discerning spatial associations, and for documenting spatial and temporal inequalities (McLafferty 1995). Quantitative information is necessary when you need to know the *pervasiveness* as well as the *seriousness* of a problem (Sprague and Zimmerman 1993). Quantitative techniques can also be used to identify people and places for in-depth study (Lawson 1995; McLafferty 1995). In addition, quantitative methods can provide a broader context in which to situate qualitative research (McLafferty 1995). Finally, because quantitative research reveals spatial and social patterns of inequality, it can serve as a basis for informed policy-making and progressive political change (McLafferty 1995; Sprague and Zimmerman 1993).

To acknowledge the strengths of quantitative methods, yet also address the weaknesses of this approach, some geographers have promoted the use of multiple methods, called "triangulation." A triangulated strategy, in which qualitative and quantitative methods are used in complementary ways, has many advantages. Multiple methods can be employed to address different facets of the same research question, to approach the same question from varied perspectives, and to consider those facets and perspectives at different times during a research project (Philip 1998). Using multiple methods may help minimize error by allowing cross-referencing of information and may help the researcher overcome problems associated with a particular method (England 1993; Gilbert 1994; Philip 1998). Triangulation also enables the researcher to address a broader range of issues that cannot necessarily be answered with only one set of tools or at one scale of analysis.
Multiple methods may improve understanding of a topic not only by adding layers of information but also by using one type of data to validate or refine another (England 1993; Reinharz 1992). Qualitative information may be used to provide validity and meaning to quantitative data, while quantitative data may help contextualize qualitative findings (McLafferty 1995). Reinharz (1992) contends that multiple methods also increase the likelihood of obtaining scientific credibility and research utility. Some have suggested that feminist scholars may be more likely than others to use triangulated strategies to advance feminist commitments by allowing researchers to link "past and present, 'data gathering' and action, and individual behavior with social frameworks" (Reinharz 1992, 197). Rose's (1993b) explanation for feminists' use of triangulation is that it can help overcome artificial divisions in research, such as between the economic and social (which feminists have long argued must be understood together; see for example Hanson and Pratt (1988)).

By demonstrating the strength of a multi-scaled, triangulated approach, my research therefore contributes to the broader field of geography in at least two ways. First, in my dissertation I highlight the utility of combining qualitative and quantitative techniques, and of working at more than one scale in order to produce a richer and more contextualized analysis. Second, the results of my study contribute to a growing body of feminist geographic research by showing how gender relations play a role in shaping access to child care at different scales in the American context.

1.4 Organization

This dissertation is organized in the following way. In Chapter Two I outline the modern history of the U. S. government's role in child care policy to place my specific case study of child care access in North Carolina in
broader historical and policy contexts. This overview also highlights more general child care themes at the national level that I return to in subsequent chapters about child care access at household, local, and state levels. In particular, I argue that historically child care policy has been spatially uncoordinated at the national level because child care is seen as a private issue in American society. Furthermore, social policy has defined women's roles as belonging to that supposedly "natural" private realm.

In Chapter Three I make a case for the role of place in examining child care arrangements and access, by introducing three specific locales in North Carolina. I selected North Carolina in general and the three study sites in particular for many reasons, including: the state's high percentage of working mothers; the recent introduction of the Smart Start program designed to improve child care across the state; and the geographical variations in child care provisioning and accessibility in these locales, all of which participate in the Smart Start program.

In Chapter Four I explore these spatial variations by examining how gender relations, labor market position (occupation and income level), family structure (dual-parent versus single-parent), and race, as experienced at the household level, interact to shape parents' child care strategies. In this chapter I bring together the strengths of quantitative techniques, such as cluster analysis of survey results, with qualitative approaches, such as interviewing and participant observation. I examine the results of a parent questionnaire, which was informed by participant observation at a preschool, that I administered in these three locales during 1995. I use the results of interviews with day care directors and parents to provide individual voices and concerns to the broader trends highlighted by the surveys.
In Chapter Five I move back out to the state's role in improving child care access for its residents to frame the empirical results of Chapter Four. I describe North Carolina's "Smart Start" program in more detail, examining its strengths and weaknesses, and discussing the implications of Smart Start at the national scale.

Finally, in Chapter Six I summarize the major findings of this study and review how the geographic concepts of place and scale are important to understanding issues of child care access. Based on the results of this research, I also suggest appropriate realms for child care improvement and discuss a few avenues for future geographic inquiry on the subject of child care.
CHAPTER 2

HISTORICAL CONTEXT:
AN OVERVIEW OF AMERICAN CHILD CARE POLICY

This chapter gives an historical overview of the U. S. government's role in child care policy. This overview will provide a framework for understanding my case study of child care access in North Carolina in terms of more general historical and policy contexts. In addition, it will highlight broader child care themes at the national level that are also evident at household, local, and state levels, based on empirical findings from my fieldwork.

In this chapter I provide an overview of the modern history of child care legislation and recent child care policy developments that distinguishes the American child care scene. Historically, the federal government has not been seen as responsible for public education. Only in recent history has the federal government approached concerns of public education and day care. As a result, helping a wide range of employed parents afford quality day care has seldom been the direct goal of child care legislation. In addition, modern legislation regarding child care reflects a social view that child care should be a private rather than a public responsibility. Another feature of the American child care scene is that child care provision has been left largely to the market. When legislation for child care has been passed, it has tended to focus on economically-disadvantaged groups, rather than acknowledging a broader-based need for child care assistance and improvements. Two important consequences of the history of federal child care legislation are a fragmented child care "system" and a high degree of spatial variation in child care services.
In order to explain the relatively minor role of the federal government in American child care policy, I rely on the feminist critique of "universal citizenship" and the public/private dichotomy on which this ideal is based. The enduring legacy of the social construction of separate public and private spheres has implications for child care policy. First, child care has historically been constructed as a private issue which does not belong in the public sphere and is therefore undeserving of political action or citizen entitlement. Secondly, social policy aimed at women has tended to define them primarily by their private roles as wives and mothers rather than their public roles of workers or citizens. Thirdly, the care of children (and dependents in general) is devalued by the public sphere.

Chapter Two is organized as follows. I first provide an historical overview of the federal government's role in U.S. child care policy. Secondly, I briefly discuss several developments that are driving recent federal action on child care issues. Next I outline the distinguishing features of the current American child care system and discuss the consequences of the form of this "system." Finally, I address the question of why the U.S. government has historically not been seen as responsible for child care policy.

2.1 American Child Care Policy: An Overview

In general, the role of the federal government in public education and in day care in particular has been fairly minor. Beginning with the constitutional tradition, the federal government was not seen as responsible for providing public education services. Only with the democratic politics of Andrew Jackson's administration (beginning roughly in the 1820s), did the state become involved in discussions about public education. The federal government, therefore, has only gradually approached public education in modern history. There remains a long-standing debate as to what exactly the
role and responsibility of the federal government should be when it comes to public education (and by extension, day care). Therefore the states have historically played a more important role in providing for such services, leading to a fragmented and spatially variable child care system.

The modern history of American involvement in child care policy reflects these tensions about what role the federal and state governments should play. The U. S. government's first involvement with child care occurred in 1933, when the Federal Emergency Relief Act and Works Progress Administration (WPA) provided federal funds for child care centers and nursery schools (most of which were housed in public schools) (Figure 2.1). Despite the government's financial commitment to child care, the underlying purpose of this action was to create work for unemployed teachers, not to benefit children or help employed mothers (Berry 1993; Bloom and Steen 1996; Reeves 1992). WPA support for child care ended in 1938.

In 1935 Congress passed Title V of the Social Security Act, which allowed for grants-in-aid for child care services and research; funds were administered through state departments of public welfare (Reeves 1992). The next major action from the U. S. government with respect to child care was the Lanham Act of 1941, which provided funds to set up child care centers in defense plants employing women. However, all federal funding for child care was terminated in 1946 at the end of the war. The U. S. government responded to the child care needs of working mothers only when a national crisis demanded it. The aim of the legislation was to help the war effort and the economy, not to help working-class families meet pressing home and work obligations. Institutional day care became a marginal child
<table>
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<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>1933</td>
<td>WPA provided federal funds for child care centers.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1935</td>
<td>Congress passed Title V of the Social Security Act, allowing for grants-in-aid for child care services and research.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>Lanham Act provided funds to set up child care centers in defense plants employing women.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>&quot;Project Head Start&quot; was launched and funded.</td>
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<td>1971</td>
<td>Comprehensive Child Development Act was passed by Congress but vetoed by President Nixon.</td>
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<td>1975</td>
<td>Title XX of the Social Security Act of 1975 allocated funds to states to subsidize child care expenses.</td>
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<td>1976</td>
<td>Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit was established.</td>
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<td>1981</td>
<td>President Reagan transformed Title XX funding into Social Service Block Grants.</td>
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<td>1988</td>
<td>Act for Better Child Care Services (ABC) bill introduced and failed in Congress.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>President Clinton proposed an additional $21 billion over five years for child care.</td>
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Figure 2.1: Chronology of U. S. government involvement in child care policy.
welfare issue after World War II. The term "day care" disappeared by the late 1940s and did not reappear again until the 1960s (Berry 1993).

In 1964 "Project Head Start" was launched and funded. A major goal of Head Start, a large-scale government social reform effort to provide remedial education to disadvantaged children, was to break the cycle of poverty at an early age level (Reeves 1992). The project was originally part of the Economic Opportunity Act and President Johnson's War on Poverty program (Reeves 1992). The focus of the program was to help disadvantaged children, not necessarily to assist their working parents. Head Start is still operating today and is the only federally-funded child care program with strong popular and congressional support and steadily rising funding (Kahn and Kamerman 1987).

Congress passed the Comprehensive Child Development Act in 1971. This legislation would have provided child care funds for welfare recipients, money for the development of new child care resources, sliding scale funding for single parents and working families, and expansion of the Head Start program (Reeves 1992). However, President Nixon vetoed the legislation, warning that it would "commit the vast moral authority of the national government to the side of communal approaches to child-rearing over and against the family-centered approach" (quoted in Rosenthal 1971). The president's reasoning clearly articulates the view that child care is a private (i.e. family), rather than a public (i.e. government) matter. Not until the late 1980s would Americans see another major effort to extend federal aid for child care.

Although the Comprehensive Child Development Act was never implemented, in 1975 Title XX of the Social Security Act allocated funds to states to subsidize child care expenses. In 1976 the Child and Dependent
Care Tax Credit was established, allowing a family to decrease its annual tax liability based on the number of children. Low-income families could claim a tax credit of 20 to 30 percent of child care expenses. However, since the credit cannot be larger than the family's tax liability, the benefit was effectively reduced for many low-income families and therefore primarily benefited middle-income families (Bloom and Steen 1996). This economic twist is ironic since government-sponsored child care was (and still is) associated mainly with the poor. During this time politicians confined their interest in day care mainly to making it possible for poor women and welfare recipients to work but failed to acknowledge that other families might have working parents and child-care needs too (Berry 1993).

This position would change over the next decade or so as more middle-class white women entered the labor force. Kahn and Kamerman (1987) argue that growth in female labor force participation rates is the single-most important factor driving developments in the child care field. Over the course of the 1970s, child care services went from a protective, treatment, or remedial service for poor or troubled children, to a service for "average" children whose mothers had joined the labor force (Kahn and Kamerman 1987).

Child care policy would enter another phase in the 1980s under President Reagan, one characterized by decentralization, privatization, and deregulation (Kahn and Kamerman 1987). For example, in 1981 Title XX funding was transformed into Social Service Block Grants administered to states for various social services, including child care (Reeves 1992). This decentralization of funding and responsibility had the geographic effect of sharpening differences between areas in terms of child care provisioning, and the economic effect of worsening child care availability and quality. According
to Kahn and Kamerman (1987), President Reagan worked to reduce the social role and responsibility of the federal government for child care and tried to reorient social policy from concerns with the poor to concerns for the middle- and upper-classes. As Berry (1993) puts it, Reagan used the tax code instead of social programs to address the child care problem.

Yet by 1988, in response to mounting concern about the declining quality and availability of child care during the 1980s, more than 100 pieces of legislation on child care were introduced into the U. S. Congress (Bloom and Steen 1996). Of these, the most significant was the Act for Better Child Care Services (ABC), the first major child care bill introduced in Congress since President Nixon vetoed the Child Care Development Act in 1971. The ABC bill proposed an increase in direct federal grants to states for child care and an expansion of tax credits for working parents. However, significant differences in the House bill and the threat of a presidential veto resulted in a failure of the legislation to pass both Houses of Congress and reach President Bush's desk (Bloom and Steen 1996). Berry (1993, 184) claims that "ABC failed to pass because polls showed deep division among the American people over endorsing federal financing of nonparental child care." She argues further that many child care policies do not have a strong enough constituency because we as a society have such well-entrenched attitudes about gender roles and the care of children.

Congress passed a substantial child care package in the 1990 Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act. The legislation, the primary objective of which was to help low-income Americans, included four major elements: 1) an expansion of the Earned Income Tax Credit, 2) block grants to states to help improve the availability and quality of child care, 3) grants to those working poor not already on Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), and 4)
funds for states to upgrade their licensing requirements for child care facilities (Bloom and Steen 1996). Congress passed more legislation related to the care of children in 1993 with the Family and Medical Leave Act, which granted employees (in companies with fifty or more workers) up to twelve weeks a year of unpaid leave following the birth of a child. In addition, the employer must guarantee that the employee will be allowed to return to work at a similar job and must also continue the employee’s health benefits during the leave (Bloom and Steen 1996). Many other countries have had these (and better) guarantees for years. Sweden, for example, passed parental leave legislation in 1974 that allowed either parent to stay home after the birth of a child for six months at an income replacement rate of 90 percent; in 1989 the parental leave period was extended to 12 months (Lewis and Astrom 1992).

In the fall of 1997, President Clinton convened a White House Conference on Child Care. In January of 1998 the White House proposed an additional $21 billion over five years for child care. The funds would provide an expanded child care tax credit for middle-class families, block grants to the states for lower-income families, credits for businesses, and some incentive money for training new workers. Child care advocates and professionals welcome the proposal and are heartened that their issue is finally on the national political agenda. However, many child care veterans regard the President’s proposal, which would increase overall child-care spending by just 10 percent a year, as "fairly little, terribly late, and too limited" (Goodman 1998).

2.2 Recent Developments in Child Care Policy

Recent action at the national scale on child care issues has been fueled by several developments. First, as previously mentioned, middle-class
women are an increasing presence in the U. S. labor force; these women work, need child care, and vote. As one observer notes, "politicians know the children in child care don't vote -- but their parents and grandparents do" (Mehren 1998). Since more parents of young children work than not, politicians are taking an increasing risk if they ignore the issue of child care or oppose measures to improve the child care scene.

Secondly, much of the recent concentration on child care stems from state and federal efforts to restructure welfare (Mehren 1998). Most politicians now agree that welfare reform cannot succeed without some provisions for child care, particularly since the types of jobs most former welfare recipients secure typically do not offer high salaries or child care benefits. In this case, the impetus for child care reform is the desire to move people from welfare to work, not the perceived need to improve child care access for all groups of people. (Incidentally, the debate surrounding this issue brings up a profound contradiction noted by many observers: the same people who insist that welfare mothers must go to work also urge middle-class mothers to stay at home (Goodman 1998; Roberts and Roberts 1998).)

A third reason driving the child care issue is the impact of recently published research on the importance of a child's earliest years on his or her future development. For example, experts contend that an incredible amount of brain development takes place from birth to age three (Greenspan 1997). Some claim that this research has broadened the discussion about child care beyond the needs of poor children since it demonstrates that all children benefit from enriched environments in their early years (Mehren 1998). Advocates using this research hope to improve children's educational experiences, but not necessarily to help parents better balance childrearing and wage-earning.
2.3 Characteristics and Consequences of the Current Child Care System

The previous sections' overviews of legislation and recent developments related to child care highlight some of the key features of the more recent U. S. governmental role in child care policy. First, because the federal government has historically not been seen as the agent for educational reform, much of the federal government's action on child care issues has been in response to reasons other than helping a wide range of parents afford quality child care. Historically, other motivations have included: creating work for unemployed teachers (in WPA-funded nurseries), meeting labor needs during a period of national crisis (Lanham Act), providing educational opportunities to economically disadvantaged children (Head Start), and moving welfare recipients to jobs. Secondly, the contemporary American approach to child care is characterized by a commitment to individualism and family privacy (England 1996c). Child care is seen as a personal or private responsibility rather than a governmental or public one. Thirdly, and related to the commitment to individualism and family privacy, child care provision has been left largely to the market, with the idea that privatization increases individual families' child care choices. Consequently, the private sector thus provides the majority of child care in this country (Bloom and Steen 1996; England 1996c). Some suggest that for-profit child care tends to be of lower quality than non-profit care (Klein 1992). In addition, the market does not guarantee equity in service provision or in accessibility. Fourthly, there is a long history of social stigma attached to government-sponsored child care programs in the U. S. (Berry 1993; Reeves 1992). As pointed out in the previous section, when the federal government has become involved in child care, it has tended to focus on economically-
disadvantaged groups, rather than acknowledging that a wider variety of families could benefit from child care assistance and improvements. Only when more middle-class women entered the formal labor force did child care become more of a mainstream topic (Kahn and Kamerman 1987; Reeves 1992).

Two important consequences of the relatively minor federal presence in child care are a fragmented child care "system," with states playing a larger role, and (as a result) a high degree of spatial variation in child care services. Governmental involvement in child care consists of a patchwork of direct and indirect programs at the federal, state, and local levels (Bloom and Steen 1996). Efforts are not well-coordinated, and there is no overall plan or vision for child care improvement.

The relatively minor role of the federal government in child care has geographical consequences as well. First, the "landscape" of child care is very uneven. As I shall discuss in Chapter Four, there is tremendous spatial variation in child care availability, affordability, and quality. These variations are true for multiple scales, from the intra-city level all the way to the national level. Secondly, because of the history of the lack of a strong federal presence, the scales at which most child care initiatives now occur are the state and local levels. However, Kahn and Kamerman (1987) argue that these more local efforts lack scale, scope, and coherence, and tend to be trial-and-error in nature. In the next chapter I will examine a state-led initiative to improve child care, North Carolina's Smart Start program, to discern the strengths and weaknesses of one state-developed policy.
2.4 Explaining the Relative Lack of Federal Involvement in American Child Care Policy

The uneven and relative lack of federal child care policies raises the following question: when the government has become involved, why has it only marginally at best provided child care opportunities and benefits for its citizens? To address this question, I must first briefly sketch the origins of the concept of "universal citizenship" in American society and the public/private dichotomy on which this ideal was based. Because child care has historically been constructed as a private issue which does not belong in the public sphere (and therefore is not deserving of political action or citizen entitlement), the government has not been seen as responsible for providing that public service. This section will also provide a framework for understanding empirically-based arguments in Chapter Four about women being viewed as mothers first, and citizens and workers second. Furthermore, evidence in Chapter Five will demonstrate that child care is still viewed by some lawmakers at the state level as a private-sphere activity.

First I will comment briefly on geographers' treatment of the issue of "citizenship." Painter and Philo (1995) argue that geographical interest in citizenship can be traced back to classical geographers such as Ptolemy and Strabo who were concerned with the institutionalization of citizenship as a political system. More recently, feminist and post-colonial geographers have studied the inclusions and exclusions of citizenship in the history of capitalism in the western world. Smith (1989) goes so far as to advocate the concept of citizenship, which helps to both explain the structure of society and provide a way to restructure society, as a framework for doing critical human geography. Many geographers have taken up this call. Special thematic issues on citizenship in two recent journals (Environment and Planning A,
26(6), 1994; Political Geography, 14 (2), 1995) include articles that address questions about the rights and responsibilities of citizens, and the changing relationship between citizens and the state in different locales. These articles and many others (including a vast literature outside of the discipline of geography; see, for example, Fraser and Gordon (1992); Mouffe (1992); and Sklair (1991)) criticize the concept of citizenship insofar as it has been used by groups in power to exclude "other" groups of people, in particular women, racial and ethnic minorities, the homeless, and gays and lesbians, from the full rights of citizenship and the "public sphere" even as it proclaims universality.

In particular, the feminist critique of citizenship argues that implicit to the ideal of the citizen and the state is the enduring notion of a public/private dichotomy (see, for example, Elshtain (1981); Hansen (1987); and Pateman (1989)). Marston (1990) traces the roots of the concept of citizenship in the United States and the gendering of public and private life to eighteenth-century bourgeois liberalism and the republican model of government in the founding of the American nation. In bourgeois liberalism, the political rights and privileges of citizenship have an economic basis; citizens are autonomous, self-sufficient, and competitive. The republican model of government assumes a self-governing community of individuals sharing a common interest in public affairs (Marston 1990). In actuality, this community of individuals -- of "citizens," as opposed to pre-Revolutionary "subjects" -- included only White, property-owning males, or the bourgeoisie. Women, minorities, and non-property-owning White males were excluded from the rights of supposed "universal" citizenship. (Of course the history of liberalism and republicanism is quite contested, especially over the concepts
of equality and freedom. These debates, however, are beyond the scope of this study.)

Although voting rights and other entitlements have since been granted to minorities, both bourgeois liberalism and the republican model rest on the notion of a division between a "masculine" public sphere of the state and politics, and a "feminine" private sphere of home and domestic life. Many scholars argue that this division between public and private spheres continues to inform contemporary politics. The history of the social construction of these gendered spheres is linked to naturalistic arguments going back to Rousseau's political philosophy of the social contract (Marston 1990; Young 1990). From this perspective, the public sphere is viewed as the site of reason and rationality (identified as masculine traits), whereas the private sphere is the locus of emotion and sentiment (identified as feminine traits). These supposedly feminine attributes were seen to be incompatible with participation (as a citizen) in the public sphere. As Marston (1990, 451) argues, "Effectively, women were barred from direct participation in civil society because their 'disorderly' nature rendered them unable to develop a sense of justice, thus making them a threat to political order." The concepts of public and private spheres helped define who could be a citizen and participate fully in public life.

The enduring legacies of the notion of "universal citizenship" and the social construction of separate public and private spheres are very relevant to this dissertation. The literature about the public/private dichotomy is vast and in fact forms the basis of many feminist critiques of society. For the purposes of the dissertation, I will note just a few of the long-term implications of this divide insofar as they are relevant to child-care issues. First, in social policy, women are still defined primarily by their private-
sphere roles as wives and mothers rather than by public roles of worker or citizen. Historically, much social legislation aimed at women, from the Mothers' Pensions of the 1910s and 1920s up to the current Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), enables women to care for their families but not to provide for them (Sapiro 1990). In contrast, many policies that assume or require potential economic independence -- such as the GI Bill, or the first national education assistance program -- have excluded women (Mink 1990). Social policy has assumed that women lead contingent lives; their ability to provide for themselves and to participate in the public sphere of paid employment, is dependent upon whether others need their private-sphere caring services (Sapiro 1990). Based on a conceptual division between private and public spheres, and for the purposes of public policy, women are classified as wives and mothers first and citizens and workers second. Therefore, government is reluctant to acknowledge families' child care needs.

Secondly, as demonstrated in the history of American legislation, child care (and the care of dependents in general) is seen to properly reside in the private sphere. Not coincidentally, most of this caring or dependency work is performed by women. The public sphere in the form of government and employers has not been seen as responsible for this supposedly "private" activity. I argued this point in the previous section in which I outlined the chronology of federal involvement in child care policy. In Chapter Four, I again raise this public/private divide as it relates to home-work linkages.

Thirdly, and related to the previous two points, so-called "dependency work" (including the care of children) is devalued because it is not defined as part of the public sphere. Young (1995, 548) traces this devaluation to the privileging of independence as a citizen virtue: "Dependent people and their
caretakers come to be defined outside public social relations, marginalized to a private realm beyond the interaction of free and full citizens with one another." Dependency work is seen as a private activity, but support from the public sphere would enable those who do this type of work to participate more fully in the public realm (Young 1995). In Chapter Four I will return to this theme and present empirical evidence of the undervaluing of "caring" work in American society.

2.5 Conclusions

In this chapter I presented a chronology of the U. S. government's involvement in child care policy and suggested that the federal presence in the child care scene is minor and fragmented. I relied upon feminist critiques of citizenship and the public/private dichotomy to help explain why the federal government has historically not been seen as responsible for child care policy. I also noted some of the key features of this federal involvement. First, federal action on child care issues has historically been in reaction to other economic and social events. Examples range from a Depression-era effort to create work for unemployed teachers to more recent efforts to move welfare recipients to jobs. Secondly, the federal government has tended to view child care as a private, rather than a public, issue. President Nixon articulated this view when he claimed that federal support for child care would be "family weakening." Thirdly, child care provision has been left largely to the market, which affects the quality and equity of service provision. Fourthly, federal involvement has tended to target low-income parents, rather than acknowledging a broader-based need for child care assistance and improvements.

