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A CASE STUDY OF TEENAGE BABYSITTING IN THE UNITED STATES

Nozomi Kawata

Abstract

This is a case study on adolescent babysitting in the United States, which is a popular phenomenon nowadays in some communities. The author interviewed people in their late teens or twenties and parents from the United States. The former group was asked about their experiences as a babysitter and their experiences of having babysat in early childhood. The latter group was asked about experiences in hiring a teenage babysitter. The data illustrated the perspectives of three parties-babysitter, babysittee, and parent. By exploring the babysitting system, this paper attempts to illustrate two important aspects of the system; (1) How the babysitting system can serve as a nurturance formation device and (2) how it accelerates the transition of an adolescent from childhood to adulthood. In conclusion, the babysitting system was considered that (1) adolescent babysitters develop nurturance through structured and unstructured education and (2) the experience of undertaking a temporary parent/adult role makes for a smooth transition of the adolescent from childhood to adulthood.

We hope to provide an effective view of resolving the difficulties that Japanese society currently faces by shedding light on the babysitting system in North America.

Key Words: babysitting, child care, nurturance, adolescent, transition

INTRODUCTION

1. Features of Babysitting in the United States

Adolescent babysitting is a popular phenomenon nowadays in some communities, particularly in North America. Several researches show the regularity with which teenagers are hired as babysitters in North American communities. Schwalb, Schwalb and Chen et al. (2009) interviewed 200 mothers of preschool children and 248 undergraduate university students (103 males, 145 females) about their babysitting experiences in the United States: 79% of the mothers and 78% of the university students (52% male, 97% female) had babysitting experiences in their youth. Kawata (2006), whose preliminary research showed a similar result, interviewed 40 university students (20 males, 20 females) from the United States about their babysitting experiences. Results showed that 72.5% (65% male, 80% female) babysat in their youth and 90% had a teenage babysitter in their early childhood. A majority started babysitting around the age of 13-14 years and the peak time for babysitting was 15-16 years old. Therefore, it was clear that a majority of the youth in the United States have babysitting experiences.

Babysitting is a less formal arrangement for either regular or occasional temporary childcare. It is supplementary to day-care centers and other formal types of childcare. Most of the time, adolescent babysitting is done at the child's home. Adolescent

babysitting is rather done under the table (it is not openly practiced) so the arrangements are made personally and differ in each case. In some states, there are guidelines on the age of the babysitter and its working hours. However, there are almost no clear regulations of this matter. Parents tend to hire babysitters with a frequency ranging from once a month to a few times a week. Some hire them only a few times a year. Parents hire teenage babysitters when the parents are at work, are out for dinner, or out with partners or friends.

The job of a babysitter is usually restricted to activities that involve taking care of the child in order to give full attention to him or her. Babysitters apparently have a fairly well-defined idea without explicit direction from the parents that babysitting involves caring for children, and responsibilities falling outside this purview are considered less appropriate (Kournay, Martin & LaBarbera, 1980). The job of a babysitter involves activities such as putting children to bed, playing with the child, feeding them, etc. The babysitter is not expected to do any housework such as washing the dishes, cleaning the house, or running errands such as grocery shopping. Frequently, babysitters feel they are not expected to discipline the child.

Studies on adolescent babysitting report the important impact babysitting experiences have on adolescents, mainly such as learning a considerable amount of child care taking skills, responsibility, and appreciation for work (Schwalb, Schwalb & Chen et al., 2009; Kawata, 2006; Chen & Kawata, 2006; Kournay & LaBarbera, 1986; Kournay, Martin & LaBarbera, 1980). Schwalb's study claimed that babysitters were significantly more confident than non-babysitters in taking care of children. Thus, these overall experiences facilitate the development of their parenting skills. Kawata (2006) shows that 76% of the respondents who babysat thought their experiences would facilitate their own parenting experiences. Moreover, Kourany and LaBarbera mentioned that the babysitting experience accelerates the maturation process in adolescents as they undertake the role of adults.