Fragmentation of the child care system and marked spatial variation in services are two significant consequences of the nature of federal
involvement in U.S. child care policy. Many of the important child care
initiatives and reform efforts take place at local and state levels, thus
explaining at least in part the tremendous geographical variation in child care
accessibility, affordability, and quality. One of these state-level initiatives to
improve child care services, North Carolina's Smart Start program, is
discussed in detail in Chapters Three and Five. This chapter thus provides a
broader historical and policy context in which to situate my case study of
child care access.

Besides providing this framework, the current chapter serves another
important purpose by highlighting themes at the national level that will
reappear in my empirical findings at local and state levels. I will demonstrate
in later chapters that several important issues relating to child care are
woven through multiple spatial scales. For example, the contemporary view
of child care as a private responsibility is echoed at the local level where
many employers neglect to offer child-care benefits to their employees,
despite the fact that child care problems can affect parents' abilities to
perform on the job (Chapter Four). The view of child care as a private rather
than a public or societal issue is also clearly articulated by some of the
opponents of North Carolina's state-led initiative ("Smart Start") to improve
child care services (Chapter Five). At the national level, child care legislation
is often a reaction to other economic and social events since the federal
government has not traditionally been seen as responsible for child care. In
Chapter Five I will show that although the Smart Start program does in fact
help working parents in many ways, the rhetoric advancing the program
focuses on meeting children's needs rather than on assisting their parents.
Federal efforts in child care have tended to focus on the most economically-
disadvantaged groups. As a result, many low- to middle-income parents are
in the difficult position of earning too much money to qualify for child care assistance but not enough to meet their financial obligations. Similarly, in Chapter Four I will present evidence from my local study areas of this "middle-class squeeze." Finally, the gendered division of labor that is implicit in the federal view of child care as a private responsibility appears at all spatial scales. At the household level, women shoulder most of the responsibility for arranging and managing child care (Chapter Four). At the local level, the majority of child care staff I encountered during my field-work sessions were female (Chapter Four). Finally, at the state level, portions of the debate over funding the Smart Start child care initiative reflect the federal view that child care is a family (i.e. mother's) responsibility (Chapter Five).
In the previous chapter I suggested that one consequence of the relatively minor role of the federal government in American child care policy is a tremendous geographical variation in the availability, affordability, and quality of child care in the United States. This variation exists at multiple spatial scales, from the intra-city all the way to the national level. In this chapter I make a case for examining child care arrangements and access in three particular locales in North Carolina to examine this variation at the state level. I chose North Carolina as a study area for three compelling reasons. First, the state has an extremely high percentage of working mothers with young children. Historically, women in North Carolina have participated in the paid labor force at higher rates than the national average. This social and economic reality means that child care has long been a pressing issue in the state. Secondly, North Carolina has recently enacted a program (called "Smart Start") to improve child care services across the state. The program has already made a material difference in child care availability, affordability, and quality in certain areas of the state and is touted by supporters as a national model for improving child care services. In addition, debates over the funding and future directions of the program raise broader issues about the care of children. Thirdly, substantial geographical variations in employment opportunities for women suggest there may also be geographical variations in child care accessibility. I chose my three study sites within the state based in part on these geographical variations but also on these sites' selection as "pioneer partnerships" in the Smart Start program (which means that they qualified for the first round of Smart Start
funding). Specifically, I examine the child care situations in three distinct areas: 1) Orange County, which is in the Triangle area of Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill, a thriving research and high-technology region; 2) Burke County, in the piedmont textile region, a declining industrial area; and 3) a consortium of seven western counties in the mountains, an historically poor area. I show that these areas have very different child care resources and needs, which implies differential access to child care services for various groups of people in different places. This chapter thus provides a framework for understanding individuals' child care experiences, the subject of Chapter Four. The case study outlined in this chapter also demonstrates the importance of place in shaping access to child care.

Chapter Three is organized as follows. First I explain why child care is such a relevant and pressing issue in North Carolina by citing figures and explanations for the state's unusually high female labor force participation rate. Secondly, I provide background information on the origins and nature of the Smart Start program, North Carolina's initiative to improve its child care services. Thirdly, I describe in some detail child care resources and needs in my three study areas. Finally, I provide specific examples of Smart Start's accomplishments in these areas.

3.1 Female Labor Force Participation

Child care is of particular concern in North Carolina, which has one of the highest rates of working mothers in the nation (Garrett 1988; Glasser 1992, 1991; Kahn and Kamerman 1987; NC Equity 1991). The 1990 Census reports that 66.8 percent of women with children under age six are in the labor force in North Carolina, compared to the U. S. average of 59.7 percent (U. S. Bureau of the Census 1992b, 1993a). This trend is not a recent one. For many decades North Carolina mothers have participated in the paid
labor force in far greater numbers than the national average (Figure 3.1). Historically, women have been important contributors to North Carolina's economy. In the nineteenth century women labored in agriculture and in the cotton mills that sprang up in the North Carolina piedmont starting in the 1830s. Later in the century women worked in the new tobacco factories and in domestic service (NC Equity 1991). Women now work in a variety of jobs in North Carolina but are still over-represented in the textile and apparel industries and, as elsewhere in the country, in the service industry. Women now make up almost half (47 percent) of North Carolina's labor force (U. S. Bureau of the Census 1993b).

The most commonly cited explanation for North Carolina's high female employment rate is that the state's low wages require most families to have a second income (Garrett 1988; NC Equity 1991; Rogers 1975). Also, jobs have historically been available to women in textiles, one of the state's largest industries. North Carolina's low wages are chiefly attributable to the state's low manufacturing wage, forty-sixth in the nation (U. S. Bureau of the Census 1997). This figure affects a large number of North Carolinians as 27 percent of the state's employed population make their living in manufacturing (U. S. Bureau of the Census 1993b). The state's largest industries -- textiles, apparel, tobacco, and furniture -- are all low-skilled, labor-intensive, and non-unionized. These industries tend to locate in rural areas, benefit from the prevalence of part-time farming, and, especially in the case of textiles and apparel, employ mostly female workers (Wood 1986). Some have even suggested that in many areas locally dominant employers discourage new companies that are unionized and offer competitive wages (Rogers 1975; Wood 1986). Even the manufacturing sectors (e.g. chemicals, rubber and plastics, electrical and electronic equipment) that have recently
moved to North Carolina have tended to be in the most labor-intensive subdivisions of these sectors or in the subdivisions (e.g., production of textile machinery) that are closely related to the state's traditional industrial base, thereby ensuring continued below-average wages (Wood 1986).

As stressed in this section, North Carolina has long had high female employment rates. A more recent national trend, which holds true for North Carolina as well, is that one of the fastest growing segments of the labor force is women with young children (England and Browne 1992). Because of the higher than national participation of women in the work force, North Carolina is an excellent place to explore the child care challenges posed by this demographic and economic reality.

### 3.2 Smart Start

Another compelling reason for selecting North Carolina as the study area for this research is that the state has recently launched a state-led effort to improve child care services through a program called "Smart Start." In addition to making a material difference in the lives of many North Carolina residents, Smart Start has prompted a dialogue about child care issues that has broader implications for the national child care scene and for the ways we think about work and family obligations in American society. I will address these broader issues in detail in Chapter Five. Also, Smart Start has interesting geographical implications; the program is decentralized in nature, and different areas within the state have used their Smart Start funds in different ways.

Smart Start is the brainchild of Democratic Governor James Hunt. The program was the centerpiece of his 1992 and 1996 gubernatorial campaigns (both of which he won). Governor Hunt and his supporters believe that Smart Start will improve child care conditions in North Carolina and in
so doing will ultimately improve the state's economy. The following comments, taken from Governor Hunt's press release announcing the program, illustrate this mindset: "We cannot build a world-class workforce if our children don't come to school ready to learn . . . The future economic prosperity of this state depends on how successfully we meet the needs of our children" (Hunt 1993). An article in the business section of the *Raleigh News and Observer* (White 1994) said the following about the Smart Start program and its anticipated effect on the economic future of the state:

The demonstration projects underway throughout the state will impart the cognitive skills and related competencies to children who will enter elementary school far better prepared to function effectively in a competitive environment. This environment will yield a handsome return when these youngsters become "knowledge-based workers" upon completion of their scholastic training.

These arguments on behalf of Smart Start reflect Hunt's long-time commitment to education reform and his broader school-to-work agenda. In addition to Smart Start, Hunt has instituted a program ("Tech Prep") to address the needs of students who are not college-bound but need employment training and services. He is also currently trying to win legislative approval to raise teachers' salaries to the national average. Smart Start is arguably the centerpiece of these educational reform efforts and the program for which Hunt most wants to be remembered (he is currently serving his fourth and final term as North Carolina's governor). Hunt has successfully battled the Republican-controlled legislature for the survival and expansion of Smart Start. Now in its fifth year the program covers 55 counties in the state, from an initial base of 18 counties. Hunt's ultimate goal is for the program to cover all 100 counties in the state by the year 2000.
Smart Start, broadly defined, is a program designed to "ensure that every child in North Carolina enters school healthy and ready to succeed" (NC Department of Human Resources 1994, 1). Smart Start aims to provide quality, affordable early childhood education and other critical family support services -- such as parenting education, child development, health care, literacy, and information about jobs and job training -- to families with children under age six. For the purposes of this dissertation, I will focus only on those aspects of Smart Start related to child care services.

Because Smart Start uses state money to fund a socially-sensitive service such as child care, it has resulted in vigorous debates in the North Carolina General Assembly on both financial and philosophical grounds. As I describe in Chapter Five, these debates raise critical issues about the respective roles of government, business, parents, and communities in the care and education of young children. The debates thus have implications that extend far beyond the borders of North Carolina, particularly since supporters of the program tout Smart Start as a model for improving the nation's child care.

3.3 Geographical Variation in Employment Opportunities

In addition to the high rate of working mothers and innovative government programs, North Carolina is an interesting place to study child care for another reason: geography. Regional variation in the types of employment opportunities for women suggests there may also be geographical differences in the availability, affordability, and quality of child care. For this reason I examine child care situations in three contrasting locales, all of which qualified for the first round of Smart Start funding (Figure 3.2). The first of these, Orange County, is in the Triangle area of Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill, which is an economically booming, research and high-
Figure 3.2: Study areas.
technology region. Burke County is located in the piedmont textile region, a declining industrial area with traditionally high female employment rates. The third region is a consortium of seven western counties in the mountains, an historically poor area lacking significant economic development.

3.3.1 Data Collection

I relied upon multiple sources of information to construct a picture of the child care scenes — set within their geographical, social, and economic contexts — in my three study areas. Specifically, my data sources were: 1) U. S. Census data; 2) interviews in 1995 with a Smart Start evaluator and child care resource and referral personnel (in which I asked general questions about child care issues and Smart Start's accomplishments in my three study sites); 3) Smart Start funding applications; and 4) newspaper articles about Smart Start from the *Raleigh News and Observer*, the *Morganton News Herald*, and the *Asheville Citizen-Times* (from September 1993 to September 1995). I collected most of this information during two fieldwork sessions in North Carolina in the winter and fall of 1995.

The main goals of my initial trip to North Carolina in January and February were to make contact with child care officials in the three study areas in order to establish my legitimacy as a researcher and pave the way for future communication and information-sharing. I also collected preliminary data on the child care needs and resources of these areas. To assess my choice of the three study areas, I interviewed county child care resource and referral personnel and the head of a Smart Start evaluation team, who generously provided me with copies of the relevant counties' applications for Smart Start funding. These applications were invaluable in understanding the child care situations in my three study areas. I also collected archival background material on the Smart Start program and local...
child care issues from Davis library and Wilson library at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and from the public libraries in Morganton and Asheville. These sources suggested clear differences among my three study areas in terms of child care provision characteristics and accessibility issues. For example, although Orange County has a comparatively high standard of child care, the area’s high cost of living (the highest in the state) makes these services unavailable to many residents. In addition to the fairly common problems of low quality and (relatively) high cost day care, many residents of Burke County face the dilemma of needing evening and weekend child care hours to accommodate shift work. Residents from the seven westernmost mountain counties face a number of barriers to accessing child care, including cost (particularly considering the severe poverty that grips much of this region), transportation (a real problem in this area of rural isolation, which has no generally scheduled public transportation and many poor-quality roads), and the need for flexible child care hours to cover manufacturing and service shift work. Obviously, place does matter in terms of child care availability, affordability, and quality.

3.3.2 Orange County

Orange County (population 77,892), situated in the piedmont region of North Carolina, is located near the geographic center of the state. Its largest town of Chapel Hill (population 33,864) is home to the University of North Carolina (UNC-CH). The county’s other towns are Carrboro, a former mill town now a bedroom community to Chapel Hill, and Hillsborough, the county seat. All three towns are located in the rapidly developing southeastern portion of Orange County; the northern and southern parts of the county remain essentially rural. Eighty-one percent of the county’s residents are
White, sixteen percent African American, three percent Asian, and less than two percent are of Hispanic origin (U. S. Bureau of the Census 1993b).

Orange County's population is among the wealthiest and most highly educated in the state (Table 3.1). Per capita income for county residents ($15,776) ranks fourth in the state (out of 100 counties), and nearly half of the population has a bachelor's degree or higher -- a figure that soars above the state average of 17.4 percent (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1993b, 1992b). The largest employers in the area include the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC-CH), UNC Hospitals, Blue Cross/Blue Shield, and General Electric (Business North Carolina 1994; Orange County Smart Start Application Team 1993). Many residents also find work at nearby Research Triangle Park, an industrial research park founded in 1959 to coordinate scientific research among UNC-CH, Duke, and North Carolina State universities and to foster university-industry research linkages and technology transfers (Gade and Stillwell 1986). Current park tenants, to name just a few, include IBM, Glaxo Wellcome, Data General, DuPont, Ciba-Geigy, BASF, and CompuChem (Labich 1993). White-collar occupations predominate in this area; the largest Census-defined occupational category in Orange County is the managerial and professional specialty occupations group, followed by technical, sales, and administrative support occupations (Table 3.2). The Census of Manufactures lists printing and publishing as the only manufacturing in the county (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1996b).

3.3.2.1 Child Care Resources and Needs

Differences in child care resources and needs in my three study sites highlight some of the ways that place can shape child care availability, affordability, and quality. Given its reputation as a liberal enclave in a conservative state, one would expect Orange County to offer progressive child
Table 3.1: Income and education characteristics of selected North Carolina counties (U. S. Bureau of the Census 1993b, 1992b).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PLACE</th>
<th>INCOME</th>
<th>EDUCATION</th>
<th>EDUCATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Per capita income in 1989 (dollars)</td>
<td>% High school graduate or higher</td>
<td>% With at least a bachelor's degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>12,885</td>
<td>70.0</td>
<td>17.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burke County</td>
<td>11,604</td>
<td>60.1</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orange County</td>
<td>15,776</td>
<td>83.6</td>
<td>46.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Consortium</td>
<td>9,941</td>
<td>65.3</td>
<td>13.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3.2: Percent of employed persons 16 years and over in Census-defined occupational categories for selected North Carolina counties (U. S. Bureau of the Census 1993b).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupational Category</th>
<th>North Carolina</th>
<th>Burke County</th>
<th>Orange County</th>
<th>Western Consortium</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Managerial and professional specialty occ.</td>
<td>22.3</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>37.1</td>
<td>19.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical, sales and administrative support occ.</td>
<td>28.8</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>32.0</td>
<td>25.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service occ.</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>13.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farming, forestry, and fishing occ.</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Precision production, craft, and repair occ.</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>16.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operators, fabricators, and laborers</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>32.1</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>22.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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care policies and programs, particularly considering the fact that close to 70 percent of its resident women with children under age six are in the labor force (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1992b). Orange County offers some of the highest quality child care in North Carolina. To begin with, almost half of the licensed preschool spaces in the county meet the state's top standards, a higher proportion than any other urban area in the state. Secondly, the county has an excellent child care resource and referral agency, in operation since 1984, which helps families find child care. The agency also provides a number of services to family day care providers in the area, including start-up assistance, a Child Care Food Program, a toy and resource library, an accreditation project, and the coordination of a Family Day Care Association. Third, the county's ten largest employers do have fairly progressive family policies, offering a range of programs such as on-site child care, resource and referral services, financial assistance with child care, and reduced fees at certain child care centers (Orange County Smart Start Application Team 1993). Finally, in keeping with this progressive attitude towards child care, there are a number of local non-profit organizations that work to improve the affordability and quality of child care in the area by providing subsidies for parents and technical assistance and training to child care providers.

Despite this positive description of the child care situation in Orange County, the area does have child care problems. As stated in their application for Smart Start funding, "Orange County is a community of disparities. We have some of the best resources and services in the state, yet they are not universally available nor are they targeted to those who need them most" (Orange County Smart Start Application Team 1993, 5). One reason services are not available to all those who need them is that far from being a uniformly wealthy area, Orange County has pockets of poverty, both
urban and rural, which are exacerbated by the county's high cost of living. Child care is financially out of reach for many of these less well-to-do residents. The costs of basic needs such as child care and housing in Orange County are the highest in the state. As a result, when Orange County submitted its application for Smart Start funding in 1993, it had an average of 300 people a month on a waiting list for subsidized care.

3.3.2.2. Smart Start's Accomplishments

Newspaper articles from September 1993 to September 1995 give concrete examples of how Smart Start improved the availability, affordability, and quality of care in Orange County during its first full year of implementation. First, Smart Start has increased the availability of child care in the county by eliminating a waiting list of 300 children needing subsidized care. Smart Start funds also created several spots at area preschools for homeless children while helping their parents find jobs, transportation, and housing. In terms of the affordability of child care in the county, as of March 1995, 355 children of working parents had received Smart Start day care subsidies. These subsidies constitute the largest part (roughly a third) of Orange County's Smart Start budget. Third, Smart Start has also improved the quality of child care in Orange County. As of spring 1995, 28 day care centers and 18 family day care homes had received funds to improve their curriculum and facilities. Smart Start funds paid for classes for day care workers, day care teacher pay incentives, a new teacher substitute pool, a nurse who is available to all local centers, and a librarian to visit child care centers and homes to encourage reading; all of these initiatives address the issue of child care quality.
3.3.3 Burke County

Nestled in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains, Burke County (population 60,248) is situated in the heart of the piedmont crescent industrial region. Morganton (population 12,522), located 60 miles northwest of Charlotte and 50 miles east of Asheville, is the county seat and largest town; the county's eight other towns each have fewer than 4,000 residents.

The textile and furniture industries dominate the economy of this area. The county's largest private employers, Drexel Heritage, Hanes, Alba-Waldensian, and Henredon, are all textile and furniture manufacturers (Business / North Carolina 1994). Though in decline over the past few decades, the textile industry is still a major employer of women in this area (Glass 1992). Burke County concentrates on knitting mills, which are small, staffed largely by women, and pay low wages relative to the rest of the industry (Stuart and Walcott 1975; U.S. Bureau of the Census 1996b). Knitting mills are the leading textile type in piedmont counties such as Burke where "the heavily male-dominated furniture industry also generates a 'by-product' supply of female labor" (Stuart and Walcott 1975, 205). Forty-six percent of the county's labor force is employed in manufacturing (Burke County Smart Start Application Team 1993). The main Census-defined occupational category for this area is that of operators, fabricators, and laborers (Table 3.2). Many of the county's residents also find employment in county, state, and federal government jobs; Burke County is home to a regional community college, the North Carolina School for the Deaf, a regional correctional facility, and a regional center for mentally retarded children.

Burke County's per capita income at $11,604 is below the state average by almost $1300 (Table 3.1). In addition, nearly 30 percent of full-time workers in the county are working for wages that are less than the
poverty level (Burke County Smart Start Application Team 1993). The largest percentage (12) of these "working poor" are employed in manufacturing. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the textile, apparel, and furniture industries tend to be labor-intensive, low-wage, low-skill, and non-unionized.

3.3.3.1 Child Care Resources and Needs

Burke County has a very large population of working women (72 percent of women with children under age six are in the labor force (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1992b)), but does not have adequate child care resources to serve the needs of this population. The county’s application for Smart Start funding states a clear need to improve the quality and quantity of day care. At the time the application was submitted in 1993, only one child care center in the county met the state’s top licensing standards (“AA”). Although a few programs do exist to help working parents and their children, the resources pale in comparison to those available in Orange County.

Burke County also has a shortage of child care spaces. Given the fact that many businesses in the county (e.g. apparel and textile manufacturers) employ a largely female work force, one would expect greater business and industrial involvement in child care. In fact, few companies offer child care programs or assistance. A notable exception is Neuville Industries, a hosiery manufacturer which offers on-site day care as well as a host of other child care benefits to its employees; this company has appeared seven times in Working Mother magazine’s list of 100 best companies for working mothers.

In addition to needing a higher quality and greater quantity of child care, many Burke County residents also need access to particular kinds of child care. Parents in this area have expressed concern about the lack of flexible hours of child care for people working evening, night, and weekend
shifts; this issue is particularly relevant in a place where many of the employment opportunities for women are in manufacturing and service sectors, jobs that do not necessarily operate on a 8:00-5:00 schedule.

Cost is yet another barrier to child care access in Burke County. As previously mentioned, nearly 30 percent of the county's families fall in the category of "working poor." Although child care is less expensive here than in Orange County, many families in this area cannot afford the full cost of quality child care.

Burke County's application for Smart Start funding states the need to ensure access to child care for an increasingly ethnically diverse population. The 1990 Census reports that 92 percent of the county's population are White, seven percent African American, one percent Asian, and less than one percent are of Hispanic origin (U. S. Bureau of the Census 1993b). But the Smart Start application team claims that although the county's population is predominantly White, growing numbers of Hispanics and Asian Americans, primarily Laotians, are relocating into the county. They further argue that the Hispanic community is the most underserved population in the service delivery system and that language and cultural differences make it more difficult to reach these populations to inform them of the services available to them and to help them gain access to community resources.

3.3.3.2 Smart Start's Accomplishments

Newspaper accounts suggest that Smart Start has improved the availability of child care services in Burke County. Smart Start funds added day care slots for infants and toddlers; nearly everyone with whom I spoke said that day care for infants was extremely difficult to find. Smart Start also provided money to begin child care resource and referral services and to establish family support services at three satellite sites outside of the main
city of Morganton in order to make services more accessible. In addition, Smart Start paid to hire someone to work with the growing Hispanic population to help them find day care and serve as an interpreter during visits to social services, doctor's offices, and other crucial services. Finally, Smart Start funded programs to help teenage mothers learn about caring for their children by working in a day care center.

In terms of improving the affordability of child care in Burke County, Smart Start funds were used to expand the Department of Social Services subsidy levels so more parents could qualify for financial assistance. Smart Start also positively affected the quality of child care in the county in several ways. First, it provided money to centers to improve their quality, both in terms of equipment and materials and in lower class sizes and teacher-to-child ratios. Smart Start provided funding to train child care workers and improve their salaries. Finally, Smart Start money established a Loan Program to lend out day care equipment and furniture to area day cares.

3.3.4 Western Consortium

The third study area is comprised of the seven westernmost counties of North Carolina -- Haywood, Jackson, Macon, Swain, Graham, Clay, and Cherokee -- plus the Qualla Boundary Reservation of the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Indians. These counties are considered as one region in this study because they have a long history of regional collaboration on planning and child care issues, and applied for and secured Smart Start funding as one geographical unit. This mountainous and overwhelmingly rural area has a total population of 143,076. The region's largest city, Waynesville (Haywood County), has only 5,653 inhabitants. Clay, Graham, and Swain counties have fewer than 10,000 residents. Nearly 50 percent of the land area of the region is public property (over 82 percent in Swain County); consequently,
the tax base for local government income is very small (Region A Smart Start Application Team 1993).

This scenic and remote region is one of the poorest areas in the state. Income ($9,941) and education (13.1 percent with at least a bachelor's degree) levels lag far behind state averages (Table 3.1), and unemployment and underemployment rates are high. Aside from Haywood County, which manufactures paper and rubber products, most of the area's employment is either in the tourism industry (many of the federal public land holdings in the area are scenic attractions such as the Great Smoky Mountain National Park) or the "cut-and-sew" apparel manufacturing. The tourism service jobs are low-paying and seasonal in nature. The apparel-making positions, also low-paying and usually filled by female workers, are increasingly vulnerable to being moved offshore to even lower wage areas (Region A Smart Start Application Team 1993).

3.3.4.1 Child Care Resources and Needs

Child care needs in this western portion of the state far outweigh available resources. However, the region does have a strong advocate for child care in the form of the Southwestern Child Development Commission (SWCDC), a private, non-profit organization which has provided 25 years of continuous and comprehensive child care services throughout the seven counties. SWDCDC operates 35 top licensing standard ("AA") child care centers throughout the region, assists families with selecting and using child care services, offers training and technical assistance to child care providers, and conducts community awareness activities on child care issues. Despite the efforts of this organization, the quality of child care is very uneven throughout this region. The turnover rate of providers is very high, creating an unstable child care environment. Additionally, because there is not
enough affordable child care to meet the needs of the region, even the poorer quality providers stay at full enrollment and thus have little incentive to improve.

There are numerous barriers to accessing child care in this region. Transportation to child care is a genuine problem in this area of rural isolation, which has no generally scheduled public transportation and many poor-quality roads. In addition, many of the parents and children of this region have special needs. This area has extremely high rates of poverty, teenage births, and infant mortality. Consequently, the residents need social services, including affordable child care. These services must also reach a diverse population, as this region includes the Qualla Boundary Cherokee Reservation.

Perhaps the most serious barrier to child care access is the severe poverty that grips much of this region. As discussed earlier, many of the employment opportunities in the area are in seasonal tourist jobs, cut-and-sew apparel manufacturing, and service jobs such as fast food. These jobs offer low wages and few benefits, making it very difficult for parents to afford child care; at the time the application for Smart Start funding was submitted, there were nearly 500 children on a waiting list for subsidized child care. With the types of jobs available in the area, there is also a need for evening and weekend child care hours to accommodate shift work.

**3.3.4.2 Smart Start's Accomplishments**

Newspaper accounts detail some of Smart Start’s accomplishments in western North Carolina. In terms of child care availability, 266 children had been removed from waiting lists for subsidized child care as of spring 1995. There was also a 24 percent increase in the number of centers serving low-income children (in other words, participating in a subsidized child care
program). Three additional providers in the region now offer evening or weekend subsidized care to support families who work in non-weekday employment.

In terms of the affordability of child care in the region, Smart Start funds enabled an extension of the income scale for subsidized care so that more low-income families could qualify for assistance. Families transitioning away from welfare now have an additional six months of subsidized child care (for a total of 18 months). In addition, students at four-year colleges and universities are now eligible for child care subsidies; previously, only those enrolled in two-year programs at community colleges were eligible.

Finally, western North Carolina has also experienced improvements in child care quality as a result of Smart Start. New payment rates were developed for the region's child care providers who serve low-income or subsidized children. These rates provide a financial incentive to upgrade facilities by enabling providers to purchase new equipment and toys, improve staff-to-child ratios, and reduce group sizes. Also, 59 area providers have given raises or bonuses to child care workers.

3.4 Conclusions

One can make a strong case for choosing North Carolina as the location for a study of access to child care. I chose this particular state for social, economic, political, and geographical reasons. First, North Carolina faces child care challenges posed by the social and economic reality of an unusually high percentage of women in the labor force. Explanations often cited for this high employment rate are that the state's low manufacturing wages require most families to have a second income and that jobs have historically been available to women in North Carolina's textile industry. These high female employment rates, combined with a national trend of more
women with young children in the labor force, mean that child care is a pressing issue in the state.

A second reason for choosing North Carolina as my case study is that "Smart Start", a program to improve the state's child care services, is near the top of the governor's political agenda. Smart Start makes North Carolina an interesting and relevant place to examine child care accessibility for a few reasons. First, the program is already making a material difference in child care conditions across the state. Of additional geographical interest is the fact that child care improvements vary by local area since Smart Start is decentralized in nature. Secondly, supporters of Smart Start tout the program as a model for improving the nation's child care. Consequently, the successes and failures of the program have implications that extend beyond the borders of North Carolina. Finally, Smart Start has generated debates that inform broader issues relating to child care.

Thirdly, North Carolina is an interesting place to study child care issues for other geographical reasons. Regional variation in employment opportunities for women suggests there may also be locational differences in the availability, affordability, and quality of child care. For this reason I chose three contrasting locales (all of which qualified for the first round of Smart Start funding) for an in-depth study of child care access. In so doing I also tease out some of the ways that place matters in shaping child care access. Orange County is an economically thriving area with many university and high-technology jobs. Burke County is in a declining industrial area with a high concentration of jobs in the textile and furniture industries. The third study site is a consortium of the state's seven westernmost counties, an historically poor area where many of the jobs are in the low-paying tourist industry and "cut-and-sew" apparel manufacturing industry.
In addition to these social, economic, and geographical contrasts, my three study areas differ in child care needs and available resources. Orange County has many child care resources, but the area's high cost of living make these services financially unavailable to its less well-off residents. Many Burke County residents need evening and weekend child care hours to accommodate manufacturing shift-work schedules. Residents from the western consortium of counties face numerous barriers to accessing child care, including cost, lack of transportation, and irregular work schedules. The Smart Start program has already made improvements in the child care situations in these three areas.

Place matters in terms of child care availability, affordability, and quality. In the next chapter I will explore how these place differences, combined with people's differing social and economic circumstances, help shape child care options, strategies, and difficulties at the household and local levels.
CHAPTER 4
ACCESS TO CHILD CARE: HOUSEHOLD AND LOCAL LEVELS

The previous chapter provided an overview of the child care situation in three locations in North Carolina and briefly discussed some of the larger structural processes at work shaping the regional child care scenes. Though these larger structural forces are certainly important, access to child care is experienced at the personal level. In order to get at the complexities of child care choices, constraints, and access, we must reach individuals in their household and local settings.

This chapter examines how gender relations, labor market position (occupation and income level), family structure (dual-parent versus single-parent), and race, as experienced at the household level, interact in particular locales to shape parents' child care options and strategies. I will make the following arguments. First, child care social relations are clearly gendered; women shoulder the greater responsibility for arranging and managing child care. I present evidence of this gendered division of labor for child care-related tasks such as finding day care and transporting children to and from day care (and even filling out my questionnaire requesting child care information). Secondly, child care is a crucial linkage between home and work and often shapes employment possibilities. Many parents indicated through questionnaire comments and interviews that their children's day care situations affected their work schedules. Thirdly, child care is viewed by many employers as a private issue outside the realm of work, reinforcing the false notion of a public/private divide. Few employers of parents I interviewed and surveyed had formal "family-friendly" policies, even though child care problems have the potential to affect employees' attendance and
performance. Fourthly, for many families, child care arrangements are fragmented, complex, and precarious as a result of the necessity of forging individual solutions with little help from employers or government. These complex situations are further evidence that child care is largely viewed as a personal rather than a societal issue.

In this chapter I will use empirical evidence to demonstrate that different groups of people (based on some combination of characteristics such as geographic location, family type, occupation, income, and race) rely on different sources of information to find child care; have different space-time limitations in choosing care; experience some different problems negotiating that care; and have different resources available to them for dealing with these problems. I will also highlight some of the commonalities of child care usage and difficulties among different groups of parents—such as the gendered division of labor in child care, the critical nature of the home-work connection, and the high turnover rate among child care workers—all of which point to larger structural problems.

The chapter is organized as follows. First I define the concept of "access to child care." Secondly, I outline the methodologies used at the household and local levels of the analysis: participant observation, and survey and interview techniques. Thirdly, I report findings related to: 1) the search for child care, 2) managing the "everyday", 3) juggling employment and child care, 4) financial assistance and benefits, and 5) parents' satisfaction with their children's day care. Finally, I discuss the broader implications of my findings.

4.1 Defining Access

Access to a service such as child care may be defined in different ways. The "location theory" and "territorial justice" traditions of the 1970s and
1980s define child care access primarily in terms of the spatial distribution of the service (e.g. Freestone 1977; Holmes et al. 1972; Pinch 1987, 1984); distance and availability are key. More recent feminist work on the subject (e.g. England 1996d; Fincher 1991; Holloway 1998a, 1998b; Rose 1993a, 1990; Rose and Chicoine 1991) stresses the idea that access to child care depends not only on service distribution but also on characteristics of the service recipient -- such as socio-economic level -- which may make them more or less able to take advantage of the service; in other words, use of child care depends not only on availability of the service but also on the ways access to the service is structured.

The logistical issues of location, timing, and cost are certainly important in evaluating access to child care. However, I discovered in the course of this research that I needed a broader definition of "access" in order to capture more of the reality of people's child care choices and constraints. My conception of access is based on recent feminist geographic research on child care (e.g. Dyck 1996; England 1996d; Holloway 1998a, 1998b; Rose 1993a, 1990) which points to both structural concerns (such as distance, cost, and time) and agency (such as personal networks and socialized expectations) as shapers of child care access. In this study I understand access to child care to depend upon a combination of the following: 1) affordability (how well it fits into parents' budgets); 2) location and hours of operation of the day care center or family day care home (how well it meshes with parents' daily schedules); 3) channels of information (how parents initially find their child's day care center or home and how cognizant they are of other options); and 4) trust and childrearing compatibility (how safe people feel leaving their children at any particular center and how
well the practices at a particular center "fit" with their own vision of childrearing).

In order to shed light on accessibility issues for people in different circumstances (e.g. labor market position, family structure, race) and locations, I will explore, using questionnaire and interview responses, the process of how parents obtain and negotiate day care for their children. In particular I will examine 1) the search for child care, 2) managing the "everyday", 3) juggling employment and child care, 4) financial assistance and benefits, and 5) parents' satisfaction with their children's day care. Before examining these processes, I first describe the methods used to obtain my results.

4.2 Methodology

As discussed in Chapter One, understanding access to child care for distinct groups of people in different places requires a combination of qualitative and quantitative techniques. To reiterate, a multiple methods approach is advantageous in that it helps minimize errors or problems associated with one particular method. It also enables one to address more complex questions, and can provide validity, meaning, and context to information gathered or generated. By blending qualitative and quantitative techniques in a triangulated strategy, it is possible to capture some of the richness and complexity of real people's lives while also placing their particular situations into a broader spatial, social, and economic context. As McLafferty (1995, 440) phrases it, "By coupling the power of the general with the insight and nuance of the particular, such research illuminates people's lives and the larger contexts in which they are embedded."

At the household and local levels of the analysis, I tacked back and forth between qualitative and quantitative methods. I first used participant...
observation to give me an "on the ground" understanding of the workings of a child care center and to help me prepare appropriate survey and interview questions. I then designed and administered a parent questionnaire (approximately 1,980 sent out and 535 returned, for a response rate of 27 percent), while also interviewing 67 day care directors, to identify broad trends and significant differences among people in terms of child care access, usage, and difficulties. The survey was designed to generate both qualitative information (in the form of extensive written comments) as well as quantitative information (coded responses). Finally, I conducted approximately 40 follow-up interviews with parents in order to hear their "voices" in this project, to collect information too complex for a fixed-format questionnaire, and to help me better understand my survey results.

Throughout this chapter I will provide specific examples of how information generated by one method helped explain, support, or contextualize information gained by another method.

4.2.1 Participant Observation

In the spring of 1995 as I contemplated a parent questionnaire, I began a year-long volunteer effort at a local preschool in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Once a week I assisted teachers in the classroom by reading to and playing with the children, running errands, and in general providing "an extra set of hands." I had frequent contact with the director and several opportunities to (briefly) talk with parents as they dropped off or picked up their children. This exercise in participant observation, a research technique which focuses on learning from people rather than studying people (Spradley 1980), afforded me an insider's view of the routine of a day care center and gave me some insight into the everyday experiences of directors, teachers, parents, and children. This experience was both enjoyable and educational,
and aided me in fieldwork preparation. For example, understanding the routine workings of a day care center helped me work out the logistics of how to reach parents with a questionnaire, decide which issues were important to ask about, and frame the questions in a language that would be familiar to parents and child care personnel. In addition, the preschool's director permitted me to pre-test my questionnaire at her center before distributing it in North Carolina, which enabled me to pinpoint and revise unclear questions.

4.2.2 The Questionnaire

The reconnaissance research trip I described in Chapter Three was very useful in providing me with a broad view of the child care scene in each of the three areas and in confirming my choice of study areas. Nonetheless, in order to address questions of child care access for people in different socioeconomic circumstances and places, I needed to reach individual families to understand their child care stories, concerns, and strategies at the micro-scale. For this reason I spent the next several months developing a questionnaire for parents. The questionnaire plus related interviews are the main sources of information for the household and local levels of the analysis.

The questionnaire, developed with guidance from my dissertation committee, queries parents about themselves, their families, and their child care arrangements (see Appendix). The basic purpose of the survey was to ascertain -- for different groups of people -- the origins and logistics of their child care arrangements, their degree of satisfaction with these arrangements, and problems with their child care. These issues would lead me to a better understanding of access for parents in different socioeconomic circumstances and geographical areas.

As is the case with any survey, this questionnaire has certain limitations. I discovered, for example, that it is difficult to capture the
complexity of some people's child care commuting arrangements within a fixed-format survey (some people have different routines on different days of the week, depending on school or work schedules). Hanson and Pratt (1995, 83) note two of the shortcomings of surveys when reflecting upon their own fieldwork experiences: structured questionnaires "impose a fragmenting grid that makes it difficult to understand the complexity of, meanings of, and interconnections among, different events and strands of life." The fixed-format also creates an interpretive grid which illuminates some things but may hide other things from view. To minimize the limitations inherent in this valuable research tool, I followed up the questionnaire with interviews to help fill some of the gaps.

The thirty-three questions on the form are of three general types: 1) socioeconomic "background" information, 2) "description" of child care, and 3) "opinion" about child care arrangements. The "background" category consists mainly of demographic items such as sex, age, marital status, race, education, employment status, occupation, income, and residential location. In the "description" section I asked parents about the specifics of their child care arrangements (e.g. type and hours of care, amount paid per month), their use of informal child care, how they found their current day care center or home, their commute to and from day care, any financial assistance with child care and/or job-related child care benefits they may receive, and their awareness of the Smart Start program. The "opinion" section queries parents about why they chose their day care center or home, how satisfied they are with it, if they were on a waiting list for enrollment, what changes they would recommend, if they would prefer using another type of child care, whether their job creates difficulties for their child care arrangements, and how "family-friendly" they perceive their employer to be (see Appendix).
I chose to distribute the questionnaire to parents through their children's day care centers and family day care homes rather than by mail because I did not have a target mailing list of parents using child care services. In addition, this strategy allowed me to gain feedback from directors as well as parents. To choose a sample of child care sites, I first obtained a listing of all licensed day care centers and registered family day care homes in each study area from the Division of Child Development of the North Carolina Department of Human Resources. I then took a random sample of 40 centers and homes for each of my three study sites from this list and sent letters to the directors briefly explaining the project and my interest in their center or home. I followed up these letters with telephone calls to the directors requesting an appointment to interview them and distribute the questionnaire to parents. Although I believe this sampling strategy is appropriate for this project, it did miss certain types of child care arrangements. I did not reach people who use: 1) an in-home caregiver such as a nanny or sitter; 2) unlicensed care which would not appear on the state's official listing of day care center and family day care homes; or 3) sequential scheduling in which parents arrange their work schedules (usually involving shift work) so that one parent is always available to watch the children. Also, I missed people who need child care but cannot secure it for reasons such as lack of availability or prohibitive cost.

During August, September, and October of 1995, I visited 20-25 day care centers and homes in each of my three study areas (67 total). I was surprised to find that most directors I contacted agreed to see me. All but one of the directors I interviewed was female. I discovered over the course of this research that the "landscape" of child care is populated almost entirely by women (and children, of course). For each visit I toured the center or home
and conducted semi-structured interviews with the director. I asked questions such as the following:

- What is the socio-economic background of your parent population?
- Is there much variation in the income levels and types of jobs held?
- What is the racial composition of your parent population?
- Do you have many single-parent families?
- Are any of the children in your center on financial assistance?
- Has your center or home benefited from Smart Start funding? If so, in what ways?
- Do you have a waiting list for enrollment?
- How do parents find out about your center or home?
- When and why did you become involved in day care provision?
- What is your biggest concern as a day care director?

Interviews generally lasted 30-60 minutes and were informal and friendly in nature despite the hectic schedules of most directors. I became quite accustomed to interruptions by phone calls, teachers, parents, and children. I view these rather disjointed interviews as valuable reflections of reality. I had originally planned on tape-recording the interviews but decided not to when I saw how disjointed the interviews would be. In some cases I followed the director around the center and spoke to her as she was dealing with teachers and center business. Also, since a few providers in family day care homes incorrectly assumed that I had been sent by a state regulatory agency to "check up" on them, I did not want to make them more uncomfortable by recording our conversations. Instead, I took as many notes as I could while we spoke, then recorded as many details as I could recall when I returned to my car.
Staeheli and Lawson (1994) and others have warned that the assumption of "insider" status based on gender alone ignores significant dimensions of difference among women (e.g. race, class position, sexuality). However, I do believe that my interview experiences were positively affected by the fact that I am a woman (like all but one of my interviewees) and that I have personal interests and experience in child care (I had mentioned my preschool volunteer activity in my letter of introduction). At least four directors commented that I was "easy to talk to." I suspect that my youth and student status also contributed to my non-threatening image. Clearly, my "position" affected both the information I gathered and the ways I interpreted it, supporting Haraway's (1991) assertion that all knowledge is "situated." The "politics of location" (i.e. the researcher's location) therefore influenced my ability to gain access to information about child care.

The director later distributed my questionnaire to all the parents as they picked up their children. My sample thus consists of all the parents who chose to participate from randomly selected day care centers and family day care homes in my three study sites. I returned to the center or home 10-14 days later and collected any completed forms. I received a total of 535 questionnaires (from approximately 1,980 distributed) from the three study areas -- 109 from Orange County, 208 from western North Carolina, and 218 from Burke County. These figures are high for Burke County and somewhat low for Orange County. Burke County has several very large day care centers which had good response rates, while Orange County has a much higher proportion of smaller day care centers and family day care homes which contributed fewer completed questionnaires. My overall questionnaire return rate was 27 percent, which is higher than the average return rate for a mail survey (about 10 percent).
Because I hope to make a practical as well as intellectual contribution on the subject of child care access, I offered to provide directors with (anonymous) parental feedback on problems and suggestions for their centers. Twenty-five of the 67 directors requested and received a report from me. I also sent a more comprehensive report to child care advocates in my three study areas. These actions were a modest attempt on my part to "give something back" to the people who so generously shared with me their time and thoughts. In addition, I offered to parents who filled out the questionnaire a chance to participate in a random drawing for $100 to be used for child care expenses. I hoped that this gesture would both improve survey return rates and demonstrate that I valued parents' time.

Two general trends are worth noting before I discuss the results of my survey. First, 94 percent of the questionnaires were completed by women, even though I designed the survey for either parent to fill out. This gendered division of labor, in which women take responsibility for most matters relating to child care, is a prominent and recurring theme in virtually all research in this area. Secondly, many parents wrote extensive comments on their questionnaires, adding valuable depth and detail to their answers. The comments ranged from a sentence or two on satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their child care arrangements to a whole page on the general lack of understanding and cooperation on the part of employers when their workers have child care difficulties. Many of these written remarks were similar in nature to the follow-up phone interviews I later conducted (see below). These comments were substantial enough to constitute a complementary data set to the questionnaire responses and the phone interviews, which I discuss in section 4.2.3.
4.2.2.1 Data Analysis of Questionnaire

I performed a series of statistical routines on the questionnaire data to make sense of this rich but unwieldy source of information. These analyses, which amount to "descriptive counting" helped me see how characteristics of respondents such as their location, labor market position, family structure, and race affected their answers to questions about their child care situations.

My first step was to enter the 535 completed questionnaires into two SAS databases, one for "description" variables and the other for "opinion" variables. I had previously assigned each questionnaire a unique eight-digit identifying code: the first digit represented the county; the second, the city; the third, whether the questionnaire came from a day care center or family day care home; the fourth and fifth, an identifying number for the center or home; and the sixth through eighth, an identifying number for the individual respondent. I used the identifying code to link description and opinion files by respondent, to composite responses by study area, and to match questionnaire responses (quantitative data) with written comments and interviews (qualitative data).

In the next step I calculated parents' responses by study area (Orange County, Burke County, and Western Consortium), occupation (pink-, blue-, and white-collar), family structure (married or living with a partner vs. divorced, separated, widowed, or never married), race, and income (<$20,000; $20-50,000; >$50,000).

Though the univariate statistics were somewhat helpful in summarizing broad trends in the questionnaire responses, I needed a multivariate view of the data in order to draw out details of the relationships between key variables and responses. I used a clustering routine to achieve this goal.
Before performing the cluster analysis, I ran a Principal Components Analysis (PCA) to eliminate covariance in the data. Dependent variable categories included: age, marital status, race, work status, education, income, and occupation. I first converted any nominal categories to binary dummy variables (ordinal and interval categories were unchanged). The PCA was then conducted on these variables. Based on a scree plot of explained variance, I decided to retain six components, which accounted for 32 percent of variation in the data. This transformation reduced my original 46 dependent variables (the number of variables appears high because each nominal variable was represented by multiple dummy variables) to six independent components.

Next I performed a cluster analysis on the 535 questionnaires using Ward's Minimum Variance Cluster Analysis. The scores of the six components from the previous step were used to cluster the questionnaires into groups (484 of 535 questionnaires were classed). The eight groups I chose based on my analysis of the scree plot explained 48 percent of the variation in the data. These clusters each represent some combination (or "bundle") of households which exhibit similar characteristics on the principal component scores. I then once again summarized "description" and "opinion" responses for each group and performed Chi-square analysis to test for significant differences across the groups.

Chi-square is a goodness-of-fit significance test that can be used to compare an observed distribution of frequencies to a theoretical distribution (Earickson and Harlin 1994). If the differences between the observed and expected frequencies are small, then one may conclude that the differences could have arisen by chance. If, however, the discrepancies between what is expected and what is observed are large, then the conclusion is that the
frequencies are significantly different from one another. In this chapter's tables, individual cells with large differences are highlighted since they contribute the most to the large Chi-square value.

The seven multivariate groups (the eighth was not included in the analysis for reasons to be explained below) are key to the household and local levels of analysis. I have labelled each of these multivariate groups according to their most distinguishing characteristic and will refer to them as such throughout this chapter. Table 4.1 describes these groups in detail.

Group 1, the largest group with 148 people, incorporates the highest percentage (71%) of people reporting earnings in the $20,000-50,000 range; I label this group the "working middle class" (so termed because the income range suggests middle class while the predominant occupations suggest lower-middle and working class). Over 99 percent of the group's members report full-time employment. The majority of questionnaire respondents work in pink-collar occupations such as clerical and service work, and their spouses are employed in blue-collar positions such as machine/equipment operators and skilled craft workers. A chi-square test reveals that a statistically higher than expected number of "working middle class" group members reside in Burke County (Table 4.2). (This fact is not surprising given previously cited figures on the high number of "working poor" in this county.)

Membership in Group 2 is very distinct; all 96 members of this group work in professional occupations. Everyone in this "professional" group is also married, White, and employed full-time. This group has the highest average income of all groups; a fifth earn more than $70,000, and over half earn more than $50,000. This "professional" group is well-represented in
Table 4.1: Characteristics of multivariate groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th># People</th>
<th>Family Type</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Income</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Working Middle Class</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>90% married</td>
<td>99% White</td>
<td>99% employed</td>
<td>middle</td>
<td>mostly pink-collar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>full-time</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>100% married</td>
<td>100% White</td>
<td>100% employed</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>professional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>full-time</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial Minority</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>60% married</td>
<td>85% minority</td>
<td>75% employed</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>mixed; sales largest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(48% Native Amer.)</td>
<td>full-time</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing Household</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>95% married</td>
<td>100% White</td>
<td>50% employed</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>professional; and professional spouses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>part-time</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>42% home</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>full-time</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>87% single</td>
<td>100% White</td>
<td>82% employed</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>mixed; service largest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>full-time</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>57% single</td>
<td>89% White</td>
<td>93% FT student; 7% PT student</td>
<td>low-mid</td>
<td>student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>student</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>52% single</td>
<td>91% Af. Am.</td>
<td>80% employed</td>
<td>middle</td>
<td>mixed; mostly pink-and blue-collar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>full-time</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.2: Residences of seven multivariate groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Burke</th>
<th>Orange</th>
<th>WNC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Working Middle Class</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observed</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected</td>
<td>59.4</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>57.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>-10</td>
<td>-1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observed</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected</td>
<td>38.6</td>
<td>20.1</td>
<td>37.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>-11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial Minority</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observed</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference</td>
<td>-7.8</td>
<td>-0.6</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing Household</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observed</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected</td>
<td>30.5</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>29.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference</td>
<td>-4.5</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>-7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observed</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>26.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference</td>
<td>-3.3</td>
<td>-7.2</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observed</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>10.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference</td>
<td>-6.2</td>
<td>-4.9</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observed</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>13.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>-9.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chi-Square Statistic = 75.90   p = 0.0001
Large positive deviations from expected are highlighted in bold.
Burke and Orange Counties and significantly under-represented in western North Carolina.

Eighty-five percent of the members of Group 3 are in a racial minority, mostly Native Americans. (African Americans, the largest minority group in this study, are represented more significantly in another group.)