Although the babysitting business is relatively free of difficulties, serious problems occur nevertheless. Several studies have reported abuse, including sexual abuse, perpetrated by adolescent babysitters (Kourany, Martin, Armstrong, 1979; Margolin & Craft, 1990; Martin & Kournay, 1980; Margolin, 1990 etc.). This issue may not be observed on a regular basis; however it is important to be mindful of such an issue.

2. Babysitting System and Formation of Nurturance in Japan and North America

The Term Nurturance

Despite the fact that the term "nurturance" is not widely used, the concept of "nurturance" is recognized widely in developmental psychology and ethnographies in anthropology. According to Kojima (1986), the term was first introduced in Murray's (1938) "Explorations in Personality."

In anthropology, the term was rarely used but there were many abundant descriptions of children taking care of younger children (e.g. Mead, 1928; Lijembe, 1967; Weisner & Gallimore, 1977; Ritchie & Ritchie, 1983; Gaskins, 2000 etc.).

Whiting and Whiting (1975, p106) defined the essence of nurturance as the ability

to predict the infant's needs and to learn what kind of behavior should be adopted in order to satisfy its need. They also point out that when taking care of an infant, even the slightest changes in an infant ought to be observed and responded to in an appropriate manner. This requires paying considerable attention to infants and also having significant experience in dealing with them (Whiting & Whiting, 1975).

In developmental psychology, the term nurturance was widely used by Fogel and Melson (1986). It was used to describe the positive characteristics of individuals in their relations with children. Kojima (2001) defined nurturance as the mind and skill to foster all living things with loving care. Nurturance is considered to be one of the fundamentals of child rearing.

Babysitting System and Formation of Nurturance

The babysitting system in North America can be viewed as a nurturance formation device when we consider the impacts of babysitting experiences on American adolescents (Kawata, 2006; Chen & Kawata, 2006; Chen, 2007; Schwab, Schwab & Chen et al., 2009).

Unfortunately, the situation in Japan is different. In a previous preliminary study, the author administered a questionnaire survey on university students from the United States and Japan to highlight their babysitting experiences. Japanese mothers of preschool children were also interviewed about their opinions on adolescent babysitting. The results clearly showed that Japan does not have an adolescent babysitting system. Furthermore, the results indicated that the opportunity to interact with younger children before becoming a parent is seriously scarce in Japan. Only 10% of the Japanese university students had experience in taking care of children. Many Japanese developmental psychologists have considered this as a serious problem. They have pointed out that parents with limited experience in interacting with children have a higher probability of "ikujifuan" (anxiety in parenting) or problems with parenting than parents who have experience in child care taking (Kojima, 1986; Sugimoto, 1991; Kaneda, 2003 etc.).

In addition to such a situation, Japanese mothers were considerably hesitant toward the idea of a teenager babysitting their children. Some of the reasons for such hesitation were as follows: the teenagers are not professionals or qualified in childcare, their knowledge and skills of taking care of children are inadequate, and they are not responsible enough. Many showed anxiety towards the adolescents as babysitters.

Therefore, the negative opinions of Japanese mothers on adolescent babysitting and the limited experience of child care taking of the adolescents reinforce each other, resulting in failure of fostering nurturance among the youth in Japanese society. This vicious cycle reinforces the segregation of children and adults.

Chen (2007) describes that it is not unusual for adolescents or even younger children to assist in taking care of their younger siblings when the parent is unavailable. Thus, nurturance is fostered at an early stage of development through actual participation and/or through participant observation of child rearing (Chen, 2007). However, this nurturance formation device, which was probably taken for granted in the daily lives of the Japanese, failed to function when Japanese society underwent

significant changes such as the decline of birth rate and the number of siblings, the increase of nuclear families living away from relatives due to the economic growth in the 1970s. Previous studies by Chen and Kawata show that Japan presently lacks the opportunity to foster nurturance. Furthermore, this accelerates the segregation of children and adults, making it all the more difficult for adolescents to transit into adulthood.

3. Purpose of this Paper

The author interviewed people in their late teens or twenties and parents from the United States. The author asked the former group questions related to (1) their experience in babysitting and (2) their experience in having been babysat in early childhood. The latter group was posed questions related to their experiences in hiring a teenage babysitter.

Firstly, the data showed more details about babysitting than previous studies, where the questionnaire survey was the main research method. Secondly, the data illustrated the perspectives of three parties: babysitter, babysittee, and parent, while previous studies tended to focus mainly on the babysitter.

By exploring the babysitting system in North America, this paper attempts to illustrate two important aspects of the system: (1) How the babysitting system can serve as a nurturance formation device and (2) how it accelerates the transition of an adolescent from childhood to adulthood. The latter is not discussed considerably in previous studies. We hope to provide an effective view of resolving the difficulties that the Japanese society currently faces by shedding light on the babysitting system in North America.

METHODS AND OUTLINE OF SURVEY

An interview was conducted on 11 (5 females and 6 males) North American adolescents in their twenties. They were asked about their babysitting experiences and their experience of being babysat in early childhood. The interview took place in Hokkaido, Japan from October to November 2007. Among the 11 participants, 7 were international undergraduate university students in an exchange program at Hokkaido University. Three people were English teachers from the JET program in Hokkaido and the remainder was the younger sister of one of the international university students. The duration of the interviews ranged from 30 minutes to 2 hours. The informants were from various parts of the United States (Massachusetts, North Dakota, Iowa, Texas, Illinois, Iowa, Oregon, and Alaska). They were all brought up in the United States and have attended or are attending college there.

Among the 11 informants, 8 of them (5 females and 3 males) had babysat a non-family member child as a part time job. The remaining 3 male informants only looked after their younger siblings and had no experience in babysitting a non-family member as a part time job.

Additional interviews were conducted with 6 parents, 3 of which were parents of the university student participants and 3 were friends of the parents. The informants were asked about their experiences in hiring a babysitter for their children. This

interview was conducted via e-mail. Among the 6 parents, 5 of them had hired a teenage babysitter before. The remaining parent had asked the child's grandparent to look after the children.

The scarce number of informants in this research may render the surveys inadequate. However, each specific interview will provide us with some rich information on how babysitting is actually practiced in North American communities.

The diverse backgrounds of the informants are an important indication that the style of babysitting is not homogeneous throughout North America. For example, according to an informant from Alaska, teenage babysitters are not popular as the community is so widely spread out that interactions with the neighbors are minimal and home schooling is the mainstream form of education.

DESCRIPTIONS OF CASES

In the practice of babysitting, there are three parties concerned: the babysitter (adolescents), the parents who hire the babysitter, and the babysittee (the child of the parent and the child who the babysitter is in charge of). These three parties form a triad. We will look at several cases of each party to gain a better understanding of how babysitting is actually practiced in North America. The cases illustrated below are only a part of the whole data.

1. The Babysitter

Case 1

Caitlin, a 21-year-old white female from Boston, Massachusetts, had her first job as a babysitter when she was 12 years old. She babysat for a family next door whom she knew very well and who had two children (ages 7 and 5). They hired her for 3-4 hours when the parents were out at dinner. She was paid \$15-20. She did several babysitting jobs until she went to college. She was a regular babysitter for 3 families at the most. In high school, she babysat for longer hours. Her working hours often ranged from 5 pm to 10 pm on weekdays and from 5 pm to midnight on weekends. Her job was to play with the children, feed them, and put them to bed.

Caitlin said she started babysitting because she wanted to earn her own money to go out with her friends and to buy things that she wanted. She also said that babysitting was "the easiest way to get a job" since it is prohibited to work before the age of 14 in the United States. However, she said that she preferred working besides babysitting in college because she felt uncomfortable when the children would not listen to her. She said she was still not sure what to do when the child was disobedient. If the child would misbehave she would often use the expression "I need you to do..." (e.g., I need you to put away your toys.) If the child still did not listen, she used time out.

Caitlin never took babysitting training classes nor did she have any younger siblings. However, she said that she felt confident doing the job when she started babysitting. Although most of her babysitting experiences were positive, one situation caught her so off guard that she did not know what to do: A 10-year-old child whom she was babysitting was endlessly screaming and crying (Caitlin was 16 years old at that

time): she was unable to deal with the situation and so asked her own mother for help. This was the first and last time she depended on her mother while she was babysitting, but she always knew that her mother would help her in similar emergencies.