Approximately half of the 27 survey respondents in this group are married. Group members, most of whom reside in western North Carolina, have among the lowest incomes of families I surveyed. People in this group are employed in a variety of occupations, though "sales" is the predominant type of work.

The distinguishing characteristic of Group 4 is that 50 percent its members work part-time and 42 percent stay at home full-time to manage the household. Most of the questionnaire respondents in this group, which has the second highest average income (over half of the respondent families earn more than $50,000 a year), have spouses who work in professional occupations. Hanson and Pratt (1995) note that part-time work is used more frequently in higher-status households where husbands' wages make this possible. A significant proportion of this group resides in Orange County. All 76 members of this "managing household" group are White.

All 68 members of Group 5 are single (separated, divorced, widowed, or never married) or living on their own (married but not living with a spouse). This group has the lowest average income of all eight groups; over 80 percent of people earn less than $20,000 a year. The largest occupational category is service work. A statistically significant proportion of this all-White "single" group is from western North Carolina.

Group 6, the youngest of the seven groups, is comprised mostly of full-time students. These 28 group members, most of whom are White, have
among the lowest incomes, and live predominantly in the western part of the state. Fewer than half of the respondents in this group are married.

African Americans make up the majority of Group 7. Most members in this group are from Orange and Burke Counties, and work in pink-collar (clerical and service work) and blue-collar (machine/equipment operators) occupations. About half of the members are married. This group falls roughly in the middle of the eight groups in terms of income. This sample of African Americans is small for the state of North Carolina, reflecting the fact that I do not have a study site in the coastal plain region where African Americans are most heavily represented. In addition, day care centers in my study areas tend not to be well-integrated. As a result, one limitation of my sampling strategy of targeting centers rather than individuals (through a mail survey, for example) is that I may miss day care centers that are attended predominantly by African American children. Therefore I will not be able to address in this dissertation the issue of race as fully as I had originally planned. A good follow-up project would pay closer attention to this important variable.

There is a Group 8, but I did not include it in the analysis since it has only six members; the common bond in this odd little group is that all members have spouses who are farmers.

4.2.3 Written Responses and Telephone Interviews

Although the information provided by a large-scale questionnaire is invaluable in detecting broad trends and providing a context for particular situations, it is vital to hear individual stories as well. (Unbeknowst to me until I received the completed questionnaires, I would actually "hear" many of these individual stories through extensive written comments on the survey.) After administering the questionnaire, I spoke with parents on the telephone
about their child care situations. I would have preferred face-to-face interviews, but resource and time restrictions and personal safety considerations led me to conduct the interviews by telephone instead. An additional factor in choosing phone interviews over face-to-face interviews is the fact that several parents indicated on their questionnaires that phone interviews would fit more easily into their busy daily schedules. Though I may have missed some details by conducting interviews over the telephone rather than in person, some people may actually feel more comfortable and willing to divulge information over the phone.

I contacted 40 parents (10-15 per study area) for telephone interviews. All had indicated on their questionnaire a willingness to be interviewed. Of the 535 people who completed the survey, an impressive 268 (50 percent) of them gave me their names and phone numbers for follow-up interviews; I was very surprised that this many people would allow me to intrude in their lives once again. I believe this high response rate indicates the importance of child care issues to these families. In deciding whom to call for an interview, I attempted to select a cross section of people from a variety of socioeconomic and racial backgrounds. In some cases I also chose people who had written particularly interesting comments on their questionnaires which I wanted to follow up on.

The interviews were semi-structured and informal in nature. Once again my sample group was composed mostly of women. As previously discussed, the vast majority of questionnaire respondents were female, and most of the parents who consented to be interviewed were women. In addition, many of the men who did fill out the questionnaire gave their wives' names as the contact person. The gendered division of labor in child care in America is again apparent.
In the process of my work, I realized that tape-recording the interviews was inappropriate and, indeed, would adversely affect the mood of the conversation. As was the case with day care directors, my conversations with parents were generally friendly and occasionally chaotic; I could usually hear children's activities in the background (again, a reflection of the hectic nature of the interviewees' lives). I was again surprised by people's generosity with their time; only one or two people said they were too busy to talk. My impression was that most parents were quite willing to discuss a topic so important in their lives. I tried to let the conversation flow as much as possible in these semi-structured interviews, most of which lasted 20-40 minutes, and drew from my list of questions when needed. I asked parents questions such as:

• How did you find out about your current child care provider?

• Are you satisfied with your child care arrangements? Are there aspects you would change if you could?

• How "family-friendly" is your employer?

• What do you do when your child is sick? Do you have back-up child care?

• Who in your family deals with most of the child care arrangements?

• Could you describe for me a typical day in your household (in terms of getting themselves and their children to and from work, child care, school, other activities, etc.)?

• What are your coping strategies for juggling home and work (or other) responsibilities?

• What is your biggest concern about child care?

Many people did not seem to understand the question about coping strategies. In retrospect I suppose that question is phrased in the language of academia. Parents certainly have coping strategies, some of them quite complex, a point which emerged from their responses to other questions.
However, I am not sure that people necessarily thought of what they were doing as a conscious strategy; it was perhaps just what they needed to do to get through their day, week, and month. I think many parents did not have the luxury of much time for self-reflection.

Not surprisingly, some of the more interesting responses came at the end of the conversation when I asked the very general question of whether they would like to tell me anything else about their child care arrangements. Perhaps people felt more at ease at this point or were less concerned about giving a precise answer.

Most of these questions were follow-ups to the information gathered on the survey; they provided me with additional detail which in some cases aided in my interpretation of questionnaire findings. For example, one parent indicated on her survey that her employer is very flexible about work-family conflicts. A subsequent interview with her revealed that this "job flexibility" simply meant that she was allowed to take her child to work with her at 5:00 a.m. until the day care center opened at 6:30, a situation which she admitted was less than ideal. At the same time, the questionnaire helped me understand how typical or atypical individuals' particular situations were.

Sprague and Zimmerman (1993) argue that quantitative information (such as that gained from my questionnaire) is necessary when you want to know the pervasiveness of a problem as well as the seriousness of it. For instance, several parents complained in written comments on their surveys or during interviews that they made just enough money to disqualify themselves from financial assistance with child care expenses. Analysis of the 535 questionnaires revealed that the "working middle class" group is indeed caught in a financial squeeze in terms of child care; they receive much less
financial help than the lowest income groups but only very slightly more assistance than the highest income groups.

Questionnaires and interviews used in combination are powerful tools of analysis. In this study the interviews came closer to capturing the complexity of people's everyday lives as they attempted to juggle wage-earning and childrearing, and the questionnaire provided a context for these unique and often complicated stories.

4.3 Finding Good Child Care: Information Networks

Access to child care depends in some measure on access to information. How do parents proceed in selecting a day care center or family day care home for their child? The sources of information they rely upon and the criteria they use may tell us something about their range of options, their awareness of alternatives, and the constraints on their choices.

Table 4.3 indicates how all survey respondents located their child's current day care center or family day care home. The most commonly cited way of locating child care was through a friend. All groups except the "student" group listed friends as their primary source of information, with the "professional" and "managing household" groups reporting the highest percentages. (In her study of local childcare cultures in two areas in Britain, Holloway (1998b) found that more affluent parents relied more often than less well-to-do families on contacts between women to disseminate child care information.) Most parents relied on informal, localized knowledge and trusted channels of information to choose care for their children. This finding echoes other feminist geographic research that emphasizes the importance of locally-embedded knowledge and personal networks in women's negotiation of home and work responsibilities (e.g. Dyck 1996; England 1996d; Hanson and Pratt 1995). Women play an active role in both choosing their own child
Table 4.3: How all respondents found their day care center or home.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Number of People</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>friend</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>resource and referral</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>relative</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>employer</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>church</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>phone book</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>newspaper</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
care and in affecting their friends' child care decisions. The finding that people rely on their friends to help them find day care for their children also highlights the role that trust plays in choosing child care. Indeed, most people act on the recommendations of people they know personally.

The second most frequently cited ways of locating child care were through a **child care resource and referral agency** and through **relatives**. A resource and referral agency helps parents find child care by tracking local program vacancies and providing detailed information on services in the area. All three of my study sites have resource and referral agencies for the county or the region. Orange County's Child Care Networks has been in operation since 1984; the Southwestern Child Development Commission has provided child care information and services to the residents of western North Carolina for over 25 years; and Burke County started a child care resource and referral agency, Child Care Connections, in 1994 using Smart Start funds.

Table 4.4 shows that the seven multivariate groups have a statistically significant difference in resource and referral usage. The "student" and "racial minority" groups relied upon resource and referral services the most, with actual usage figures well above those expected in a chi-square distribution. One possible explanation for this pattern is that these groups have comparatively high rates of financial assistance, and child care resource and referral agencies often help coordinate the allocation of funds. Holloway (1998b) similarly found that lower income groups are more tied into the child care bureaucracy and tend to learn about their child care options through child care professionals. Also, the majority of people in the "student" and "racial minority" groups are from western North Carolina, a region which has a long-established, comprehensive child care resource and
Table 4.4: Use of resource and referral services in finding child care.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Did Use</th>
<th></th>
<th>Did Not Use</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Observed</td>
<td>Expected</td>
<td>Difference</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working Middle Class</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>-10</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>132</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>80</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial Minority</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>22.8</td>
<td>22.8</td>
<td>-3.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing Household</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>-3.1</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>64</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>57.2</td>
<td>57.2</td>
<td>-2.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>22.7</td>
<td>22.7</td>
<td>-4.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>29.5</td>
<td>29.5</td>
<td>-0.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chi-Square Statistic = 16.98  \( p = 0.009 \)
Large deviations from expected are highlighted in bold.
referral agency (that also offers a number of other child care services) to meet the significant social and economic needs of this population.

Resource and referral services were least often used by the "working middle class" and "managing household" groups. The "working middle class" is in a difficult position. They are much less likely than the "student" and "racial minority" groups to receive financial aid (and thus have fewer ties to formal child care bureaucracy), and their employers are less likely than those of professionals to offer resource and referral services as part of a benefits package. Some explanation may also reside in the fact that Burke County, the home of most of the "working middle class" group, established a child care resource and referral agency only recently. Finally, low resource and referral usage by the high-income "managing household" group may reflect Holloway's (1998b) finding that parents of higher socio-economic standing were more likely to use informal channels such as friends and less likely to use formal state-provided information and services when researching child care options.

These informal channels, however, are not necessarily family related. The "managing household" group, most of whom live in Orange County, and the "professional" group, well-represented in both Burke and Orange Counties, had the fewest people using relatives to help them find child care (Table 4.5). By contrast, the "student" group, the majority of whom reside in western North Carolina, had the highest percentage of people citing relatives as an important source of information for locating day care. Though this figure was not statistically significant, I do have anecdotal evidence from interviews with day care directors and parents that relatives play a bigger role in western North Carolina and Burke County than in Orange County. These search patterns again relate to Holloway's (1998b) finding that
Table 4.5: Use of relatives in finding child care.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Observed</th>
<th>Expected</th>
<th>Difference</th>
<th>Did Use</th>
<th>Did Not Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional and</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>27.1</td>
<td>-9.1</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>143.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing Household</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>22.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>50</td>
<td>43.6</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>231.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chi-Square Statistic = 6.81  \[ p = 0.033 \]
Large deviations from expected are highlighted in bold.
different socioeconomic groups use different sources of information to locate their child care providers. In her study, family networks and child care professionals shaped the awareness of provision possibilities much more for less affluent parents than for wealthier parents. It is also possible that some members of the "student" group still live at home with their parents and rely on them for child care information and assistance.

The strategy of using relatives to help locate child care has interesting geographical as well as socioeconomic implications. Geographic mobility, in the sense of moving away from "home" and family members, changes the nature of the community you live in and may affect your options for child care as well as your awareness of provision possibilities. More people in western North Carolina and Burke County said that they relied on relatives to help them find child care (and in many cases to supplement formal child care arrangements, a point I will discuss later in more detail). By contrast, questionnaire respondents from Orange County were much less likely to cite relatives as an important source of information. Orange County has a much higher concentration than western North Carolina of "professional" and "managing household" group members (who tend to have professional spouses); Burke County has a similar proportion of professionals but many fewer "managing householders" than Orange County. In the formal economy professionals seem more likely than other occupational groups to move from their original homeplaces to pursue careers. This socioeconomically-driven mobility shapes these parents' child care possibilities.

The category labelled "other" received the fourth highest number of responses in reference to the question "how did you find out about this day care center/home?" In general, the information sources people wrote in fell into one of the following categories: personal ties (e.g. know the owner, have
used the day care center or provider before for other children, went there herself as a child); social, health, or child care professionals (e.g. Department of Social Services, Health Department, Early Intervention Program); referral from another day care center; work-related link (e.g. presently employed at the day care center or have worked there in the past); local knowledge (e.g. drove by and saw a sign for the center, center is located near home); systematic search (i.e. went from place to place).

Geographically speaking, parents from western North Carolina were more likely to have found their child's day care through one or more of these sources; the most common source was that of social, health, or child care professionals. In terms of the multivariate groups, the "student" and "African American" groups had the highest percentages of parents who used these "other" sources to locate care (Table 4.6). Not coincidentally, these groups also have relatively high rates of financial assistance with child care.

The fifth most commonly cited source for locating child care was through an employer. The "working middle class" group cited this option more often than the other six groups (Table 4.7). I had expected the "professional" group to lead this category since they are more likely than other occupational groups to have child care benefits. However, the "working middle class" includes some day care teachers and employees of a hosiery manufacturer that offers on-site day care; both groups have direct links between their employers and their child care situations.

The least commonly used ways of locating child care were through the newspaper, a church, or the phone book (Table 4.3). As previously mentioned, personal networks and child care professionals are more important sources of child care information for most families.
Table 4.6: Use of "other" sources in finding child care.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Did Use</th>
<th>Did Not Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Observed</td>
<td>Expected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working Middle Class</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>16.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial Minority</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing Household</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chi-Square Statistic = 19.36  \( p = 0.004 \)
Large deviations from expected are highlighted in bold.
Table 4.7: Use of employer in finding child care.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Did Use</th>
<th>Did Not Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Observed</td>
<td>Expected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working Middle Class</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>12.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial Minority</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing Household</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chi-Square Statistic = 25.67  \( p = 0.0001 \)

Large deviations from expected are highlighted in bold.
In response to the question of \textit{why} they chose that particular day care center or home, all seven parent groups listed "good reputation/high quality" as a primary reason. Location factors (\textit{e.g.} child care is located near home, near workplace, on the way between home and workplace, and/or located near school) were most important for the "single" and "student" groups and least important for the "professional" and "managing household" groups (Table 4.8). Timing factors (\textit{e.g.} hours of operation fit parents' work schedules, center offers flexible hours) were most significant for the "working middle class," "racial minority," and "single" groups and least significant for the "managing household" and "professional" groups (Table 4.9). These findings suggest that although all parents want quality care for their children, some people, particularly single and lower income parents, are more restricted in their options by space-time logistics. It is also significant to note that three of the four groups for whom location and timing factors were most important reside primarily in western North Carolina, an area of the state known for its rural isolation and poverty. Characteristics of the place itself, such as poor transportation infrastructure, help explain some of the restrictions on child care options for area residents.

"Affordable cost" was cited most often as a deciding factor by the "student" and the "working middle class" groups; however, too few people listed this option to be able to test the relationship for statistical significance. Considering the large number of people who complained about the cost of child care and who listed "tuition aid" as the top recommended change at their day care center, perhaps "affordable cost" was poorly worded. Many people think that child care is too expensive and may not accept the "affordable" label.
Table 4.8: Influence of location factors on child care selection.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Location Cited</th>
<th>Location Not Cited</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Observed</td>
<td>Expected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional and</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>103.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing Household</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single and Student</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>114.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chi-Square Statistic = 6.44 \( p = 0.040 \)

Large deviations from expected are highlighted in bold.
Table 4.9: Influence of timing factors on child care selection.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Timing Cited</th>
<th>Timing Not Cited</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Working Middle Class</td>
<td>94 81.7 12.3</td>
<td>54 66.3 -12.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>50 53 -3</td>
<td>46 43 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial Minority</td>
<td>18 14.9 3.1</td>
<td>9 12.1 -3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing Household</td>
<td>30 42 -12</td>
<td>46 34 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>40 37.6 2.4</td>
<td>28 30.4 -2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>15 15.5 -0.5</td>
<td>13 12.5 0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>17 19.3 -2.3</td>
<td>18 15.7 2.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chi-Square Statistic = 14.56   \( p = 0.024 \)

Large deviations from expected are highlighted in bold.
These caveats notwithstanding, it is interesting to note that the "working middle class" group has a higher income than both the "single" and "racial minority" groups, yet a greater percentage of people in this group list cost as a factor in choosing child care. A possible explanation for this finding is the fact that the "working middle class" group receives much less financial assistance with child care expenses than do the other two groups. My field research revealed many instances of lower-middle income parents making just enough money to disqualify them from financial aid but not enough to really make ends meet. I will explore this "middle class squeeze" in more detail later in this chapter.

4.4 Managing the "Everyday": Gendered Patterns and Space-Time Logistics

Feminist geographers have emphasized the conceptual importance of the "everyday" and indeed have a strong empirical tradition of studying women's daily lived experiences (e.g. Dyck 1989; England 1996d; Hanson and Pratt 1995; Mackenzie 1989; Tivers 1985). Gillian Rose (1993, 17) argues that feminists are interested in the everyday, which is often overlooked in "mainstream" geography, because it "is the arena through which patriarchy is (re)created - and contested." In other words, the "everyday" may reveal how gender relations shape and/or limit people's daily activities and space-time patterns.

Of course, the everyday lives of women, men, and children are greatly significant in this study. Child care choices, constraints, and strategies are shaped in part by the space-time logistics of day-to-day activities and routines such as: the commutes to and from workplace and to and from day care; hours of employment and/or school; occasional or more frequent informal child care to fill the gaps left by formal arrangements; other "caring"
work; and all the errands that make a household run. Formal child care fits somewhere in this daily balance of activities, schedules, and obligations.

Although access involves more than time and space considerations, they do factor heavily in many people's child care options and schedules. As Julie, a 36 year-old married researcher, explained:

I have been surprised at how rigid and limited the timings are for childcare facilities in the Chapel Hill area. Many are only open between 8-5 - at best 7:30-5:30. Since both of us work at least 25 min. away from home - there is no flexibility for overtime, traffic problems, etc. Unless you work right next to the center, there is no way both parents can work a full 8 hr. day.

Valerie, a 21 year-old single housekeeper at a university, has even a more pressing problem. She works an odd shift (3:50 a.m. - 11:50 a.m.) so has to hire someone to take her child to and from day care.

My problem would be solve[d] if they had a 24 hour day care, and then I could drop him off myself and pick him up and I would feel more like my son[’s] mother.

Unfortunately, examples such as these abound. Child care arrangements for many parents are temporally restrictive and spatially complicated, resulting in complex daily geographies. When I asked parents to describe a typical day in their household, I usually received a fairly complicated answer. Hearing about these juggling acts made me wonder how single parents manage. As we see later in this chapter, the answer is "with greater difficulty." Women often carry the heavier burden for making these arrangements work, as I will demonstrate in this section.

A prominent feature of the everyday routine for parents with kids in child care is the journey to and from the day care center or family day care home. Geographers have had little to say on the subject (notable exceptions are Cromley (1987) and Myers-Jones and Brooker-Gross (1996)). By contrast the journey-to-work literature in geography is voluminous (e.g. Howe
and O'Conner 1982; Johnston-Anumonwo 1992; McLafferty and Preston 1991). A major finding of this latter literature is that women's shorter commutes to work are related to a more restricted job search area and, as a result, lower pay. Yet commuting patterns to and from child care for people in different socio-economic circumstances and in different places may also play a role in journeys to work. Day care commuting patterns at the very least tell us something about spatial constraints on child care options and spatial strategies for juggling wage-earning and childrearing.

The only groups that had significantly different commuting times than the other groups were those of the "single", "managing household", and "working middle class" (Table 4.10). Of these, the "single" group had significantly shorter commutes to and from day care. This finding implies that home, employment, and child care are closer together than for other groups, which may be part of a spatial strategy to bridge the gap between home and work. This pattern also suggests that the "single" group may be more restricted in their child care options by space-time logistics. The "managing household" group had a shorter trip to but longer trip from day care; this pattern implies that day care is closer to home and farther away from employment. The "working middle class" group had a longer commute to and a shorter commute from day care, suggesting that their child care is closer to work than to home. (This group also included people who have on-site day care at a hosiery manufacturer, while others are day care teachers or workers at their child's day care center which amounts to having on-site care.)

A critical issue in this discussion is whether or not shorter commutes to, or from, child care necessarily imply more restricted options. A shorter trip in one direction may simply mean that the parent(s) chose a day care
Table 4.10: Mean commuting times in minutes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Commute To</th>
<th>Commute From</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Working Middle Class</td>
<td>13.6*** (+)</td>
<td>10.4** (-)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>12.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial Minority</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>13.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing Household</td>
<td>10.5* (-)</td>
<td>14.5*** (+)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>10.3** (-)</td>
<td>9.9* (-)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>13.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Significantly different commuting times using ANOVA are indicated by:
*** p = 0.01      ** p = 0.05      * p = 0.10

(+) indicates a longer commuting time
(-) indicates a shorter commuting time
center that would be closer to home rather than to work, or vice versa. In addition, one could argue that longer commutes imply greater restriction of choice; for example, a parent may be forced to choose a day care center or home that is inconveniently located because it is the only one in the area that is affordable to them or is open long enough hours. Several people in this study drove fairly long distances to get to their children's day care center because it was the only one in the area to offer specialized care for developmentally-delayed children. Indeed, short commutes do not necessarily mean restricted options. A final point to make is that the commuting time differences between the groups were actually quite small (a few minutes at most). Many parents would probably argue that the quality of care is more important than distance (up to a point) and be willing to drive an extra five minutes to a preferred day care center or home.

On the basis of questionnaire responses, the responsibility of taking children to and from day care fell mainly on women. In some cases this division of labor may result from women managing the household full-time or working for pay part-time. However, these women total far fewer than the women who reported doing most of the child care commuting, so there must be another explanation. I suggest that child care is still seen primarily as a mother's responsibility, even when both parents are employed outside the home.

Among the seven multivariate parent groups, the "professional" group had the most equitable commuting arrangements (I defined an "equitable" arrangement as one in which a woman shared commuting responsibilities 50/50 with another source such as a spouse/partner, another family member, a friend, or a bus system) (Table 4.11). Women in this group shared transporting duties primarily with their spouses. This finding supports the
Table 4.11: Commuting arrangements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Female does 2 trips</th>
<th>Female does 1 trip</th>
<th>Female does 0 trips</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Observed</td>
<td>Expected</td>
<td>Difference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working Middle Class</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>85.8</td>
<td>-8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>48</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>23</td>
<td>24.8</td>
<td>-1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>55.6</td>
<td>-10.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30</td>
<td>24.3</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>21</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial Minority</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>-0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing Household</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>-1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>-4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>39.4</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>-6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>-5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>-7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>-1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>-1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chi-Square Statistic = 32.25  \( p = 0.001 \)
Large deviations from expected are highlighted in bold.
notion that power in the workplace carries over into power in the home (Hanson and Pratt 1995). In contrast, the "single" and "managing household" groups had the least equitable commuting arrangements; over 80 percent of the women in these groups had sole responsibility for transporting their children to and from day care. Of course, "single" group members must carry virtually all responsibility for child care because there is no spouse to share it with. Most members of the "managing household" group are married but may take on more of the day care commuting (and other child care) responsibilities because of reduced employment obligations (most work part-time or manage the household full-time).

The child care routine for many families includes not only transporting children back and forth to a day care center or home but also constantly arranging for informal care. The majority of parents I surveyed had to resort occasionally (anywhere from weekly to monthly) to informal means to fill the gaps left by more rigid formal care structures. For example, some parents needed someone to take their child to or from child care because the center's hours did not fit with their work hours, whereas others needed a stand-in when their center (but not their workplace) was closed for holidays or snowdays. Still others needed back-up care when their children were sick and they could not take time off from work to stay home with them.

The "single" and "student" groups relied more often than others on friends, neighbors, or relatives not living with them to help care for their children while they were at work or school (in addition to enrollment at a day care center or home) (Table 4.12). I would expect single parents to need supplemental care more often than those families with two parents who can divide child care and other responsibilities. In addition, most members of the "single" and "student" groups reside in western North Carolina, where more
Table 4.12: Use of informal child care arrangements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Used</th>
<th>Did Not Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Observed</td>
<td>Expected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional and Managing Household</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>71.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single and Student</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>61.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>173.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chi-Square Statistic = 8.93  \( p = 0.012 \)
Large deviations from expected are highlighted in bold.
people indicated that relatives played a role in their child care arrangements. In fact, many women I spoke with in western North Carolina said they did not know how they would manage without family nearby. In this way, place does shape child care needs, options, and strategies.