Caitlin said that she did not reap any immediate learning benefits. However, her experiences as a babysitter will definitely help in raising her own children when she becomes a parent.

“You’re often in a situation where you don’t know what to do when you’re dealing with small kids. But you come to learn how to deal with it. I don’t know how but you just do. So those experiences have definitely made me more responsible.”

Case 2

Michael, a 24-year-old male from North Dakota first began to babysit when he was 12 years old because he wanted to earn extra money. He advertised his services by putting up posters on telephone poles and putting advertisements in his neighbors’ mailboxes in order to attract clients. He thought that it seemed “cool” or trendy to earn money and work at an early age.

He babysat for random families in his community. Since his clients were complete strangers, the parents who hired Michael arranged to meet his parents in order to acquaint themselves with each other. He said that although his earnings were little, he enjoyed the work and felt confident of himself.

Case 3

Betsy, a 24-year-old female from Iowa started her first babysitting job when she was 12 years old and has babysat many times throughout her whole school life until she graduated college. Her first babysitting job involved babysitting her 7-year-old cousin while her aunt was working. The aunt requested Betsy’s parents to allow their daughter to babysit her children since it would be a good opportunity to learn about assuming responsibility. Her mother and aunt made the arrangements and she started babysitting regularly during the summer break. They mostly stayed at home watched TV, or played games. Betsy and her aunt lived in the same neighborhood so when Betsy and her cousins wanted to play at the park or go to a swimming pool, Betsy’s mother would give them a ride. She was paid \$40 for 5 hours.

While Betsy was babysitting, a few emergencies occurred. Once her cousin fell off a bike and injured himself. Betsy was able to manage the situation by herself so she reported the accident when her aunt returned home. On another occasion, a stranger was prowling around the house. Although nothing happened, Betsy felt insecure so she called her mother for help.

In high school, she used to babysit her friend’s baby boy. She changed his diapers, fed him, and held him when he cried. In college, Betsy had a part time job at a children’s museum. Some of her coworkers asked her to babysit their children.

Betsy is very experienced as a babysitter. She said that she loves babysitting and considers herself adept with children. She also considered it her duty to discipline the children in order to comply with the parents’ demands such as going to bed on time. However, she was unsure how to address the children if they disobeyed. When the

child did not listen to her, she tried to provide the child with options (e.g., you can stop watching TV or keep watching TV and tell your parents about your behavior.) If the child would still not listen to her, she would try to threaten the child by saying that she would complain to the child's parents about the bad behavior.

Most of the time, babysitting is done at the child's home. Since the owner of the house (the parent) is absent, this situation sometimes makes the babysitter feel awkward. Betsy reported that she was not completely at ease even when the child was not looking because she always had a feeling that she was being watched. She was careful to be well behaved and act as a role model.

Many parents would give her emergency numbers, directions on when and what to eat, bed time, and how much TV the child is allowed to watch. However, some parents were rather indifferent and left the child in Betsy's care without much information. Betsy feels that her vast experience has led her to develop a specific image of how to raise her own child and the kind of parent she would want to be.

2. The Parent

Case A

Liz is a housewife who has a son in college and a daughter in high school. She hired babysitters for once or twice a month when she attended a party, a wedding, or dined out with her husband. The babysitters she hired were always teenagers from her neighborhood and whose parents she was well acquainted with. She mentioned she often hired this 14-year-old girl who lived in the same neighborhood. She employed a babysitter until her son was 12 years old. She said that it is common practice to hire teenagers as babysitters and that most teenagers are very capable of taking care of young children. The majority take a babysitting class where they learn child rearing techniques as well as what approaches to adopt during emergencies. She said that the babysitters that she hired were always very competent and reliable.

Case B

Andrew, who has a 20-year-old son and a 14-year-old daughter, hired a babysitter when he went out with his wife. His wife is also a fulltime worker. He hired a babysitter twice or thrice a year from the time his son was born till the boy was 10 years old. The babysitters he hired were usually 15 years old or older and they were older children of family friends. He said he would never have hired a teenager he did not personally know. He hired teenage babysitters because he was very well acquainted with them and their family. Most of the teenage babysitters he considered have attended special classes and undergone emergency training (CPR and First Aid). He said that the teenage babysitters he hired were very competent and were excellent role models for his children.