The "managing household" and "African American" groups used informal care less often. With limited or no employment obligations, the "managing household" group probably has fewer home-work conflicts that would necessitate supplemental informal care. The fact that the "African American" group relies less often on informal care may indicate less need for this care or may suggest that they have fewer options for this care.

The child care strategies that resulted from the blending of formal and informal care were often fragmented, complicated, and precarious. The complexity of child care arrangements may reflect a general inadequacy of the formal child care system, and definitely demonstrates the multiple roles women must perform. In addition, these patchwork strategies suggest that corporate culture still does not acknowledge that employees have family lives to manage, a point I will take up in the next section.

4.5 Juggling Employment and Child Care

With nearly 60 percent of women with young children in the labor force in the United States (almost 67 percent in North Carolina), an increasingly large number of families are facing the challenges of combining wage-earning and childrearing. The structure of particular occupations may make this juggling act more or less difficult. This section examines home-work linkages and the effects they have on child care arrangements for people in different socioeconomic circumstances and in different places.

In the context of this study, home-life affects work-life and vice versa; the surveyed and interviewed parents' views of "reality" made clear that the
public/private dichotomy is a gender-based social construct. A number of parents, for example, commented on the ways that their work regimes were affected by their children's day care situations. Indeed, home and work are inextricably connected, and child care is often the link. Over the course of my fieldwork I was reminded many times of the sign I saw in the one workplace-based day care center I visited: "Parents work when child care works." Many parents' comments to me (in interviews and on questionnaires) reinforced this motto:

Since my husband works second shift the only shift I can work is first otherwise we would not have daycare.
(Alice, 35, looking for a post in retail management)

I'm often asked to work Sat. But can't because of no daycare.
(Donna, 29, assembler)

I could work full-time if the public school offered after school care for pre-school aged children.
(Eлизabeth, 33, administrative assistant)

My husband and I have switched jobs and hours (off shifts) so we could give our son the best child care possible.
(Gail, 30, letter carrier)

Day care is provided from 8:00-5:00, therefore my work hours are 8:30-4:30.
(Tina, 28, health educator)

Despite the prevalence of comments such as these, only a small minority of questionnaire respondents had any type of employer-provided child care benefits or programs. Employers may be aware of this home-work link, but few share the responsibility for making this balance work. Judging by the relative lack of child care benefits, most employers still view child care as a private, family issue rather than a work-related issue.

On the questionnaire I asked parents if aspects of their jobs -- such as non-standard working hours (i.e. not 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.), overtime hours, irregular hours (i.e. different hours on different days), and out-of-town travel --
created difficulties for their child care arrangements. I expected to find that people lower in the occupational hierarchy, such as in blue-collar or service industry shift-work jobs, would have the greatest problems. Indeed, the "single" group, many of whose members work in service jobs, reported among the most difficulties (Table 4.13). However, I did not anticipate that the "professional" group would report a similar degree of difficulty. These latter two groups are very different in terms of family structure, occupation, and income level; the "professional" group members are all married, in white-collar occupations, and have the highest average incomes, while parents in the "single" group work mostly in pink-collar occupations (such as service jobs) for relatively low pay. However, both groups have many problems negotiating employment and child care.

A possible explanation for this finding might be that professionals often work long days. Employees in service jobs also may have problems due to their non-standard hours as well as less autonomy and flexibility on the job. In addition, the "single" group cannot rely on a spouse to share child care responsibilities such as picking up a child from day care when one parent must work late. Two of the women I interviewed typified these problems. Emily, a married advertising executive, lamented that long hours on the job often create conflicts with her child care arrangements. She said that "face time" (that is, how much time you are actually there) is very important where she works, even though she has a modem and could do more work from home. Barbara, a divorced cook, said she doesn't feel right about taking her child to work with her at 5:00 a.m. but has to since the day care center doesn't open until 6:30.

Despite the commonality of home/work conflicts, we should not lose sight of the fact that the "professional" and "single" groups probably have
Table 4.13: Work-related difficulties with child care arrangements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Reported 0 Difficulties</th>
<th>Reported 1-2 Difficulties</th>
<th>Reported 3-5 Difficulties</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Working Middle Class</td>
<td>Observed: 83 Expected: 82.1 Difference: 0.9</td>
<td>Reported: 52 Expected: 51.1 Difference: 0.9</td>
<td>Reported: 13 Expected: 14.9 Difference: -1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Observed: 19 Expected: 15.5 Difference: 3.5</td>
<td>Reported: 9 Expected: 9.7 Difference: -0.7</td>
<td>Reported: 0 Expected: 2.8 Difference: -2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Observed: 23 Expected: 19.4 Difference: 3.6</td>
<td>Reported: 10 Expected: 12.1 Difference: -2.1</td>
<td>Reported: 2 Expected: 3.5 Difference: -1.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chi-Square Statistic = 31.33  p = 0.002
Large deviations from expected are highlighted in bold.
different resources and options available to them for dealing with these problems. Professionals are more likely to be able to purchase supplemental care (such as a babysitter); also, everyone in the "professional" group is married and may be able to count on assistance from a spouse. Most single parents would have fewer financial options for solving home-work conflicts. The majority of the "single" group members live in western North Carolina, some of them near relatives. However, I should caution against the assumption that proximity to family necessarily means unlimited help; increasingly, mothers, grandmothers, and aunts are also part of the American paid workforce.

Many of the logistical problems associated with child care could be eased by flexibility at work. Kamerman and Kahn (1987, 226) argue that "changes in family structure and composition and changes in the work force are making time off and flexible work schedules essential for workers trying to manage home and work simultaneously." On the questionnaire I asked parents, "If family matters require that either of you must leave work early or arrive late, how flexible is your employer?" I expected to find that people in higher-status occupations would have greater flexibility. However, I was surprised to find no substantial differences among the seven groups. I was puzzled until I read back over my interview notes. (Here is a good example of how individual stories from interviews helped me interpret broader trends from the questionnaire.) I was struck by the number of women who made comments such as the following: their boss had kids so he/she understood family obligations and was flexible; the boss did not have kids so did not understand; the supervisor was a woman so understood; or there were lots of women in the office so family issues came up a lot, etc.
On the basis of these comments, it appears that the erratic nature of workplace flexibility is true for a great variety of occupations. Barbara, a cook, has to be at work at 5:00 in the morning. Her boss, who she says has kids herself therefore is understanding, lets her take her child to work with her until the day care center opens. Vivian, a C.P.A., attributes her job flexibility to her position in management plus the fact that her boss has kids "so understands these things." Others are less fortunate. Sharon, an accounting technician, can only be late three times in three months; she said that's very hard to stick to when you have a baby. Emily, an advertising executive, said that her employer has not been very understanding even though she stated in her job interview that she needed flexibility. She is now considering leaving her current job and trying to get a position at IBM because she has heard they have better family policies.

Flexibility at work to deal with family matters is largely up to the whim of the individual boss or the particular office situation. Many of the women I spoke with said they felt "lucky" because their bosses were so "understanding." Yet few of their workplaces had formal child care policies or benefits; this was especially true for "single," "racial minority," and, of course, "student" groups. Their "lucky situation" could easily change with a new supervisor. Without a formal structure for handling family and work issues, parents, usually women, have to forge individual solutions. Many feel grateful that their personal situation is working out and are unwilling to push the issue. This fragmented strategy is unlikely to lead to larger structural changes that could help all families (Ferree 1987; Hertz 1986; Kessler-Harris 1987).

As these interviews indicate, women have to juggle employment and child care despite the significance of their role in the workforce and the
regional economy. As previously pointed out, North Carolina has one of the highest percentages of working mothers with young children in the nation. Families in this state rely significantly on women's incomes. Comments on questionnaires and in interviews reinforce the importance of women's financial contributions to their families' well-being. In response to the question "Is there another type of child care that you would prefer using?" many women wrote in (since it was not one of the multiple choice options) that they would like to stay home and watch their kids themselves but -- "I must work to pay bills," "nowdays it takes two to make a living," "I go to school to get an education to be able to support my children better," and the very succinct argument, "we have to eat." Women are commonplace in and vital to the workplace, yet caregiving is still primarily viewed as women's responsibility and a private matter, to be worked out on their own time, not on company time.

On the basis of my surveys and interviews, this sense of frustration expressed by women reflects the problems with dominant gender-biased assumptions in American society. Mothers' employment is still regarded with a great deal of ambivalence, despite women's changing economic role in our society (Berry 1993). The tension that results from this ambivalence exists not just between women and men but also among women themselves. Most of the quotes just cited above come from women in low- to middle-income households. A few people wrote on their questionnaires that mothers should be at home to raise their children (their children were in preschool part-time for socialization and learning purposes). However, it is important to note that in each of these cases their spouses earned more than $70,000 a year, thus they could afford to take this stand. Sadly, there seems to be a rift between women who want to be at home with their children but cannot afford this
option and women who declare that mothers should stay at home but also personally have the financial means to do so.

4.6 Financial Assistance and Benefits

A key element of child care accessibility is, of course, cost. The average American family spends approximately $650 a month on child care expenses per child (Simmons and Sheehan 1997). Families in this study spent anywhere from $200 to $550 a month on day care for one child. This expense can amount to a significant portion of a family's income. American families typically spend 10 to 25 percent of their income on day care; only housing, food, and taxes consume more of the family budget (Simmons and Sheehan 1997).

Many families need assistance with child care expenses. As I mentioned in Chapter Two, financial assistance and benefits come in many forms and from a wide variety of sources at the federal, state, and local levels. Federal programs include: Head Start, Child Care Food Program, Title XX, Family Support Act of AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children), and the Dependent Care Tax Credit. State or county agencies provide assistance through programs such as Smart Start, Department of Social Services Day Care Subsidy, and others. Employer-provided assistance may include: on-site day care (usually subsidized), direct financial assistance, reduced fees at certain centers, pre-tax flexible spending account, and contracts with a child care resource and referral agency. Child care financial assistance is complex; funding comes from overlapping and at times competing bureaucracies at federal, state, and local levels.

Over half (52 percent) of the questionnaire respondents from the western consortium received some form of financial assistance with child care; that figure is more than double the number for Orange (22 percent) and
Burke (16 percent) counties. The "single" and "student" groups, most of whom live in western North Carolina, received the most assistance, indicating who and where would be most affected by cuts in social programs such as child care assistance (Table 4.14). Actually, I witnessed some evidence of these effects as I was conducting this research. Two of the day care directors in the western part of the state told me that some of their single mothers had had to quit their jobs and withdraw their children from day care since Title XX funds (which provide financial assistance with child care) were frozen, and the parents could not afford the full cost of care.

Receiving the least amount of assistance with child care expenses were the "professional," "managing household," and "working middle class" groups (in that order). The first two groups have by far the highest income levels among the seven groups. The "working middle class" is solidly in the middle in terms of income, yet receives only slightly more assistance than the first two groups. These figures suggest that this group is in fact caught in the middle; they make too much money to qualify for assistance but still struggle to pay their child care (and other) bills. Many parents expressed this frustration through written comments such as:

- It is very hard for 2 working class people who want the best for their children to pay for a good daycare that's affordable.  
  (Stephanie, 26, secretary)

- Sorry about the cynicism, but if you're not poor and on assistance or wealthy, daycare takes a huge chunk of your paycheck. It is very frustrating and unfair.  
  (Margaret, 33, speech-language pathologist)

- My only problem with child care is the fees ... we need the money left after paying - just to make it. If there were programs to help working parents (that need the assistance) it would be nice - we struggle too!  
  (Marie, 25, data entry)
Table 4.14: Financial assistance with child care expenses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Assistance</th>
<th>No Assistance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Observed</td>
<td>Expected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Difference</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working Middle Class</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>46.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-14.4</td>
<td>14.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>30.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-24.1</td>
<td>24.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial Minority</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing Household</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>23.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-10.8</td>
<td>10.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>21.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26.7</td>
<td>-26.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>-12.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>-9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chi-Square Statistic = 126.37  \( p = 0.0001 \)

Large deviations from expected are highlighted in bold.
We've been "borderline" or over by just a little for Smart Start funding. What's frustrating is that if I quit my job we could get all kinds of help. I think more emphasis should be placed on the "new working poor," we used to be called middle class.
(Rebecca, 42, secretary)

When you don't get AFDC (welfare) it is hard to manage because you have no benifits[sic]. I think they should help the people who a[re] tr[y]ing to do something with there [sic] lives. Because, they help the ones who don't do anything but stay at home. I don't think it's fair!!
(Janice, 31, teacher, hairdresser, student)

As these quotes attest, child care assistance can be a very divisive issue. It pits families in different economic circumstances against each other, which makes it hard to reach a common goal of affordable child care for all.

In addition to highlighting the cost dilemma for the middle class, these complaints also point to a larger issue, articulated by Sapiro (1990) and others: in the United States, social legislation, including child care policy, has tended to view women as mothers first and citizens and workers second. In other words, legislation is often designed to help women care for their families but not to provide for them. As discussed in Chapter Two, in the eyes of policy-makers, women are defined primarily by their private roles as wives and mothers rather than by their public roles as workers and citizens.

Assistance with child care is deemed acceptable only in "special" circumstances, not as a routine measure to help families combine wage-earning and childrearing. A particularly poignant example of this situation is the case of Melanie, a 32 year-old receptionist, who wrote the following on her questionnaire:

If my child did not have a disability, which she does, I would not be able to afford daycare, therefore I could not work and would loose [sic] my home, car, etc. etc. She is receiving daycare based on her disability. It's quite ironic that I have come to depend on her disability in order for me to work to support my family.
It should not require exceptional circumstances for families to receive support in meeting home and work responsibilities. As noted in Chapter Two, federal efforts in child care have historically focused on the needs of the most economically-disadvantaged groups, rather than acknowledging that a broader range of families could benefit from child care support and improvements.

Families seeking assistance with child care expenses are not likely to receive it from their employers. A mere 14 percent of respondents from western North Carolina received any form of employer-provided child care benefits. Figures are somewhat higher for the other two areas, but even Orange County, with its concentration of professional/university/high-technology jobs (which typically offer better employee benefits), offered child care benefits to only about a third of respondents. Burke County is the third largest employer of women in the state, yet relatively few employers offer child care benefits. When I asked the day care director of one of the larger centers why she thought this was so, she said matter-of-factly, "because men run the businesses." Undoubtedly the explanation is more complex than that, but her point is supported in much of the literature on family and work issues. Kamerman and Kahn (1987, 213), for example, state that

management in private sector firms is at best ambivalent about women with children working. Most are men with at-home wives; they are firmly convinced that children should be cared for at home -- by their mothers. If the women are working it's not management's responsibility to see to it that their children are cared for.

Of the people who did get employer-provided child care benefits, the "professional" group reported the highest percentage. Most people's benefits were indirect, such as pre-tax flexible spending accounts. The "student", "racial minority", and "single" groups, who have among the lowest incomes, have significantly lower percentages of employer assistance (Table 4.15).
Table 4.15: Employer-provided child care benefits.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Assistance</th>
<th>No Assistance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Observed</td>
<td>Expected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working Middle Class</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>105</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>21.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>60</td>
<td>73.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial Minority</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing Household</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>63</td>
<td>58.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>60</td>
<td>52.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>27</td>
<td>21.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30</td>
<td>27.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chi-Square Statistic = 32.02  \( p = 0.0001 \)
Large deviations from expected are highlighted in bold.
(The "managing household" group also reported a low percentage of employer-provided child care benefits, but I am suspicious of these results since most of these respondents have professional spouses. I do recall that many people did not fill out benefit information for their spouses.) The people most likely to need assistance seem least likely to get it from their employers. Lower incomes and fewer benefits often go hand-in-hand, with child care (and other) benefits reserved for higher-paying, professional jobs (Kamerman and Kahn 1987).

Smart Start, the state program to improve child care services in North Carolina, offers scholarships to parents to help offset the costs of child care. However, I found an inverse relationship between those families who need (or are on) financial assistance and those who are familiar with the program (Table 4.16a). The two groups with the highest incomes ("professional" and "managing household") have the largest percentages of people who know about the Smart Start program, and the two groups with the lowest incomes have among the smallest (Table 4.16b). A clear challenge for the program is to find ways to reach those parents who most need the help. As stressed previously, access to information is a key component of access to quality, affordable child care.

4.7 Parents' Satisfaction with Child Care

Accessibility to quality, affordable child care implies satisfaction with that care. Many parents told me in interviews and wrote on their questionnaires that it is very hard to concentrate on your job when you are worried about your child's day care situation. Satisfaction also speaks to issues of equity and fairness -- whose needs are being met, and whose are not? All parents deserve the peace of mind that comes from knowing that their children are well cared for while they are at work or school.
Table 4.16a: Awareness of the Smart Start program versus receipt of financial assistance with child care expenses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>% Aware of Smart Start</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>% Receiving Financial Assistance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing Household</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial Minority</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>Racial Minority</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>Working Middle Class</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working Middle Class</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Managing Household</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.16b: Awareness of the Smart Start program.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Aware</th>
<th>Not Aware</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working Middle Class</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observed</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected</td>
<td>82.2</td>
<td>65.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference</td>
<td>-18.2</td>
<td>18.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observed</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected</td>
<td>53.3</td>
<td>42.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>-21.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial Minority</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observed</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing Household</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observed</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected</td>
<td>42.2</td>
<td>33.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>-6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observed</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected</td>
<td>37.2</td>
<td>29.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference</td>
<td>-10.2</td>
<td>10.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observed</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>12.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference</td>
<td>-2.6</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observed</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>15.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>-2.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chi-Square Statistic = 39.36    \( p = 0.0001 \)

Large deviations from expected are highlighted in bold.
Even though satisfaction plays an important role in child care access, it is very difficult to measure and evaluate because it is so subjective. For example, the following are questionnaire comments from two different parents regarding the same day care center:

**Our current day care facility is very caring and the children are extremely responsive to their show of affection, firmness in discipline and efforts to teach them during their long day at "school."**
(Jill, 30, speech-language pathologist).

Contrast that statement with:

**I am not satisfied with the care my daughter is receiving. But it is a "catch 22" (I and my husband have to work.). We don't have the luxury of staying home w/her. But it is heartwrenching to think she's not getting enough nurturing not to mention developmental training. The teachers need training on basic nurturing skills!**
(Karen, 34, human services)

Everyone wants quality care for their children, but people may have different ideas about what that means.

With these caveats in mind, the percentage of people in each group who said they were "extremely" or "very" satisfied with their child care arrangements ranged from 96 for the "student" group to 73 for the "ethnic minority" group. I found these numbers to be fairly high considering the fact that so many people commented on the difficulties of meshing child care and employment responsibilities. Possible explanations include the following. In terms of work-related difficulties, parents may be unsatisfied with the structure of their jobs rather than with their child care arrangements. Also, if parents were truly unhappy with their child care situation, perhaps they would already have altered the arrangements. Many parents indicated that they had changed day care centers and/or caregivers several times before settling on their current situation. Also, some research suggests that many people perceive their child's day care to be of higher quality than it actually is.
(Jones 1995). In fact, a recent study of day care quality in North Carolina rated 80 percent of care for children under age six as either poor or mediocre (Sheehan and Simmons 1997a). Since most people want and need to believe that they are doing the best they can for their children, many parents may report a higher level satisfaction than they actually feel.

I expected to find that parents of lower socioeconomic status would be less satisfied than other groups with their child care since I assumed that their options were more limited by cost and other concerns. However, I found no significant satisfaction differences among the seven parent groups. The relative nature of the concept of "satisfaction" may help explain the lack of a discernable relationship. Anecdotally, I can recall examples of parents with children at high-quality (and high-cost) day care centers and homes who raved about the program and teachers; I can also cite examples of parents at these same centers or homes who complained about the standard of care. By the same token, I came across people with children in lower-cost centers and homes who were pleased with their child care circumstances, and others at the same or similar places who expressed some dissatisfaction with their arrangements. The "satisfaction question" is a difficult one to sort out.

I also attempted to measure "satisfaction" in yet another way. On the questionnaire I asked parents if they would prefer a different form of child care than what they currently use. Responses to this question were much clearer, although this is obviously only one aspect of satisfaction. The "professional" group, who has the highest income so one would presume a wide variety of child care options, also had the highest percentage of people who said they would prefer using another type of care (Table 4.17). The finding that parents in the group with the highest income appear to be the least satisfied with their child care seems counterintuitive. Perhaps this
Table 4.17: Preference cited for using another type of child care.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Observed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Expected</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Difference</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working Middle Class</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26.2</td>
<td>119.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>-1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial Minority</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>22.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-1.8</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing Household</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>62.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-1.6</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>55.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-4.2</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>22.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-1.8</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>28.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-4.3</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chi-Square Statistic = 17.65    p = 0.007
Large deviations from expected are highlighted in bold.
group is socialized through peers to expect a higher standard of care or to be aware of a greater range of child care options. It is also possible that friends and colleagues of these people are actually using the option (at-home sitter) they claim to prefer. The most popular alternative for this group was a nanny or at-home sitter, though most people said that cost prohibited them from using this type of child care.

The "African American" and "single" groups had significantly fewer people who said they would prefer using another type of care. Again, I did not expect this result since these groups are lower in the income hierarchy. The only alternative the "African American" group suggested was another family member. (This response was fairly unusual among the seven parent groups; all other groups except the "single" group listed "nanny or at-home sitter" as their first choice). Of those people in the "single" group who said they would rather use another type of child care, the majority wrote in "myself" as the preferred alternative.

After expressing frustration with their particular child care problems, many parents offered suggestions about where changes in the child care system should come from. Topping the list were government, the state, employers, and communities. I would add to their list more responsibility and involvement from fathers (though fathers too are penalized for bringing family matters into the workplace (Berry 1993)). As long as child care is viewed as a "women's issue" rather than a family and societal issue, it is unlikely that change will come from these other arenas.

4.8 Conclusions

Using both quantitative (questionnaire results) and qualitative (interviews and written comments) information, this chapter described some of the ways that gender relations, labor market position, family structure,
race, and place matter in terms of structuring access to child care. To reiterate, access is based on some combination of affordability, location and hours of operation, channels of information, and trust and compatibility. I examined access issues related to 1) finding good child care, 2) managing the "everyday", 3) juggling employment and child care, 4) financial assistance and benefits, and 5) parents' satisfaction with child care.

While attempting to understand access issues for different groups of people, I discovered that in some cases child care problems transcended social, economic, and geographical borders. For the remainder of the chapter I will discuss these differences and commonalities and comment on what they may tell us about the broader child care picture.

This study considers how differences between families structure access to child care. Recent feminist research and debate has been shaped in large part by a consideration of the "politics of difference" (Bondi 1990a; McDowell 1991; Pratt 1994; Young 1990). Interest in "difference" grew out of tensions within the Women's Movement (Bowlby 1992). All women's lives cannot be understood through the experiences of white, heterosexual, middle-class western women. Class position, race and ethnicity, age, and sexuality -- as well as gender -- are significant (Collins 1991; Sanders 1990). Of course these social, economic, and geographical circumstances are interwoven. In western North Carolina, single-parent households, usually female-headed, and other low-income households tended to be farther down in the occupational hierarchy. In Orange County, there was a high concentration of high-income households. Dual-parent households had a broad range of occupations and income levels, but the highest income groups were those in which one or both spouses worked in professional jobs. Burke County had the largest proportion of people in the "working middle class."
Parents at the lowest socioeconomic level (mostly the "single," "student," and "racial minority" groups), predominantly located in western North Carolina, faced the most serious child care accessibility problems. Location factors appear to be of greater consequence in choosing a particular day care center or family day care home for the "student" and "single" groups (and least important for the two highest-income groups). This finding suggests that these groups' child care options are more restricted by space-time logistics. Indeed, the "single" group had the shortest commute to and from child care. This group also had one of the least equitable commuting arrangements (that is, mothers did most of the transporting back and forth). The lower-income "single" and "student" groups reported a higher usage of informal care to fill the gaps left by formal care structures, implying a more complex and fragmented child care regime. In addition, the single group cited one of the highest levels of work-related difficulties with child care. Although the financial assistance rate is highest for the "single," "student," and "racial minority" groups (and western North Carolina in general), these groups also have the lowest percentages of employer-provided child care benefits. Finally, lower-income groups displayed the least awareness of the potentially helpful Smart Start program.

The most significant child care issue for the "working middle class", largely located in Burke County, to emerge from this study was that of affordability. Anecdotal information (quotes and comments) and overall survey results both support the idea that the middle class is in a difficult financial situation; their incomes are too high to qualify them for financial assistance with child care but too low to enable them to comfortably make ends meet. The "working middle class" group earns far less money than the two highest-income groups ("professional" and "managing household"), yet
receives only slightly less help with child care expenses. The "single", "student", and "racial minority" groups have much lower incomes but also much higher levels of financial assistance than the "working middle class" group. Many members of this "middle" group expressed great frustration with this dilemma.