Hiring a babysitter enabled him to spend quality time with his wife. This helped them reestablish their relationship. Had this not been the case, he feels that there would have been more conflict in his marriage.

Case C

Susan is a mother who has two daughters (aged 8 and 10 years old). Susan and her husband both work. She hired babysitters since her children's infancy and still hires them once a month for her daughters when she is required at work or when she goes out with her partner. She hires the babysitters based on her friend's recommendations or people she already knew. The babysitters are aged 13-20 years old. All of her babysitters started out as mother's helpers around Susan's house which enabled her to observe them with the children. In addition, all the teenage babysitters she has hired have taken babysitting courses. She thinks that teenagers can be very responsible if they are trained to do the job and they are often able to easily relate with children. "Children love teenage babysitters because they are like big sisters." Her almost 11-year-old daughter will be taking a babysitting course during her school year.

Case D

Kara is a mother of a 3-year-old and a 6-year-old. She is a single mother. Her aunts and mother take care of her daughters regularly while she is at work. However, Kara sometimes employs her 16-year-old niece and other teenagers as a babysitter when she wants to go out alone. She has interviewed two teenage girls recommended by the local high school guidance counselor but she was not very impressed by them. She finally found a babysitter through an advertisement in the local paper.

She hires teenage babysitters because she thinks that they are more available. She does not trust all teenagers to be competent babysitters but that depends on the maturity of the teenagers. She said that she would recommend a teenager that she could trust with her own children.

Case E

Kate is a housewife and a mother of two children. She was the only parent among the informants who has never used a teenage babysitter before. Since her relatives lived nearby, in rare emergencies, she asked a grandparent to look after the children. Although she has never hired a babysitter before, she herself did babysitting jobs when she was 16 years old and her daughter who is now 17 years old has babysat since she was 11 years old. Her daughter babysat for her neighbor, who has three children (ages 8, 5, and 4), when she was 11 years old; she is still hired by the neighbor because the oldest boy (now 14 years old) is still not responsible enough to look after his younger siblings.

Kate's daughter first demonstrated her ability to be a responsible babysitter prior to taking on the job. She wanted to earn her own money and wanted to take care of children. Kate ensured that her daughter was trained and knew what to do in an emergency. Initially, Kate felt responsible for her daughter's babysitting jobs but after several years she could see that her daughter was capable of carrying out her job effectively on her own.

3. The Babysittee

Case I

Betsy had a regular babysitter until she was 11 years old. The babysitter, who was 16 years old, was the daughter of Betsy's father's good friend. Betsy remembers that she enjoyed being with the babysitter because she was like a big sister to her. Since Betsy was the oldest among her siblings, she said she enjoyed having a big sister.

Case II

Peter had a regular babysitter when his parents went out for dinner on weekends. The babysitter was a 17-year-old high school girl whom Peter was not very familiar with. However, Peter's mother was very well acquainted with the babysitter as she (the babysitter) was the daughter of Peter's mother's friend. Peter remembers that he did not like the teenage babysitter because he was uncomfortable having a stranger taking care of him and telling him what to do. Since Peter had two younger siblings, he felt that he was mature enough to take care of himself.

Case III

Cody had a regular babysitter when his mother went out socializing. He had a babysitter until he was 10 years old. His babysitters were 16 and 18 year old high school girls. They were the daughters of his mother's friend and his mother knew them well. Cody did not like the high school babysitters. They were indifferent to Cody and his younger sister; moreover, one of the high school babysitters secretly brought her boyfriend over to the house so Cody asked his mother not to hire babysitters.

DISCUSSION

The cases shown above reveal information about teenage babysitters from the perspective of each party: the babysitter, the parent, and the babysittee. It describes the responsibilities of the teenage babysitters and the parents' opinion of the teenage babysitters.

Here we will first illustrate the overall characteristics of babysitting and training. We will then discuss the two important themes of babysitting: (1) nurturance formation and (2) transition from childhood to adulthood.

1. Teenage Babysitters: Perspectives from Parents and Children

All parents in this study, with one exception, have previously hired teenage babysitters. All the parents had a positive opinion of the teenagers, considering them mature and responsible enough to take care of children. The parents thought that teenagers were more available and were competent in taking care of their children. The only mother who did not hire teenage babysitters also had a positive opinion on the matter since she did babysitting when she was 16 years old and her daughter is also a babysitter.

Most of the parents were confident in hiring teenage babysitters and placed great emphasis on training. The age of the babysitter was 15 years or older. All the parents

considered some teenagers to be responsible enough to care for the children if they took babysitting training courses or some kind of emergency training such as CPR and First Aid.

It was important for the parent to know the teenager very well and to be able to trust the teenager with their children; the parents were also well acquainted with the teenagers' family. The majority found their babysitters through family friends and neighbors. One informant found a babysitter via an advertisement and also tried to find one through the student guidance counselor of a local high school. Parents try to find teenage babysitters through personal references.

The parents and adolescents pointed out that the babysitter and child often build close and stable relationships. When parents find a good babysitter (a babysitter who can be trusted and who can develop a good rapport with the children), they tend to "keep" the babysitter for a long period of time. Thus, many of the informants had babysat regularly for a certain family for over a year. In Shcwalb's (2009) study, 64% of the mothers replied that their children had a close relationship with or attachment to a special babysitter. Among those mothers, over 90% reported that the babysitter-child relationship had extended over a year. Children often consider the babysitters as big brothers or sisters. Moreover, parents consider adolescents to be entertaining to their children. "Teenagers get along with children well and come up with fun activities." Some thought they were good role models for their children.

This was true to the children who had been babysat by teenagers. Betsy said that she loved her babysitter because she was like a big sister. Many of the informants built good relationships with the children and their parents. However, there were negative reports from some informants, like Peter and Cody. They reported that they did not get along with their babysitters. Cody's case especially indicates that all teenagers are not mature enough to take care of children and that some do not take the job seriously.

It is also important to mention that there is a whole network behind the teenager that serves as a kind of back up system in case of emergencies. Although teenagers are solely responsible for the job, many parents of teenage babysitters feel responsible for their child's job. Parents of the babysitter try to help in case of emergencies or when the teenagers need help during the job. Two of the informants said they called their own mothers when they did not know what to do. There is a great possibility that the babysitter's parents know about the babysittee and his or her parents well because in many cases babysitting is practiced among trusting family friends and neighbors. Although this does not apply to every case, perhaps the support from this personal network is one reason why parents are comfortable in hiring teenagers from trusting families.

2. The Importance of Education: Babysitting Training Courses

Babysitting training courses provide individuals, from ages 11 to 15, with the information and skills necessary to provide safe and responsible care for children in the absence of parents. The courses are conducted by the Red Cross, schools, churches, community centers, etc. The training is aimed at developing skills in leadership, professionalism, basic care, safety and safe play, and first aid. They demonstrate

important techniques for infant care: how to pick up and hold infants, how to bottle-feed and spoon-feed, how to burp after bottle-feeding, and how to diaper an infant. There are also group discussions on important themes. The course also teaches would-be babysitters about interviewing parents and assessing the job, how to write a resume, and how to advertise their “babysitting business.” The training course provides the overall knowledge required in babysitting.

Parents place great emphasis on babysitting training courses or first aid classes. They are concerned if their babysitter acquires knowledge about safety and child care, in order to hire a competent babysitter. In addition, the parents in our survey ensured that their children received training before starting babysitting jobs. Data from previous research shows that 44.8% who did babysitting were certified in CPR or took babysitting training courses, 25% looked after their younger siblings, and 20% had no training or knowledge in child care before they started their babysitting jobs (Kawata, 2006). However, only two of the informants in this study took babysitting classes.

On the other hand, adolescents did not consider the training courses to be as important as the parents did. One informant who took the class found it very easy to manage. He said that he took the class because his parents wanted him to do so before he babysits. The daughter of Case E took the class for the same reason. Others reported that they did not feel the need to take the course. The Red Cross replied that many adolescents take the course to get better jobs or, in other words, to earn a good income. Thus, the adolescents considered the training courses as a means to creating a good impression on the parents.