The "professional" and "managing household" parent groups, heavily represented in Orange County, both occupy the highest socioeconomic level but have many different child care experiences. The "professional" group had the most equitable commuting arrangements to and from day care, while the "managing household" group had the least. The "professional" group reported one of the highest levels of work-related difficulties with child care; the "managing household" group reported the lowest level. On a related topic, the "managing household" group was the least dependent on informal supplemental child care. Both groups had a low level of financial assistance with child care expenses, but the "professional" group reported the highest level of employer-provided child care benefits. Finally, the "professional" group (who has a high income level so one would presume a great range of child care choices) ironically also had the highest percentage of people who said they would prefer using another type of child care.

Despite the presence of such place-, class-, occupational-, and race-based group differences, in many cases the presence of child care problems cut across geographical, social, and economic borders. Many people in this study shared the same sort of child care difficulties -- whether it be with timing, distance, cost, lack of flexibility, quality, etc. The prevalence of such problems is significant and points to more general shortcomings of the child care "system" in the United States.
Most notable, a common thread that runs through much of this discussion is the significance of the home-work connection. The "public" sphere of employment affects and is affected by the "private" sphere of home and family life. As the results of my questionnaires and interviews demonstrate, the public/private divide is indeed a social construction. All parents want their children to be well cared for while they are at work or school. Parents from many different backgrounds expressed the sentiment that it is hard to concentrate at work when you are worried about your child's day care situation. Yet, flexibility at work to deal with family matters that arise is largely up to the whim of individual supervisors rather than based on formal "family friendly" policies. Despite the obvious links between home and work, relatively few employers offer child care benefits or programs. Families are thus faced with piecing together individual solutions that are often complicated and precarious. The position of "sick care" at the top of most parents' lists of recommended changes in their child care highlights the fragile nature of many of these child care arrangements. The fact that 55 to 75 percent of parents in all seven multivariate groups relied on some degree of informal child care to supplement their formal child care arrangements provides more evidence of the flaws in the formal child care structure. Despite these common child care problems, I think it is also important to remember that people in different socioeconomic circumstances and locations may have different options available to them for dealing with these problems. For example, one woman in this study wrote that she would like to have her child at home with a "Mary Poppins type" rather than in a day care center, but "there's no room to house a nanny in our trailer."

Another widespread problem, mentioned both by parents and day care directors, is the high turnover rate of day care workers (a well-documented
problem in the child care industry). Day care workers in North Carolina remain on the job an average of seven months. Their median hourly wage is $5.25 at day care centers and $3.97 at family day care homes (Sheehan and Simmons 1997a). The staff are underpaid, which results in the high turnover. Parents are unhappy about the disruption in their child's care routine but cannot afford to pay more in order to retain high-quality teachers. One parent summed it up as follows:

It is difficult to find daycare workers who stay in their positions for very long. Low pay and lack of benefits make it almost impossible to find and keep caring, qualified people. The turnover at our daycare has been tremendous -- this is difficult for child and parent alike! (Sarah, 31, case manager).

This problem epitomizes the undervaluing of "caring" work in American society. As one parent and day care worker wrote on her questionnaire:

Wages are a good question to raise. People that park cars make more than I. What's more important, our children or cars? (Heather, 25, day care teacher)

These women suggest that the care of children is socially viewed as a private-sphere activity, and therefore not deserving of high monetary compensation (despite the fact that participation in the public sphere is dependent upon this caring work). As I pointed out in Chapter Two, so-called "dependency work," including the care of children, is generally devalued by the public sphere. Young (1995) argues that dependency workers are automatically defined as second-class citizens when independence is esteemed as a public, citizen virtue. Consequently, our society has many contradictory attitudes about the care of children. Marcy Whitebook, director of the Center for the Child Care Workforce, labels these attitudes as a bipolar policy disorder . . . We are trapped between thinking that child-care workers are worth what we pay mothers -- nothing -- and what we pay professional teachers . . . We are focused on how to get more and
cheaper care while talking about how we need to nurture the crucial early years (quoted in Goodman 1998).

A related prominent commonality throughout this research is the pervasiveness of the gendered division of labor in child care. This observation began with my fieldwork experiences. I encountered very few men while gathering data on child care arrangements and experiences. The overwhelming majority of questionnaire respondents were women, and most of the parents who consented to be interviewed were women. In addition, of the 67 day care directors and hundreds of day care teachers I saw, only one was male. Questionnaires results and interviews revealed that mothers made most of the child care arrangements and did most of the transporting to and from day care. Despite the large number of women in the labor force and their significant contribution to their families' economic well-being, child care is still considered to be "women's work" and is still in fact handled primarily by women. Women shoulder a disproportionate amount of the responsibility for making complex child care strategies work and suffer the greater consequences when they don't. These "grounded" observations are very much linked to more abstract notions of gendered citizenship and societal responsibility for children. Not until child care becomes a societal issue rather than a women's issue will we see improved access for all groups of people.

The presence of this gendered division of labor suggests that we should heed the warnings of some feminists not to toss aside the "big" categories such as gender in favor of an exclusive postmodern focus on difference (Bondi 1990b; Bordo 1990; Pratt 1993). We still make sense of the world through these categories and we still have something to gain by paying attention to them (Gregson 1993; Hanson and Pratt 1995; G. Rose 1993).
As I hope the following "voices" of parents make clear, there are some commonly held ideas as to how to improve the child care scene for all family types:

I personally believe that the day care system in general is greatly underfunded. I believe that the state should provide the very best for the children. We are all supposed to put children first and help provide them with the best learning environment possible, and all parents want that for their children when they can't be with them.
(Courtney, 23, office assistant and full-time student)

I would like to see state or government help well deserved daycare centers with grants or supplies.
(Kim, 26, geneology researcher)

I wish the state offered child care and sick child care services for their employees but I do not see it in the future.
(Helen, 31, RN supervisor)

We need the government to realize how crucial quality daycare is needed. Single parents, especially, cannot afford to work and have childcare often times -- There needs to be more financial assistance and improved salaries and benefits for workers in order to attract (and keep) quality people.
(Amy, 28, teacher and part-time student)

Most companies do not care about their employees who are mothers. They think that your family should be last on your list of priorities, and the company first . . . If you want to help us mothers with child care problems, speak to these companies about allowing their employees to work 8-5 hours, and allowing mothers who wish to split work weeks to do so.
(Kathryn, 33, lending/collection administrator)

It seems to me that quality day care should be a higher priority in our communities. Day care workers should have professional training and should be paid at least as much as public school teachers.
(Allison, 37, professor)
In Chapter Four I examined the ways that gender relations, labor market position, family structure, and race interact in particular locales to shape parents' access to child care. The scales of this analysis were the household and local levels. However, these household and local interactions take place within the context of state-level policy. As the quotes at the end of the last chapter demonstrated, many parents feel that the government should increase its funding for child care. This chapter focuses on the state's role in improving child care access for its residents.

In North Carolina, the most relevant child care policy at the state level is the Smart Start program, an initiative launched in 1993 and designed to improve child care for children under the age of six. As I describe in this chapter, Smart Start has affected access to child care in local areas in many positive ways. However, because Smart Start uses state money to fund a socially-sensitive service such as child care, the program has generated heated debates which inform broader child care issues at both the state and national level. Of additional national significance is the fact that supporters of Smart Start promote the program as a national model for improving child care services. Therefore, the successes and shortcomings of the program have implications that extend far beyond the borders of North Carolina.

In this chapter I demonstrate that Smart Start has improved the availability, affordability, and quality of child care in Orange and Burke Counties and the western consortium of counties, and suggest that the program has the potential to address some of the child care concerns expressed by parents and child care directors in Chapter Four. Yet other
problems, especially those that are employment-related, are beyond the scope of Smart Start policies. A closer look at the views and rhetoric of Smart Start opponents does not point to these problems, but rather indicates a persistent social belief in a strict dichotomy of public/private spheres, the assumption of a gendered division of labor in child care, and the notion that child care is an individual rather than a societal responsibility. Ironically, even the supporters of Smart Start -- though they make very compelling arguments on behalf of children and the need for the program -- fail to challenge implicit gender-biased assumptions about women’s employment and the care of children. Because such assumptions helped create the problems with the current child care scene, I suggest that Smart Start -- even though it has improved the material conditions of child care in the state -- does not go far enough in addressing deeper-seated structural problems of child care access in North Carolina and the U. S. more generally. Furthermore, I argue that the debates over Smart Start reflect national trends toward devolution and privatization; the demand for more private money to fund social programs is particularly troublesome for reasons I explore later in the chapter.

The chapter is organized as follows. First I briefly describe the information sources and methodology used at the state level of analysis. Secondly, I outline the history of Smart Start legislation to provide a basic framework for understanding the politics and debates surrounding the program. Next, I provide specific examples based on my fieldwork of the accomplishments of Smart Start in each of my three study areas. I then outline the support for and opposition to Smart Start and discuss the broader implications of these arguments. Finally, I consider the Smart Start program as a national model for improving child care services and access.
5.1 Methodology

This chapter’s analysis is based on information from a variety of sources. Primary data include interviews with 67 day care directors and the head of a Smart Start evaluation team in 1995. I also obtained a Smart Start progress report from 1995. Secondary sources include approximately 150 articles on Smart Start and related child care issues from newspapers in my study area, primarily the Raleigh News and Observer (from September 1993 to May 1998), the Morganton News Herald (from September 1993 to September 1995), and the Asheville Citizen-Times (from September 1993 to September 1995). The ending dates for the Morganton and Asheville newspapers coincide with my main fieldwork session. I have more extensive coverage for the Raleigh newspaper because it is accessible electronically on the World Wide Web. In addition, as the newspaper from the state capital, the News & Observer has more complete coverage of Smart Start’s legislative history.

I used the newspaper articles to construct an overview of Smart Start legislation from 1993 to the present. My interviews with day care directors and a Smart Start evaluator, combined with a progress report on the program, formed the basis for my comments on the effects of Smart Start on child care services in my three study areas (as of my fall 1995 fieldwork session). I performed a qualitative content analysis of newspaper articles on Smart Start to ascertain recurring themes that arose in the reporting and discussion of the Smart Start program. These themes form the framework for section 5.4 on the debate over Smart Start.

5.2 History of Smart Start Legislation

An outline of the chronology of Smart Start legislation provides a basic framework for understanding both the nature of the program and the politics
and debates surrounding the program. Here I only describe the program and debates; I will discuss their implications at state and national levels in sections 5.4 and 5.5.

In 1992 Democratic candidate James Hunt was voted in for a third term as North Carolina's governor (he also held the office from 1977 to 1984). Hunt ran on a campaign that focused largely on the needs of young children, and the Smart Start program was the centerpiece of this campaign. Legislation for the program was passed in July 1993. Smart Start was conceived by Governor Hunt as an early childhood initiative designed to provide child care, health care, and other crucial services to children under six years old. Hunt has declared repeatedly that he wants to bring Smart Start to all 100 counties by the year 2000, and to date 55 counties have Smart Start programs. However, due to changes in the political makeup of the North Carolina General Assembly, the expansion of Smart Start has not proceeded in the fashion that Hunt originally envisioned.

In September 1993, 89 of North Carolina's 100 counties applied for selection as one of twelve "pioneer partnerships" in the first round of Smart Start funding. For the pioneer program, counties were chosen based on a combination of need, perceived community support, quality of health care available to children and pregnant women, quality of the application, and congressional district (only one per district). Eighteen counties -- including my study areas of Orange, Burke, and the western consortium -- were chosen for this first round of funding and constituted the 12 pioneer partnerships (11 individual counties plus a seven-county consortium) (Figure 5.1). In September 1994, the legislature approved funding to expand Smart Start to 14 new counties, bringing the total of counties involved in the program to 32.
Figure 5.1: Counties chosen for the first round of Smart Start funding.
When Republicans took over the majority of the North Carolina House of Representatives in November 1994 (the first Republican-led State House since the turn of the century), the new majority questioned the effectiveness and cost of Smart Start and challenged the idea of expanding the program. From April to June of 1995, Governor Hunt was engaged in an intense political battle with the Republican-controlled North Carolina General Assembly over expansion of the Smart Start program. Republicans wanted to require more private contributions to the program, new accountability for spending at local and state levels, and more control by the state. Negotiations on the issue held up the entire state budget for three weeks. A compromise was finally reached, with the following provisions. The existing 32 Smart Start counties got the funding that Hunt requested. An additional 12 expansion counties received planning money only, with program money forthcoming only if an independent audit on Smart Start operations came back favorable. Increased financial accountability was required by the Assembly for county spending. In addition, ten percent of the public money had to be matched by private contributions (half cash, half in-kind contributions). Although control of the program was maintained at the local level, this central tenet of Smart Start was challenged by Republicans who wanted the state to exert more control over the program. By the end of this legislative session, Smart Start counties totaled 43 (one county declined funding).

After more intense debate in the summer of 1996, the General Assembly agreed to provide funding to expand Smart Start. Twelve additional counties were selected to receive funds, bringing the total of Smart Start counties to 55. Later that year, in November 1996, Hunt won a fourth term as North Carolina's governor by defeating Republican contender Robin...
Hayes, a conservative Christian who often derided Smart Start as "an intrusion into parenting." Hunt ran on a platform of expanding Smart Start statewide and boosting teacher pay to the national average by the year 2000. In September 1997, Hunt (who now has veto power and threatened to use it if Smart Start was not adequately funded) secured funding from the General Assembly to expand the Smart Start program. The funding allowed 12 additional counties to implement programs and services, expanded services in already-existing Smart Start counties, and allowed 45 new counties (the rest of the state) to begin planning for services.

5.3 Characteristics and Accomplishments of the Smart Start Program

Smart Start is not a centralized program providing a specific set of services but is instead an assortment of programs and services. A major goal of Smart Start is to improve the availability, affordability, and quality of child care for young children in the state. To that end, the program includes measures such as: lowering child care staff ratios, increasing eligibility levels for subsidized child care, increasing the child care tax credit, offering grants to train child care providers and to improve child care facilities, creating the North Carolina Partnership for Children to oversee the state "vision" for child care, and providing incentives for local public-private partnerships to improve child care at community levels. In addition, it funds more creative efforts such as sending homeless children to preschool while helping their families find jobs, transportation, and housing, and providing vans to transport children between homes and day care centers in remote areas.

The Smart Start program, though primarily state-funded, places an emphasis on local decision-making power. Individual counties or groups of counties apply for state money to improve their child care services. The state does not stipulate exactly how the counties are to spend their funds, but
it does require that individuals and agencies in the county form a public-private organization (called a "Partnership for Children") to design and implement a child care plan for that particular county. Local Partnerships for Children are quasi-independent, non-profit agencies that typically have representatives from the following types of groups on their boards: Department of Social Services, schools, business representatives, United Way, Health Department, churches, parents, child care providers, city-county government, civic groups, and library and family literacy organizations. Power resides at the local level: the local Partnership for Children decides how to spend the county's Smart Start funding based on local needs and existing resources. Counties then (at least in theory) spend their funds according to local needs and priorities.

Because of local autonomy, it is difficult to compile a complete listing of Smart Start's accomplishments and the number of children served by the program. For example, it is hard to document exactly how many children have benefited from Smart Start since one child could be served by several different programs or services. Therefore, it would be difficult to provide a comprehensive account of the effects of Smart Start on my three study areas; to my knowledge, no one source lists all the programs and services provided by the program. This difficulty of tracking the program has been a major complaint of legislators, who want more control over the program and more proof of its effectiveness. I can, however, give some concrete examples of how Smart Start has affected the availability, affordability, and quality of child care in Orange and Burke Counties and the western consortium of counties based on my interviews with day care directors in 1995. The date of 1995 also corresponds roughly with the end of the first full year of Smart
Start funding. Before doing so, however, I first discuss some general accomplishments shared in all Smart Start counties.

As previously mentioned, my three study areas were included in the initial 12 pioneer partnerships (representing 18 counties -- 11 individual counties and one seven-county consortium) funded by the program. According to a 1995 evaluation of Smart Start carried out by the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (Smart Start Evaluation Team 1995), the program has improved the quality of child care in all of the first 18 counties included. The number of centers receiving the state's top rating of "AA" increased 25 percent in Smart Start counties as opposed to 17 percent in non-Smart Start counties; AA-licensed centers usually have better staff-to-child ratios, smaller group sizes, and more educational materials than A-licensed facilities. The evaluation team also observed (based on 193 child care visits) that day care centers receiving Smart Start services provided higher quality care than centers receiving no Smart Start funds. In terms of the availability of child care, Smart Start counties reduced the number of children on child care subsidy waiting lists by 42 percent from 1993 to 1994; the lists in counties not receiving Smart Start money increased 36 percent during this time period. Smart Start also provided funds for new services in these counties, such as child care resource and referral agencies and family resource centers.

With these general accomplishments in mind, I now briefly discuss the specific effects of Smart Start in my three study areas. Based upon my interviews with day care directors, there seemed to be a general recognition of the positive effects of Smart Start funding. All 24 day care directors I interviewed in Orange County knew about the Smart Start program, and eleven of them said that their day care center or family day care home had...
benefited from Smart Start funds. The benefits mentioned included: funds for center renovation, a new playground, a fence, and books and toys; funds to upgrade the program to an "AA" rating; salary money for staff; teacher training through the T.E.A.C.H (Teacher Education and Compensation Helps) program; and subsidies for parents. Four directors said they knew about Smart Start but either did not want to become involved in it (because they wanted to remain "independent") or were outright opposed to it (because they objected to the idea of subsidies for parents).

All 19 day care directors I interviewed in Burke County knew about Smart Start, and 13 of them said their centers or family day care homes had benefited from Smart Start funding. The types of improvements mentioned include: playground and equipment grants; center improvements; training for child care workers (including CPR and first aid); financial incentives to keep staff-to-child ratios low; upgraded accreditation; and the availability of vans to rent for field trips. Three directors were either not interested in Smart Start because they wanted to retain their independence or were opposed to it because they felt that one center had benefited disproportionately from the county's Smart Start money.

Of the 22 day care directors I interviewed in western North Carolina, all of whom knew about the Smart Start program, 17 said that their center or home had benefited from Smart Start in one or more of the following ways: new equipment, building improvements, staff raises, expanded eligibility for parent subsidies, and vans to help transport kids. Only one director said she did not want to be involved in Smart Start because it required too much paperwork.

Because Smart Start had only been in operation a little more than a year at the time I did the majority of my fieldwork, it would be unreasonable
to expect the program to have solved all of my study areas' child care problems. However, based on evidence of what has already been accomplished in these areas, I speculate here on Smart Start's ability or inability to address the parental difficulties and concerns with child care outlined in Chapter Four.

Smart Start has the potential to address several of the concerns voiced by the parents and directors I surveyed and interviewed, especially financial support and child care employee turnover. For example, the expanded eligibility levels for parent subsidies may help some members of the "working middle class" qualify for assistance with child care expenses, thereby addressing their affordability problem. In addition, Smart Start funds are currently being used to address a problem identified by parents and day care directors: the high turnover rate of day care workers. Smart Start is providing money for teacher training and salary increases. Finally, Smart Start funds are being used to improve the quality of child care (by upgrading facilities, purchasing new equipment and toys, and training staff), which may improve parents' satisfaction with their children's day care.

However, many of the concerns that parents expressed in Chapter Four are beyond the realm of Smart Start's efforts. Most of these problems are employment-related, such as work-related difficulties with child care arrangements, the lack of formal "family-friendly" policies at the workplace, and low rates of employer-provided child care benefits. Obviously, employers have a role to play in helping their employees successfully manage home and work responsibilities. Finally, as I argue later in this chapter, Smart Start is not designed to alter the problem of a gendered division of labor in child care which puts most of the responsibility on women. Both government and
employers could help though, by offering measures such as reasonable parental leave policies and flexible work schedules.

5.4 The Debate Over Smart Start

As pointed out in Chapter Three, the Smart Start program is significant to this dissertation for at least three reasons. As indicated above, Smart Start is already making a material difference in the lives of North Carolina's children and their families and has the potential to further improve the availability, affordability, and quality of child care in the state. Secondly, supporters tout the program as a model for improving the national child care scene, which I discuss in section 5.5. Thirdly, the program has generated a debate that informs broader issues concerning child care. In particular, the ongoing discussion revolves around the role government should play in the care and education of young children. On the one hand, supporters argue that Smart Start will positively affect child care conditions in North Carolina and in so doing will improve the state's economy. On the other hand, critics charge that Smart Start is costly, inefficient, and representative of governmental intrusion into family life. As I suggest below, while these positions demonstrate distinct political stances, both fail to challenge the assumed gendered division of labor that helped create the current unsatisfactory child care conditions. Specifically, opponents argue that government should have little or no role in providing care for young children, while supporters argue that government should have a role but articulate their position based on the needs of children rather than their working parents.

5.4.1 Support for Smart Start

Newspaper articles and editorials favoring Smart Start far outweigh those opposing or criticizing the program. A partial explanation is that the
Raleigh News and Observer, the primary newspaper source for this section, has a liberal orientation and strongly supports Smart Start. In addition, a poll taken in 1995 revealed that 82 percent of North Carolinians were in favor of the program (Raleigh News and Observer 1995a).

Arguments supporting the Smart Start program generally take one or more of the following three positions. First, supporters claim that Smart Start will improve the material conditions of North Carolina's children. Second, Smart Start is viewed as good for the economic future of the state. And third, Smart Start is praised for helping today's children become tomorrow's responsible citizens. Governor Hunt uses different versions of these three basic arguments when addressing various groups of people (Christensen 1995). Hunt also uses appropriate metaphors to convince his audience that he understands their social concerns. For example, before a group of ministers, Hunt described Smart Start as "mission work," a "ministry to kids," and a "crusade for children" (Christensen 1995). Before a group of business executives, he pitched the program as an economic development tool that will someday lead to a better work force (Christensen 1995). And before the same business leaders, Hunt compared the initiation of Smart Start with the creation of the University of North Carolina system 200 years ago and the public school system a century ago, reflecting a belief in societal responsibility for the education of children.

The first argument in support of Smart Start focuses on the immediate goal of improving the material condition of North Carolina's children. North Carolina usually fares poorly in studies ranking the living circumstances of children across the nation. For example, the 1994 Children's Index Report ranked North Carolina fortieth in the nation in terms of children's well-being, taking into account such factors as the number of
children living in poverty, reports of child abuse and neglect, the number of
children on welfare rolls, and the lack of health insurance for children (Miller
"this program [Smart Start] isn't a frill. It's an attempt to keep tens of
thousands of North Carolina's children from falling behind before they even
begin their schooling and from falling out later -- something in which all
citizens of this state have an interest." Supporters of Smart Start also point
to statistics that demonstrate the low priority placed on child care in
American society. For example, the executive director of the North Carolina
Day Care Association provided the following figures. Each year North
Carolina spends: $20,000 to house a prisoner; $42,000 per child for public
school education; $568-$2,840 per foot of interstate highway; and $155 per
child on child care services for preschool children (Russell 1994). The broader
issue in this argument for Smart Start funding is societal responsibility
toward a vulnerable segment of our population. Smart Start supporters
make a compelling argument on this issue. It is difficult to argue against
promoting the welfare of children, which the State House Republican leader
acknowledged even as he fought the funding of Smart Start: "I don't know of
anybody in our caucus who's opposed to helping children ... But we have
obligation because of our November mandate to make sure that government
is run more efficiently" (quoted in Christensen 1995).

A second argument in favor of Smart Start promotes the program as
sound economic policy. According to this line of reasoning, Smart Start is
good for the economic future of North Carolina since it will help produce good
workers and cut down on school dropout rates, crime, teenage pregnancies,
and welfare dependency. This particular argument fits into Governor Hunt's
broader school-to-work agenda (discussed in Chapter Three) and is consistent
with his long-standing support of education. The following quotes taken from North Carolina newspapers are examples of how this argument is presented:

Hunt has presented an ambitious complement of innovative programs [with Smart Start as the centerpiece] that will inevitably yield a better-trained, more productive work force (White 1994).

It would be a shame if Smart Start opponents managed to crush or even slow this program, designed to help kids gain the skills to succeed in school, work and life in general. This goal, in fact, ought to appeal to all legislators who want to limit welfare dependency, fight crime and better prepare the state's labor force to compete for world-class jobs (Raleigh News and Observer 1995c).

The [Smart Start] program reflects the governor's ideas about how to interrupt the growing cycle of poverty, crime, drugs, dropouts, welfare dependency and teenage pregnancies that have afflicted North Carolina's underclass (Christensen 1995).

A 27-year study by the Hi/Scope Research Foundation shows that for every dollar spent on good care for young children, the state will save at least $7 in spending on prisons, training schools, welfare and training for school dropouts (Rice and Abramson 1994).