There is a vast amount of information available on the internet as well as through publications. For instance, Kids Health.org provides good quality information for adolescents in the babysitting profession; websites of police departments and schools such as University of Illinois distribute warnings and guidelines on the practice. There are a large number of handbooks published for adolescents and parents such as “The Babysitter’s Handbook: the care and keeping of kids” and “The New Complete Babysitter’s Handbook.” This makes it considerably easier for the parent and teenager to acquire knowledge on babysitting.

The training course and the abundant information support the informal setting of babysitting practiced by “nonprofessional” teenagers.

3. Nurturance Formation

Considering the results of this research and many other reports, it is safe to say that the babysitting system in North America serves as a nurturance formation device for the current generation of American adolescents. Included in this research are many reports emphasizing that American adolescents are learning a great deal about responsibility and child care by babysitting. Moreover, Schwalb’s (2009) study indicated that babysitters were significantly more confident in taking care of children than non-babysitters. Therefore, we can say that the activities babysitters engage in develop nurturance in the adolescents.

The babysitter and child often build close and stable relationships. Through daily interactions and spending a considerable amount of time with the children as babysitters,

adolescents become closely acquainted with them. The babysitters are role models to the children and the children often consider the babysitters as big brothers or sisters. Through such stable relationships and rich experiences in interacting with children, adolescents can develop nurturance.

On the other hand, adolescents face difficulties during babysitting. As described by Case 1 and Case 3, adolescent babysitters sometimes have to deal with disobedience and emergencies. Caitlin and Betsy both gave careful considerations to the methods they undertook when dealing with the disobedient child. Although the expressions they used indicated respect toward the child, they were still not sure if they appropriately handled the situation or used the right expressions. As babysitters face these problems and struggle to be good caregivers, they develop a sense of nurturance and build a specific image of being a parent.

Another important aspect of babysitting is preparing for parenting. Most female informants reported that their experience as a babysitter would be useful for their own parenting in the future. In Kawata's (2006) research, 76% of the adolescents who did babysitting reported that their experience would be useful when they become parents. It can be thought that adolescents not only develop child care-taking skills, but also develop a clearer view of parenting by temporarily assuming the adult and parent roles and by interacting with the parents and knowing the demands for their children. This may help teenagers to gain a better understanding of what it would be like to be a parent or what kind of parent they want to become.

Nurturance Formation through Formal and Informal Learning

Considering the social context of babysitting, adolescents develop nurturance through informal/unstructured settings and formal/structured settings. These settings compensate each other.

The informal method of developing nurturance is "doing the job." Adolescents learn a considerable amount about children by actually taking care of a child, which is an unstructured setting. Adolescents develop ideas and techniques on discipline when facing the difficulties associated with disobedient children.

Secondly, the formal way of developing nurturance is via "babysitting training courses." The babysitting training course, which is intended for adolescents aged 11-15, provides a considerable amount of important information and knowledge on child care. Although the adolescents in this study did not feel the importance of the training course, this form of education systematically teaches and passes down child caring techniques, knowledge of child development, and safety. The demonstrations using dolls teach the youth actual child caring skills. The group discussions on themes like how to be a responsible babysitter develops an image of a good caregiver in the youth. Moreover, many parents consider teenagers with training and certification to be competent in taking care of the children. In this sense, adolescents are able to foster nurturance through such a structured education.

From the above, it can be considered that adolescents foster nurturance through structured and unstructured settings. The formal and informal ways of learning compensate each other and serves as nurturance formation devices.

4. Babysitting as Rites of Passage: Transition from Childhood to Adulthood

First Time Job: Appreciation for Work

It is safe to say that babysitting is the first paid job that many of the youth undertake, especially girls in the United States. Cases 1, 2, and 3 show that some people start their babysitting jobs at a very early age-11 or 12 years old. In addition, the daughters of Cases C and E had started or were willing to start babysitting jobs at the age of 11. Kournay and LaBarbera (1986) reported that adolescents started to babysit for children outside their homes at the mean age of 13.5 years old. Thus, it is clear that many of the youth start babysitting jobs around the last year of elementary school or the years in junior high school.