A third argument for Smart Start, which is related to the "economic future" argument just discussed, is that the program will help today's children turn into tomorrow's responsible citizens. The word "citizen" appears many times in newspaper editorials supporting Smart Start. For example:

It's [Smart Start] a good deal for disadvantaged kids, of course, but it's a much better deal for the state. Through early investment, North Carolina is likely to reap a dividend of better-educated, and more skilled citizens (Raleigh News and Observer 1995d).

The best argument for doing so [investing money in Smart Start] is the long-term payoff it promises in better educated, healthier, more successful citizens (Raleigh News and Observer 1994).

Making sure that children have every chance to become contributing citizens is a responsibility the entire state shares (Raleigh News and Observer 1995e).

These three arguments in support of Smart Start are very compelling. They reflect a commitment to improving children's lives in the short- and long-term and demonstrate a belief in a shared, societal responsibility for
child care. And certainly, children deserve the support and opportunity to become productive members of society. Smart Start has already proven that it is capable of making improvements in the availability, affordability, and quality of child care in North Carolina; it has the potential to do far more in these respects.

However, I think it is instructive to consider what is not being said to promote the program as well as what is being said; these omissions also speak to some of the larger issues surrounding child care. Not articulated in the argument that Smart Start will produce better future workers is the fact that improvements in the child care scene would help today's workers, particularly women who are mothers. These workers are important to North Carolina's current economy, yet in the debates over Smart Start, they usually only receive mention as a disadvantaging factor in children's lives (e.g. "two thirds of North Carolina's young children have working mothers and therefore need child care services"). It is politically "safer" to argue on the basis of children's needs rather than on the rights of their mothers and fathers, though women usually suffer the greater consequences when child care is unreliable or absent (Berry 1993).

In response to such a criticism, supporters of Smart Start would be quick to point out that the program is helping parents in many ways: subsidies make child care more affordable; the addition of day care spaces improves availability of care so parents can work; and improved day care quality provides parental peace of mind. Also aiding parents are locally-specific efforts such as Orange County's use of Smart Start funds to help homeless parents find jobs, transportation, and housing while also paying for their children to attend preschool. Or Burke County's use of funds to hire an interpreter to help the county's growing Hispanic population find child care
and other social services for their children and themselves. Nonetheless, my point here is not to question whether Smart Start helps parents. Rather it is to make clear that the rhetoric used to gain support is to help children, not parents.

A similar case can be made for the argument that Smart Start will eventually result in more responsible citizens. Again, the focus of supporter rhetoric is on children and their role as future (adult) citizens. Far less is said about their parents as citizens in the present and their right to quality, affordable child care so they can meet their financial obligations and participate more fully in public life. Although this focus on children may be a way to gain votes and support, it has the consequence of diverting attention away from larger structural problems about child care access in American society. Certainly the Smart Start program itself does benefit parents as well as children; but the arguments put forth to promote the program do not challenge the gender-biased assumptions about women's employment and the care of children that help explain the inadequacies of the current child care scene. When supporters of Smart Start mention that "parents are working" and use this as a reason to support government programs (so that children can be "helped"), it detracts public attention from the reasons why we as a society need to help the parents as well. Furthermore such reasoning assumes that access to child care does not really affect fathers' employment; it also appears that many people still are ambivalent about mothers' working and placing their children in day care. Thus supporters do not argue that Smart Start is a good idea because working parents need it. Rather, a strategy (conscious or unconscious) of Smart Start proponents is to tie a sensitive subject (i.e. child care) to non-controversial goals that presumably everyone wants (e.g. healthy and educated children, a strong state economy,
and a responsible citizenry). Although Smart Start is changing the material conditions of the child care scene, I question whether it is challenging the ideological underpinnings that helped create this scene. Nelson (1990) points out that some social programs incorporate long-lasting tensions in that they reproduce and reinforce social inequities between groups while at the same time improving the material condition of beneficiaries. This may be true for Smart Start.

Perhaps Smart Start can be viewed as a "back-door" approach to improving child care and thus the lives of both children and their working parents. Rather than address the problems parents face in combining wage-earning and childrearing, it claims to be good for everyone by emphasizing the needs of children. I would like to believe that a "front-door" approach of arguing on the behalf of working parents would be as politically successful, but I do not think that would be the case. An optimistic view of the situation is that ideological positions may change as material circumstances change. A less hopeful view is that without articulating and challenging the root of the problem, reform may be too easily abandoned with changing circumstances such as a new political administration.

5.4.2 Opposition to Smart Start

Despite the positive effects of Smart Start, Governor Hunt has had to fight the General Assembly for the survival and expansion of the program, even though the majority of North Carolinians are in favor of it. According to reports in the *Raleigh News and Observer*, opposition to Smart Start comes from conservative legislators, fundamentalist churches, home schooling supporters, and some parents. These groups oppose the program on a combination of philosophical and financial grounds. Basically, they suggest that government has neither the social right nor the financial obligation to
play a significant role in the care of young children. The rhetoric of opponents reveals a persistent belief in a strict public/private dichotomy.

Philosophical objections to Smart Start surfaced early in the debate over the program. Some opponents argue that Smart Start represents governmental intrusion into how parents raise their children. As a Republican state representative phrased it, "We don't need government to influence the mind of a youngster" (quoted in Simmons and Sheehan 1997). Similarly, a Republican state senator remarked in a letter to the editor of the Raleigh News & Observer, "Your June 9 editorial 'Time to get smart' continued to espouse the socialist theme that 'government' knows what is best for its citizens" (Clark 1995). A more extreme version of this argument put forth by opponents such as the Family Advisory Council on Education is that Smart Start is based on a so-called "Swedish-socialist model" in which both parents work while children are raised by the state (Miller 1995). At a rally against Smart Start in which opponents expressed their fears about government intervention in their lives and the erosion of family values, one parent even remarked that "I would have expected this to happen in Nazi Germany with Hitler" (quoted in Denton 1993). And as a parent and day care operator said at a public hearing on Smart Start, "I think we need to put more of the responsibility back on parents to raise their children" (quoted in Patterson 1995). Implicit to these positions is the view that child care is a private-sphere activity, inappropriate for funding or involvement by the public realm of the state. Also underlying this view is an assumption of a gendered division of labor in which mothers are the most appropriate caretakers of children. This view firmly supports the notion of a public/private dichotomy.

Over time, the debate over the future of Smart Start has become more financial and less philosophical in nature. However, many of the financial
arguments against the program, leveled mainly by Republican state lawmakers, rest on the same notion of a public/private dichotomy that the philosophical ones do. The financially-based arguments against Smart Start reflect a current political climate (at both state and national levels) that puts a high priority on cutting taxes, scaling back social programs, and being "efficient" in government spending. For example, Smart Start has been described as big-government spending; for the government to run more efficiently, Smart Start needs to be less of a tax burden, according to this perspective. Another similar view articulated by critics is that Smart Start is just another big government program that may not be giving adequate returns for the investment. Some critics want to see proof that Smart Start is working before they grant the program more funding. Other opponents argue that there is not enough accountability of public money in the program. Smart Start is also described as merely duplicating services that the state already provides (such as immunizations and health care). The financial objection of greatest consequence though is the charge that there is not enough private money in the Smart Start program. Acting on this objection, the Republican-controlled General Assembly passed legislation requiring the North Carolina Partnership for Children (the non-profit organization created to administer Smart Start) to raise a 10 percent private funding match in order to receive public funds from the state. This move towards privatization has enormous implications at the state level for the future of Smart Start and at the national level if Smart Start is truly viewed as a model for improving the nation's child care services. I explore the national implications in section 5.5.

The philosophical and financial objections to the Smart Start program suggest a persistent belief in both the separation of public and private
spheres and in the notion that child care is an individual rather than a societal responsibility. The view of Smart Start as governmental intrusion into family life is reminiscent of President Nixon's rationale for vetoing the Comprehensive Child Care Development Act of 1971 because it would be "family weakening." Some version of this "family weakening" argument has historically been used to justify the relative lack of federal involvement in child care policy, as discussed in Chapter Two. One would think that this line of reasoning would hold fewer adherents as more women enter the U.S. work force, and the need for child care increases. Although North Carolina has one of the highest percentages of working mothers in the nation, that economic reality did not stop this argument from playing a prominent role in the early debates over Smart Start funding. Implicit (at times explicit) to the "family-weakening" argument is the belief that women should stay home to care for their children. Support for this idealized gendered division of labor persists in the face of the social and economic reality of increasing numbers of women (many of them mothers) in the work force.

The move towards the privatization of Smart Start implies that the financial support of child care services does not belong in the public realm. Yet some would argue that the state should bear a greater responsibility for the care and education of young children:

there's no way the private sector can or should be expected to defray a significant share of these [Smart Start] costs -- or any of them for that matter. The financing of essential educational programs should not depend on hand-outs -- which is why the state constitution puts responsibility for providing public education squarely on the General Assembly (Raleigh News and Observer 1995a).

In contrast, the privatizing legislation suggests that while the education of school-aged children rightly belongs in the public realm, the care and education of young children does not. In other words, it is the government's
responsibility to educate older children, but the family's role to care for and educate young children.

The push for more private money could be the downfall of the Smart Start program. By the year 2000 Smart Start is projected to operate in all 100 counties at an annual cost of nearly $300 million; the private match requirement for that amount of state support is $30 million. There are serious questions about whether the North Carolina Partnership for Children will be able to raise that much money. So far most of the cash contributions to Smart Start have come from major corporations. However, most corporations shift their philanthropic money every few years as new ideas are presented and look more appealing (Wagner 1998). An additional problem is that most charitable giving in the U.S. comes from individuals (88 percent from individuals, 7 percent from philanthropic foundations, and 5 percent from corporations). However, fund-raising campaigns aimed at individuals take years to flourish, and Smart Start must show results quickly (Wagner 1998). For reasons I explore more fully in the next section, it seems risky to leave child care provisioning up to the whim of private support.

5.5 Smart Start as a National Model for Child Care Improvement

In addition to generating valuable and interesting debate on the subject of child care, the Smart Start program is significant because it has national ramifications, in at least two senses. First, since supporters promote the program as a model for improving the nation's child care, Smart Start's successes, shortcomings, and difficulties have implications that reach far beyond the borders of North Carolina. Secondly, Smart Start is emblematic of larger national trends towards devolution and privatization of social programs.
North Carolina's Smart Start program has received national attention and numerous accolades. Child care experts applaud Smart Start for its commitment to improving the state's child care services. They also praise the program for its accomplishments thus far. In 1995 Helen Blank, Director of Child Care at the Children's Defense Fund, said that "The commitment to child care in North Carolina is simply the most exciting thing going on in the country right now" (quoted in Cadden 1995, 24). A study conducted in 1996 by Columbia University ranked Smart Start among the country's top eight early childhood initiatives (Sheehan and Simmons 1997b). The program has been discussed in a number of national venues, including Congressional committees, the national Healthy Cities Conference, the Children's Defense Fund, and the Carnegie Corporation Conference on Children (NC Department of Human Resources 1994). In addition, in its annual evaluation by child care experts of the child care scene in the fifty states, Working Mother magazine proclaimed North Carolina "the most improved state" for child care in 1994, "the most exciting state" for child care progress in 1995, "the state working the hardest for child care improvements" in 1996, and the state with the "most action and enthusiasm for improving child care" in 1997 (Cadden 1994, 35; 1995, 24; Holcomb 1996, 32; 1997, 38).

As I reported in section 5.3, Smart Start has been very successful in improving North Carolina's child care availability, affordability, and quality. It is thus not surprising that many observers of child care reform tout Smart Start as a model for improving the nation's child care services. However, my research raises two cautionary points about using Smart Start as a national model. First, as discussed in the section outlining the support for the program, even though Smart Start benefits parents as well as children, the rhetoric promoting the program focuses almost exclusively on children's
needs rather than working parents' needs. In this way the program fails to challenge the gender-biased assumptions about women's employment and the care of young children that helped create the inadequacies of the current child care scene. Secondly, Smart Start's move toward increased privatization, which I will discuss below, is particularly troubling if the program is to be used as a national model for improving child care services and access.

A second reason Smart Start may be seen as having national implications is that the program reflects broader trends toward devolution and privatization of social programs. It therefore seems likely that other states embarking upon child care reform will pay close attention to North Carolina's experiences with Smart Start. Devolution is "the transfer, or decentralization, of government functions from higher to lower levels of the federal hierarchy" (Kodras 1997, 81). In the case of Smart Start, responsibility for implementing child care improvements resides at the local (county) level rather than at the state level. "Privatization" refers to "the transfer of government functions to commercial firms and nonprofit organizations" (Kodras 1997, 81). Again in the case of Smart Start, lawmakers enacted legislation requiring the non-profit organization that oversees the program to raise a 10 percent match in private money in order to receive public funds, thus substituting the private sector for components of the public sector. Since Smart Start is a decentralized program that relies on a public-private partnership, it may be viewed as representative of larger structural changes in the American political economy since the late 1970s and 1980s.

In many ways, North Carolina's particular experience with negotiating the Smart Start program has parallels at the national level. When
Republicans took over the majority of the North Carolina House of Representatives in November 1994, they immediately began to question the scale and scope of the state government's involvement in social programs (including Smart Start). As mentioned earlier, a battle over Smart Start in the summer of 1995 held up the entire state budget for three weeks. While opponents of Governor Hunt's vision of Smart Start want to change the scale of government involvement, the desired direction of change -- from control at the county level to control at the state level -- is actually the opposite of national and state decentralizing trends for social programs, such as welfare reform. Critics of Smart Start's local approach fear a loss of state control, and a lack of legislative scrutiny and financial accountability. Critics of the program also push to change the scope of government's involvement in Smart Start by requiring more private money in the program.

The logic used by critics ("cut big government spending") is misplaced for the case of Smart Start for two additional reasons. First, though Smart Start is a decentralized program with power concentrated at the local level, it is the product of devolution only in an indirect sense. Smart Start arose because of a relative lack of federal involvement in child care policy, not because federal funds and responsibility were being reorganized and shifted to the state level. Smart Start uses state, not federal, funds. A related point is that some of Smart Start's problems highlighted by critics, in particular the lack of government efficiency, may be a result of the history of spatially uncoordinated policies between the federal and state levels. Because the federal landscape of provision was already uneven, it is difficult to see how the addition of funds, even though they are controlled and administered locally, could exacerbate geographical variations that already exist.
A clearer parallel between the North Carolina experience with Smart Start and the national experience with other social programs is the move toward privatization. As discussed earlier in this chapter, Smart Start is now required to raise a 10 percent match in private donations in order to receive the full amount of state-allocated funds. By the year 2000, when Smart Start is projected to operate in all 100 counties at a total cost of $300 million, this requirement would amount to a private match of $30 million. For reasons articulate earlier, such as the fact that corporate-giving is inconsistent, this goal will be very difficult to meet.

In addition to the difficulty of raising private funds, there is a deeper problem with the move toward privatizing a social program such as Smart Start. Namely, would privatization serve the public interest? In other words, would private managers include not only such goals as cost-efficiency but also concerns of access, quality, fairness, and security (Goodman and Loveman 1991)? It may be more cost-efficient to provide a lower-quality child care service, but that would not be in parents' or children's best interests. It may also be more cost-efficient to only serve those child care clients who can pay in full for the service, but that too would not serve the public well. Privatizing social programs suggests that social services become commodities to be sold. Private managers may then try to sell a commodity rather than provide the highest-quality service to the most people. In this way, the private market cannot guarantee to take care of the poor. The public interest may not be best-served by privatization in the case of social services.

Although Governor Hunt promoted Smart Start as a public-private partnership, he surely did not anticipate that Republican legislators would be in a position to demand such a high level of private contributions. Leaving a
social program as important as child care up to market forces, and the short-term interests and inconsistencies of private hand-outs seems a precarious means to provide access to quality child care for all families. As one editorial stated,

[Smart Start] is clearly a program that has proven its worth. Withholding much-needed support from North Carolina's children -- by penalizing the partnership for failing to reach an unreachable goal or by underfunding it -- is just wrong. Extending Smart Start to as many children as possible is a job for government. (Raleigh News and Observer 1998).

The national implications of Smart Start debates raise at least two important concerns. The first is the role of the government -- at various scales -- in providing care and education to young children. The second is whether the market should be left to decide the quality and access of child care to families. Other states who look to North Carolina as a model for improving their own child care services should be aware of the possibility and pitfalls of a demand for increased private involvement.

5.6 Conclusions

The Smart Start program has made substantial progress toward improving access to child care in North Carolina. The availability, affordability, and quality of child care have improved in counties affected by Smart Start funding, including my study areas of Orange and Burke Counties and the western consortium of counties. However, Smart Start has been a source of great contention in the North Carolina legislature, with debates covering both philosophical and financial grounds. Supporters of the program argue that Smart Start will improve the material conditions of North Carolina's children, is good for the economic future of the state, and will help today's children become tomorrow's responsible citizens. However, they do not fully acknowledge an obligation to support working parents as well as
their children. Opponents of Smart Start charge that the program represents governmental intrusion into how parents raise their children and an inappropriate usage of state funds. These charges suggest a belief in a strict public/private dichotomy.

The debates in North Carolina over the funding and future of the Smart Start program have national implications for two reasons. First, Smart Start is promoted as a national model for child care improvement. Secondly, Smart Start is a reflection of broader trends toward the decentralization and privatization of social programs. For these reasons it seems likely that other states enacting child care reform may head down similar paths, thereby adding weight to the significance of North Carolina's experiences.

The debates generated by Smart Start also raise critical issues about the respective roles of government, business, parents, and communities in the care and education of young children. It seems clear that in order to improve access to child care, child care must be viewed as a societal rather than an individual responsibility. This shift in thinking would require overcoming the notion of a public/private dichotomy which views child care as an inappropriate subject for attention and funding by the public realm of government. Many early childhood experts take the position that government should play a bigger role since most parents are already paying all they can realistically afford and child care workers are paid as little as the system will allow (Simmons and Sheehan 1997).

Since the Smart Start program is still in its infancy, it may be too early to draw firm conclusions from the North Carolina experience with this social program. However, at least two red flags do emerge at this point. First, although Smart Start does benefit working parents as well as their
children, the rhetoric promoting the program focuses almost exclusively on the needs of children. By failing to acknowledge that parents have a right and usually a need to work, Smart Start perpetuates societal ambivalence about parents -- and in particular, mothers -- working and placing their children in day care. This ambivalence helped to create and sustain the current fragmented and unsatisfactory child care system in the United States. A second cautionary lesson from Smart Start is the push for more private money in the program. Large amounts of private funds will be difficult to raise, and it is questionable whether increased private involvement would best serve the interests of children and parents.

Despite these criticisms, Smart Start shows great promise. It has already improved access to child care in many parts of the state, thereby benefiting both children and parents. Program promoters have insisted that child care be placed on the "public" agenda for attention and support. Without question, Smart Start represents the most significant commitment to child care improvements that North Carolina residents have ever witnessed. The tensions swirling around the program and the apparent inconsistencies of the program's messages are valuable reflections of American society's ambivalence toward a service it increasingly relies upon. The "child care dilemma," as some call it, will not just go away. Neither, at least in the short-term, will the debates surrounding it.
CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSIONS

I am lucky in that I managed to find a child care provider whom I like and trust. If I was uneasy about my son's well-being while working, it would be very hard for me to continue to work.
(Tracy, 28, legal assistant and student)

The hardest thing about being a parent so far has been dealing with day care issues . . . It seems to me that quality day care should be a higher priority in our communities.
(Allison, 37, professor)

Access to child care is becoming an increasingly pressing economic and social issue for American families as more women enter the paid labor force. However, the provision of child care services has not kept pace with this social and economic reality. Furthermore, substantial spatial variations exist in child care availability, affordability, and quality. As I have argued in this dissertation, place is an important variable when considering questions of child care access. In addition, access to child care is shaped by both local and non-local forces, hence attention to issues of scale is also critical.

Despite these geographical implications of child care access, the geographic literature on child care issues is relatively sparse. However, feminist geographers have sought to put child care on the geographic research agenda by pointing out that the social and the economic are connected, and that child care is a crucial linkage between home and work. This study, along with recent scholarship on the subject, has called for more multi-scaled geographic research on child care. I argued that gender relations play a role in shaping access to child care at different scales in an American context. In addition to the insights offered to feminist geography, this dissertation also contributes to the scholarship on the gendered dichotomy of public and private spheres in the U. S., on questions about gender and the
welfare state, and on child care services from a policy perspective. Finally, this research makes a contribution to the broader field of geography by demonstrating the utility both of combining qualitative and quantitative techniques, and of working at multiple scales in order to produce a richer and more contextualized analysis.

The two geographical concepts of place and scale helped shape the structure of this dissertation, as I employed both horizontal (i.e. comparative) and vertical (i.e. multi-scaled) dimensions of inquiry. I used a comparative framework to examine the child care situations in three areas of North Carolina that differ socially, economically, and geographically. In addition, I considered child care access issues at multiple spatial scales: the household experiences of child care access, local contrasts in child care needs and resources, the effects on child care access of a state-led initiative to improve child care services, and the broader context of federal legislation regarding child care. This comparative and multi-scaled approach enabled me to tackle the complexity of child care access issues.

In addition to my innovative approach, I used both qualitative and quantitative methods in complementary ways to address my main research questions. This "triangulated," or integrated, approach was necessary for a few reasons. First, it allowed me to capture some of the complexity of real people's lives while also placing their particular situations into a broader geographical, social, and economic context. Secondly, it enabled me to investigate both the seriousness (through qualitative means) and the pervasiveness (through quantitative means) of child care access difficulties. Thirdly, by using this multiple-methods approach I was able to address issues of child care access at several spatial scales. At the household level of analysis, I employed participant observation, survey techniques, and
interviewing. At the local level of analysis I relied upon interview and archival research techniques. At the state level I performed a qualitative content analysis of relevant newspaper articles. Finally, I interpreted secondary sources to construct a national-level context for the issue of child care access.

For the remainder of this chapter I will summarize the major findings of this study and demonstrate how the geographic concepts of place and scale are important to understanding issues of child care access. Based on the findings of this study, I will also suggest appropriate realms for child care improvement and discuss a few ideas for future research on the subject.

6.1 Summary

In Chapter Two I gave an historical overview of federal involvement in American child care policy. This overview served two purposes. First, it provided a broader historical and policy context in which to situate my case study of access to child care in North Carolina. Secondly, it highlighted broader child care themes at the national level that would also appear at household, local and state levels, based on my empirical research. I argued that the history of child care legislation and recent child care policy developments reveal several distinguishing characteristics of the U.S. government's role in child care policy. First, federal action on child care issues has historically been motivated by reasons other than helping a wide range of employed parents afford quality child care. For example, WPA-funded nurseries in the 1930s created work for unemployed teachers; the Lanham Act of 1941 provided funds to set up child care centers in defense plants employing women and thus helped meet labor needs during a period of national crisis; and some recent child care initiatives have as their underlying goal the movement of people from welfare to work. Secondly, the federal government has tended to view child care as a private rather than a public
responsibility. I argued that this approach to child care policy reflects a commitment to individualism and family privacy, as evidenced by President Nixon's 1971 comment that passing the Comprehensive Child Development Act would be "family weakening." Thirdly, child care provision has been left largely to the market under the assumption that privatization increases individual families' child care choices. However, as I argued in Chapter Five, the market does not guarantee equity in service provision or in accessibility. In addition, for-profit care tends to be of lower quality than non-profit care. Fourthly, federal efforts in child care have tended to focus on economically-disadvantaged groups. As a result, there has been a long history of social stigma attached to government-sponsored child care programs in the U. S.

Historically, the federal government has not been seen as responsible for child care policy. One important consequence of this relatively minor role played by the national-level government is a fragmented child care "system." Governmental involvement in child care consists of an uncoordinated mix of direct and indirect programs at the federal, state, and local levels. There is no overarching plan or coherent vision for child care improvement. A second important consequence of the fairly minor federal role is also a geographical one, namely, there is a high degree of spatial variation in child care availability, cost, and quality. Since the federal government is relatively uninvolved in child care reform, the scales at which most child care initiatives occur are the local and state levels. The "landscape" of child care is thus very uneven.

To offer one explanation for the uneven and fairly minor federal role in child care policy, I turned to the critique of "universal citizenship" and the public/private dichotomy on which this ideal is based. I argued that the enduring legacy of the social construction of distinct public and private
spheres has several implications for child care policy. First, child care historically has been constructed as a private issue which does not belong in the public sphere and thus is inappropriate as a citizen entitlement. Secondly, social policy aimed at women has tended to define them according to their private roles as wives and mothers rather than their public roles as workers or citizens. Thirdly, the care of children (and dependents in general) is devalued by the public sphere. To end the chapter, I highlighted national-level themes -- such as the view of child care as a private responsibility and the gendered division of labor implicit in this view -- that would reappear in my empirical findings at household, local, and state levels.

In Chapter Three I made a case for examining child care access in three particular locales in North Carolina. In so doing I also highlighted the importance of place in shaping child care availability, affordability, and quality. I chose North Carolina as a study area for three compelling reasons. First, North Carolina has an extremely high percentage of working mothers with young children, thus child care is a pressing issue in the state. Secondly, North Carolina has recently launched a state-led effort to improve child care services and access through a program called "Smart Start." The program has already made progress in child care improvements and is touted by supporters as a model for improving the national child care scene. Of additional interest for this dissertation is the fact that debates over the funding and direction of Smart Start raise broader child care issues. Thirdly, regional variations in employment opportunities for women suggest there may also be geographical differences in child care services. For this reason I chose three contrasting locales, all of which qualified for the first round of Smart Start funding, for an in-depth study of child care access. Orange County is an economically thriving area with many university and high-
technology jobs. Burke County is in a declining industrial area with a high concentration of jobs in the textile and furniture industries. The third study site is a consortium of the state's seven westernmost counties, an historically poor area where many of the jobs are in the low-wage tourist and apparel industries.

Differences in child care needs and resources in these three areas highlighted some of the ways that place can shape child care access. For example, Orange County has an abundance of child care resources, but the area's high cost of living make these services financially out of reach for less well-off residents. Many Burke County residents need evening and weekend child care hours to accommodate manufacturing shift-work schedules. Residents from the western consortium of counties face numerous barriers to accessing child care, such as poverty, lack of transportation in an isolated rural area, and irregular work schedules associated with the predominant employment in the region. The Smart Start program has already made many improvements in child care services and access in these three areas by increasing the availability of day care slots, subsidizing the cost of this care, and improving the quality of care in terms of staff training and curriculum and facility improvements.

In Chapter Four I explored how the place differences outlined in Chapter Three, combined with parents' differing social and economic circumstances, helped shape access to child care at household and local levels. I used both qualitative and quantitative methods to examine how gender relations, labor market position (occupation and income level), family structure (dual-parent versus single-parent), and race interact in particular locales to shape parents' child care options and strategies. I defined "access to child care" as a combination of affordability, location and hours of
operation, channels of information, and trust and childrearing compatibility. To explore access in my three study areas, I specifically examined access issues related to: 1) finding good child care, 2) managing the "everyday," 3) juggling employment and child care, 4) financial assistance and benefits, and 5) parents' satisfaction with child care.

The results of my analysis led me to make some broader arguments. First, women shoulder the greater responsibility for arranging and managing child care. Secondly, child care is a crucial link between home and work and often shapes parents' employment possibilities. Thirdly, child care is viewed by many employers as a private issue outside the realm of work. Fourthly, child care arrangement for many families are fragmented, complex, and precarious as a result of the necessity of forging individual solutions with little help from employers or government.

I used empirical evidence gained from surveys and interviews to demonstrate that distinct groups of people -- based on some combination of social, economic, and geographic characteristics -- rely on different sources of information to find child care. Furthermore, these groups clearly had varying space-time limitations in choosing care. There were also significant variations in group experiences in negotiating that care, perhaps as a consequence of the different resources available to them for dealing with these problems. Parents at the lowest socioeconomic level (mostly the "single," "student," and "racial minority" groups), who were located predominantly in western North Carolina, faced the most serious problems in accessing child care. Their child care options were more restricted by space-time logistics. They also had one of the least equitable commuting arrangements. They had high levels of work-related difficulties with child care and the lowest percentage of employer-provided child care benefits. In
addition, they reported a higher usage of supplementary informal care, implying a more complex and fragmented child care regime. The most significant child care issue for the "working middle class," largely located in Burke County, was the matter of affordability. The middle class proved to be in a difficult financial situation in that their incomes were too high to qualify them for financial assistance with child care but too low to allow them to comfortably make ends meet. Parents at the highest socioeconomic level (the "professional" and "managing household" parent groups), heavily represented in Orange County, had a mixture of child care experiences. The "professional" group had the most equitable commuting arrangements to and from day care, while the "managing household" group had the least. The "professional" group reported one of the highest levels of work-related difficulties with child care, while the "managing household" group reported the lowest. The "professional" group reported the highest level of employer-provided child care benefits. At the same time, however, this group also had the highest percentage of people who said they would prefer using another type of child care.

I also used empirical data to show that in many cases the presence of child care problems cut across social, economic, and geographical borders. One common thread throughout this chapter was the significance of home-work connections. In other words, the "public" sphere of employment affects and is affected by the "private" sphere of home and family life. Many parents expressed the sentiment that it is hard to concentrate at work when you are worried about your child's day care situation, yet few employers offered formal "family-friendly" policies or child care benefits. Parents also commented on the ways their work schedules were affected by day care schedules and vice versa. Another widespread problem to emerge from this
study was the high turnover rate of day care workers due to low pay and lack of benefits. This problem epitomizes the undervaluing of "caring" work (which is viewed as a private-sphere activity and is carried out mostly by women) in American society. Perhaps the most prominent commonality throughout this research was the pervasiveness of the gendered division of labor in child care. This observation began with my fieldwork experiences. All but one of the 67 day care directors and hundreds of day care teachers I saw were female. In addition, the overwhelming majority of questionnaire respondents were women, and most of the parents who agreed to be interviewed were women. Questionnaire results and interviews suggested that child care is still considered to be "women's work" and is still in fact handled primarily by women. However, I suggest that not until child care becomes a societal issue rather than a women's issue will we see improved access for all groups of people.

These household and local interactions, though important in their own right, take place within the context of state-level policy. In Chapter Five I considered the state's role in improving child care access for its residents by focusing on North Carolina's Smart Start program, a state-led initiative to improve child care services. The Smart Start program, launched in 1993, has already made considerable progress toward improving access to child care in North Carolina. The availability, affordability, and quality of child care have improved in counties affected by Smart Start funding, including my study areas of Orange and Burke Counties and the western consortium of counties. However, since Smart Start uses state money to fund a socially-sensitive service such as child care, the program has been a source of great contention in the North Carolina legislature. The debates over the funding and future direction of Smart Start focus on the role of government in child care.
care policy. As such, they inform broader child care issues at both the state and national level. First, because Smart Start is promoted as a national model for child care improvement, the successes and shortcomings of the program have implications that extend far beyond the borders of North Carolina. Secondly, because Smart Start appears to offer a successful example of decentralization and privatization of social programs, other states embarking upon child care reform may follow a path similar to North Carolina's.

The debates over Smart Start cover both philosophical and financial grounds. Supporters make three basic claims about the program. First, Smart Start is touted as improving the welfare of North Carolina's children. Second, Smart Start is viewed by supporters as good for the economic future of North Carolina since it will help produce good workers and cut down on school drop-out rates, crime, teenage pregnancies, and welfare dependency. And third, Smart Start is praised for helping today's children become tomorrow's responsible citizens. These arguments, though compelling, fail to challenge the gender-biased assumptions about women's employment and the care of children that help account for the inadequacies of the current child care scene.

Opponents of Smart Start charge that the program represents governmental intrusion into how parents raise their children and an inappropriate usage of state funds. They suggest that government has neither the social right nor the financial obligation to play a significant role in the care and education of young children. Critics additionally complain that Smart Start is costly, inefficient, and lacking in private funding. Acting on this last objection, the North Carolina General Assembly mandated that ten percent of Smart Start's funding must now come from private sources. The
rhetoric opposing Smart Start indicates a persistent belief in a strict
dichotomy of public/private spheres, the assumption of a gendered division of
labor in child care, and the notion that child care is an individual rather than a
societal responsibility.

Two cautionary lessons were drawn from North Carolina's experiences
thus far with the fledgling Smart Start program. First, although Smart Start
does benefit working parents as well as their children, the rhetoric promoting
the program focuses almost exclusively on the needs of children. As a result
of failing to acknowledge that parents have a right and usually a need to
work, Smart Start perpetuates a societal ambivalence about day care that
helped to create and sustain the current fragmented and unsatisfactory
American child care system. A second cautionary lesson from Smart Start is
the push for more private money in the program. Large amounts of private
funds will be difficult to raise, and it is questionable whether increased private
involvement would serve the best interests of parents and children. Despite
these criticisms, Smart Start shows great promise for improving child care
services and access and is a significant commitment to child care reform.
Nonetheless, the debates and controversies surrounding the program reflect
a larger societal ambivalence in the U. S. about the use of child care services.

6.2 Geographical Perspectives on Child Care

In conclusion I would like to return to two geographical concepts that
framed this dissertation: place and scale. A focus on these key geographical
concepts demonstrates what geographers can contribute to an analysis of
child care issues and suggests some possible arenas for child care
improvement and directions for future geographical inquiry on the subject.

In Chapter Three's discussion of the three locales chosen for in-depth
study, I outlined some of the ways that place matters in shaping child care
access. For example, the predominant employment structure of an area -- including wages, typical work schedules (e.g. 8:00-5:00 daily versus shift-work or otherwise irregular hours, seasonal versus year-round employment), tendency of employers to offer child care benefits -- has the potential to affect child care access for the area's residents. In addition, an area's cost of living affects people's ability to afford child care and thus their access to this care. The amount of migration in and out of an area can also influence child care access for area residents. People who live near relatives potentially have more child care options and/or different child care strategies involving family-based care. The geography of an area certainly plays a role in shaping child care access. Isolated regions with poor quality roads and minimal public transportation (e.g. western North Carolina) present challenges to area residents needing child care. Place does make a difference in child care access.

Another distinctly geographical concept that informs an analysis of child care access is scale. The order of chapters in this dissertation suggests some general ways in which scale is implicated in this analysis of child care access. A relative lack of involvement in child care policy at the national level (Chapter Two) has resulted in extreme spatial variations in child care services and access as state and local leaders pick up the slack and form their own initiatives (Chapter Three). North Carolina's Smart Start program is one such example. Local areas use their Smart Start funds differently, depending upon child care needs and existing resources (Chapters Three and Five). At the household level, parents' occupations, incomes, work schedules, family type, and race, as well as the locations of employment and home, all influence child care options and strategies (Chapter Four).
The direction of influence is not always top-down, however. Government policies filter down to the local level, but local activism can influence government policy (England 1996b). In the case of North Carolina, individuals in Smart Start's local "Partnerships for Children" may influence how child care funds are spent and thus have an impact on the local child care scene. And individuals could have voted Governor Hunt out of office in 1996, a move which certainly would have altered the child care situations at both state and local levels. One way that the local level affects the state level is that State Representatives and Senators from differing local areas influenced the debates over and thus the direction of the Smart Start program. Smart Start has already affected the national child care scene insofar that one of President Clinton's child care proposals unveiled in January 1998 is a child care teacher training and compensation program modeled after North Carolina's T.E.A.C.H. (Teacher Education and Compensation Helps) program.

At least three of the major themes of this dissertation -- the public/private dichotomy, the gendered division of labor in child care, and the indirect nature of much child care legislation -- emerged at multiple scales of analysis. The enduring notion of a public/private dichotomy -- or the view of child care as a distinctly private as opposed to a public concern -- is woven through national, state, local, and household levels. The U.S. government has historically been reluctant to get involved in child care policy since child care is viewed by many as a private (family) matter rather than a public (governmental) concern. As a result, federal child care policy remains sparse and fragmented. At the state level some opponents of North Carolina's Smart Start program clearly articulated a view of child care as a private issue when they argued that state government has neither the social right
nor the financial responsibility to get involved in the way parents raise their children. In terms of the local level, many employers of parents surveyed in this study neglected to offer child care benefits or formal "family friendly" policies that would help employees meet home and work obligations, despite the fact that child care problems can affect parents' abilities to do their jobs. One reason for this failure may be that child care is viewed by many employers as something to be worked out on personal time rather than company time. Many individual employees are afraid to push the child care issue at work because of the general view in corporate culture that child care problems are private rather than public (i.e. employment) concerns. As a result, employees forge individual solutions rather than working together for larger, more permanent structural changes.

The gendered division of labor that is implicit to the view of child care as a private responsibility also runs through multiple scales of analysis. The federal view of child care as a private concern relies upon an idealized gendered division of labor in which mothers are always available to care for their children. At the state level, some of the objections voiced about Smart Start reflect the view that child care is a private (i.e. mother's) responsibility. At the local level the overwhelming majority of day care directors and teachers I saw during my fieldwork were women. At the household level 94 percent of questionnaires returned to me were completed by women. In addition, surveys and interviews revealed that women shoulder most of the responsibility for arranging and managing child care, including finding a day care center or family day care home and doing most of the transporting to and from this child care site. Anecdotal evidence from interviews also suggests that most women perceive themselves as doing most of the child care-related tasks for the family. Even if child care is supposedly viewed
more these days as a "family issue" rather than a "women's issue," it appears that most child care responsibilities still fall to women.

The explicit goal of child care legislation is seldom to help parents manage childrearing and wage-earning responsibilities, a fact apparent at both national and state government levels. In Chapter Two I gave examples of several other national-level child care goals, such as the current push to move people from welfare to work. As Spakes (1992) notes, as there is no consensus about whether all or even most women should work, there is thus also no agreement on whether women should be supported in meeting their family and work obligations. At the state level the rhetoric advancing Smart Start articulates goals such as helping children, improving the state's economy, and building a responsible citizenry -- not helping parents be both workers and parents (though in practice it actually does help parents in this way). The failure of state and national child care policies to articulate this goal of helping parents suggests an ambivalence in American society about mothers' participation in the workforce and about the use of child care services in general. These attitudes contribute to the current child care dilemma in the U. S.

A focus on scale also suggests appropriate realms for improving child care services and access. At the national level we need a social and economic commitment to child care reform so that piecemeal, short-term solutions at local and state levels are not the norm. Geographical variations in child care availability, affordability, and quality should not be so dramatic. At the state level we need initiatives such as North Carolina's Smart Start program which demonstrate a commitment to child care reform and which actually do improve child care services and access. However, these programs must acknowledge working parents' need for quality, affordable child care. Closing
our eyes to the economic and social necessity of child care helps neither children nor their parents. At the local level employers need to view child care as an employment-related issue and enact measures -- such as financial assistance with child care expenses and flex-time to better balance wage-earning and childrearing -- to help their employees meet their home and work obligations. At the household level parents should work toward a more equitable distribution of child care responsibilities. The effects of the current state of gender relations on child care usage and access are apparent at all spatial scales.

Attention to issues of scale also suggests some avenues for future geographic inquiry on the subject of child care. Geographical variations in child care services call for more attention. Which areas have better and worse services and access to these services? Who benefits and who is disadvantaged by these distributions? An interesting follow-up project to this dissertation would be to compare other states' child care reform efforts with North Carolina's Smart Start program. Is Smart Start indeed a model for other states? Have other states experienced a push for greater privatization of their child care programs? Also meriting attention are recent child care reform efforts that are tied to other goals such as the welfare-to-work initiatives. Do these efforts actually improve access to child care? What are their stated aims and do these efforts address deeper structural problems of child care access or just deal with short-term goals?

In conclusion, I return to the sentiments of Courtney -- a 23 year-old single parent, office assistant, and full-time student:

I personally believe that the day care system in general is greatly underfunded. I believe that the state should provide the very best for the children. We are all supposed to put children first and help provide them with the best learning environment possible, and all parents want that for their children when they can't be with them.
With these words she puts her finger on a crucial aspect of the current American child care dilemma and a critical point of this dissertation: namely, the view of child care as a private responsibility both places an unfair and unrealistic burden on parents, and creates and sustains an inadequate child care system. Child care is a societal issue -- one that involves government, employers, and communities, as well as families. Children and their parents are best-served by this broader-based, and more just, view of child care responsibility.
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APPENDIX

Child Care Arrangements in the 1990s

The following questions ask about you, your family, and your child care arrangements. Please check the response(s) you think best answer the questions, and make any additional comments you feel are important. Please return the questionnaire to your child’s day care center by

***ABOUT YOU***

1. Sex: ___ male ___ female

2. Age: ______

3. Street address (or nearest street intersection): ______________________________________________

4. Marital status:
   ___ married, living with spouse ___ divorced
   ___ married, not living with spouse ___ widowed
   ___ not married, living with a partner ___ never married
   ___ separated

   If divorced, do you share child custody with your former spouse?
   ___ yes ___ no

5. Race ethnicity:
   ___ White ___ Asian
   ___ African American ___ Hispanic
   ___ Native American ___ Other (please specify) ____________________________

6. Which of these best describes you now? You may select all that apply to you.
   ___ working full-time
      If working full-time, are you self-employed? ___ yes ___ no
   ___ working part-time
   ___ managing household full-time
   ___ unemployed, looking for work
   ___ full-time student
   ___ part-time student

***YOUR CHILD CARE ARRANGEMENTS***

7. About children under age 18 living with you . . .

   1st Child 2nd Child 3rd Child 4th Child
   Ages: ________ ________ ________ ________
   Sex: ________ ________ ________ ________
   Receiving child care? Yes No Yes No Yes No Yes No
   If yes, type of care* ________ ________ ________ ________
   (see categories below)
Monthly care rate paid $_______ $_______ $_______ $_______
for each child

Hours of care per day _________ _________ _________ _________

* Categories for "type of care" question above:
  1. this day care center
  2. other day care center
  3. family day care home
  4. preschool
  5. after-school program
  6. summer camp
  7. family member relative
  8. provider comes to your home
  9. other (please specify) ____________________________

8. Do you ever rely on friends, neighbors, or relatives not living with you to help with care for your children while you are at work or school?
   ___ yes
   ___ no

   If yes, how often?
   ___ once a month or less
   ___ 2-3 times a month
   ___ once a week
   ___ more than once a week

9. How satisfied are you with your current child care arrangements?
   ___ extremely satisfied
   ___ very satisfied
   ___ fairly satisfied
   ___ not too satisfied
   ___ not at all satisfied

10. How did you find out about this day care center?
    ___ friend
    ___ relative
    ___ Child Care Resource and Referral Agency
    ___ employer
    ___ church
    ___ phone book
    ___ newspaper advertisement
    ___ other (please specify) _______________________

11. Why did you choose this day care center? Please check all that apply.
    ___ good reputation high quality
    ___ affordable cost
    ___ located near home
    ___ located near workplace
    ___ located on the way between home and workplace
    ___ located near school
    ___ hours of operation fit parents' work schedules
    ___ flexible hours
    ___ church-affiliated
    ___ offers infant care
    ___ other (please specify) _______________________

12. Were you on a waiting list for this day care center?
    ___ yes
    ___ no

    If yes, for how long? _________________________________
13. If you were to recommend changes at this day care center, what would you suggest? First check all that apply, then rank in order of importance with "1" being most important.

- ___ earlier morning hours
- ___ evening hours
- ___ weekend hours
- ___ summer care
- ___ sick child care
- ___ infant care
- ___ tuition aid (for example, sliding fee scale, discount for 2nd child, etc.)
- ___ other (please specify) __________________________

14. Is there another type of child care that you would prefer using?

- ___ yes
- ___ no

If yes, what is it? __________________________

What prevents you from using it?

- ___ too expensive
- ___ inconvenient hours
- ___ inconvenient location
- ___ no openings available
- ___ other (please specify) __________________________

15. Who usually drops off your child(ren) at day care?

- ___ you
- ___ your spouse partner
- ___ another family member
- ___ your former spouse
- ___ a friend
- ___ carpool
- ___ other (please specify) __________________________

16. Where is this person usually coming from?

- ___ home
- ___ workplace
- ___ school
- ___ other (please specify) __________________________

17. How long does this trip usually take (in minutes)? _________________

18. Who usually picks up your child(ren) from day care?

- ___ you
- ___ your spouse partner
- ___ another family member
- ___ your former spouse
- ___ a friend
- ___ carpool
- ___ other (please specify) __________________________

19. Where is this person coming from?

- ___ home
- ___ workplace
- ___ school
- ___ other (please specify) __________________________

20. How long does it usually take this person to get to the day care center (in minutes)? _________________

21. What percentage of your household monthly income is spent on day care?

- ___ 1-5%
- ___ 6-10%
- ___ 11-15%
- ___ 16-20%
- ___ 21-25%
- ___ more than 25%
22. Do you or does anyone in your household receive financial assistance with child care?
   — yes
   — no
   If yes, please check all that apply.
   — employer assistance
   — tuition aid from day care provider
   — alimony or child support
   — Smart Start scholarship
   — child care subsidy from state or county agency
   — child care subsidy from federal agency
   — federal child care tax credit
   — other (please specify) ____________________

23. Do you know about the Smart Start program in your county?
   — yes
   — no
   If yes, how did you learn about it? Please check all that apply.
   — newspaper article
   — television news program
   — flyer or pamphlet
   — friend, family, or neighbor
   — Child Care Resource and Referral Agency
   — school
   — employer
   — other (please specify) ____________________

24. IF YOU OR YOUR SPOUSE/PARTNER ARE CURRENTLY EMPLOYED. . .
   a. Does either of your jobs create special difficulties for your child care arrangements? If so, what causes these difficulties? Please check all that apply.
      YOU S/P
      — __ non-standard working hours (not 8:00 am to 5:00 pm)
      — __ over-time hours
      — __ irregular hours (e.g. different hours on different days)
      — __ required out-of-town travel
      — __ other (please specify) ____________________
   b. If family matters require that either of you must leave work early or arrive late, how flexible is your employer?
      YOU S/P
      — __ extremely flexible
      — __ very flexible
      — __ fairly flexible
      — __ not very flexible
      — __ not at all flexible
   c. Does either of your employers offer child care programs or benefits?
      — yes
      — no
      If yes, please check all that apply.
      YOU S/P
      — __ on-site child care
      — __ child care resource and referral service
      — __ reduced fees at certain centers
      — __ child care financial assistance
      — __ pre-tax flexible spending account
      — __ other (please specify) ____________________

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**MORE ABOUT YOU**

25. What is the highest grade or year in school you and your spouse partner have completed?

   YOU   S/P
   ____   ____
   none
   elementary
   high school
   college
   some graduate school
   graduate or professional degree

26. Considering everyone and all sources, what was your total family income before taxes and other deductions last year?

   ____ less than $5,000
   ____ $5,000 - $9,999
   ____ $10,000 - $14,999
   ____ $15,000 - $19,999
   ____ $20,000 - $24,999
   ____ $25,000 - $34,999
   ____ $35,000 - $49,999
   ____ $50,000 - $70,000
   ____ more than $70,000

27. IF YOU OR YOUR SPOUSE/PARTNER ARE CURRENTLY EMPLOYED . . .

   a. What type of work do you and/or your spouse/partner do?

      YOU   S/P
      ____   ____
      professional
      technical
      managerial
      clerical
      sales worker
      service worker
      skilled craft worker
      machine equipment operator
      farming or forestry
      other (please specify) __________________________________________

   b. Which best describes where you and/or your spouse partner work?

      YOU   S/P
      ____   ____
      federal, state, or local government agency
      school or university
      private business
      non-profit organization
      self-employed
      other (please specify) __________________________________________

   c. What is your occupation? ________________________________

      What is your spouse/partner's occupation? ________________________________

28. Counting all types of workers in all areas and departments, about how many people work at the locations where you and/or your spouse/partner work?

   YOU   S/P
   ____   ____
   less than 25
   25-49
   50-100
   more than 100
29. You probably have many stories that would help me better understand child care issues. Would you be willing to speak with me privately or with a small group of other parents about your child care experiences? If so, please leave your name, a phone number, and the best time to contact you so we can arrange to talk (briefly and at your convenience).

Name: ________________________________________________

Phone number: _________________________________________

Best time to contact: ____________________________________

30. Many parents do not use day care centers or day care homes for their child care arrangements. Sometimes they hire child care providers who come to their homes or rely on family friends neighbors or other informal arrangements. As part of this study, I would like to talk to these parents. If you know parents who use any of these alternatives, I would appreciate it if you would give them the letter that follows this questionnaire.

31. I welcome any additional comments you might have . . . .

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

THANK YOU so much for taking time from your busy day to answer this questionnaire.
Bonnie Morris Henderson was born on May 2, 1966, in Jacksonville, Florida. After graduating from Sandalwood High School with honors in 1984, she enrolled at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where she earned a Bachelor of Arts degree with highest distinction in geography in 1988. She earned a Master of Arts degree in geography from the same department in 1991. She then worked for a year as a contract researcher for the Louisiana Geological Survey in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. In 1992 she entered the doctoral program in geography with a concentration in urban and social geography at Louisiana State University on a Graduate School Fellowship. In 1996 she was awarded a Dissertation Fellowship to complete her dissertation research. She currently lives in Baton Rouge with her husband, Keith Glenn Henderson, and their daughter, Kate Marina.
DOCTORAL EXAMINATION AND DISSERTATION REPORT

Candidate: Bonnie Morris Henderson

Major Field: Geography

Title of Dissertation: Access to Child Care in North Carolina: The Interaction of Gender Relations, Class, and Government Policy across Places and Scales

Approved:

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Major Professor and Chairman

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Date of Examination:

7 August 1998