The previous studies, including the data from this research, show that adolescents have learned responsibility and appreciation for work through their babysitting experiences. Babysitting jobs provide an advantageous opportunity to develop a good set of work ethics. Although the informants did not consider babysitting to be a “real job,” the profession contains the basic rules of a real job such as being punctual, taking the task seriously, being responsible, and getting paid. Further, good communication skills and manners are required in order to negotiate with clients and to report on their children. Adolescents develop the necessary working skills through such a business-like setting.

Many teenagers adopt babysitting jobs because they want to earn their own money. The author’s preliminary survey shows that 58.6% of the respondents who have done babysitting did so because they wanted extra money (Kawata, 2006). As cases 1 and 2 indicate, many youth are eager to work and earn extra money. For example, Caitlin wanted to earn her own money because she was reluctant to ask her parents for extra money whenever she went out with her friends or when she wanted to buy something. Michael thought it was cool to make money, so he always wanted to work. He also advertised his services and worked hard to attract his clients. This indicates that many adolescents are highly motivated to work and earn money for themselves from an early age.

Although babysitters are paid only a small amount of money, this reward and positive feedback from clients may help develop a sense of self-fulfillment and self-worth in the adolescent. All the informants reported that they were happy earning their own money. This positive experience may be important in developing high motivation toward working.

Transition from Childhood to Adulthood

American culture nowadays does not include a formal initiation ceremony through which young people pass from childhood to adulthood. Nevertheless, some cultural practices signify maturity and some cultural contexts have particular significance for the transition from youth to adulthood. Babysitting can be considered one of the practices that signify this transition.

The status of a babysitter is a public acceptance of the adolescent’s new legal role. Adolescents are at the liminal stage of development. They are not yet adults, nor are they children. In other words, they are ready to undertake responsibility to some

extent, but they are still under the wings of their parents and are not ready to assume the entire responsibility of a parent or “real work.” Thus, by becoming a babysitter, many adolescents gain a legitimate status of a temporary “parent-adult” role. By carrying out the adult/parent roles, teenagers learn and realize the reality of “the adult world” such as the difficulties and happiness of being a parent, the importance of taking jobs seriously, and being responsible. The experience of undertaking an adult role makes the teenager a more competent person in society. Furthermore, experiences of being trusted and relied upon are very important in developing confidence and a positive self-image.

The interesting part of a babysitting job is that the range of responsibilities and tasks of the babysitter changes depending on how responsible the babysitter is. For instance, in case C, the parent hired an 11-year-old babysitter as a mother’s helper. A mother’s helper is the preliminary form of a babysitter. They look after the children while the mother of the child is around but they still get paid. Experienced and competent babysitters care for younger children such as infants and babysit for a longer time. Young babysitters often start off by babysitting children who can vocalize their needs and when the work is often easy. Since this is not openly practiced, the actual tasks of the job are flexibly coordinated between the client and the babysitter depending on the age and competence of the teenage babysitter and the age and maturity of the babysittee. Thus, this flexibility is another important aspect for the adolescent to smoothly transit into adulthood.

The most common motive for starting babysitting jobs was earning their own money. Many informants were happy and felt confident in making money. Earning one’s own money is a way of earning freedom. Teenagers gain the right to spend the money they earn as they like. This is one way of gaining independence from parents. Through babysitting jobs, adolescents show how responsible and mature they are and gain some sort of independence by earning money.

It is important to point out that not all the youth in the United States do babysitting and the babysitting experience is not the same for all teenagers; its impact is differential among teenagers. However, a majority of American adolescents are involved in babysitting practices.

In conclusion, the status of a babysitter is a public acceptance of the adolescent’s new legal role and this experience accelerates the transition from childhood to adulthood. Adolescents who are not children but not yet adults are gradually introduced to the adult world and acquire skills to become a competent adult through babysitting jobs.

CONCLUSION

We have discussed the important aspects of babysitting and have considered that (1) adolescent babysitters develop nurturance through structured and unstructured education and (2) the experience of undertaking a temporary parent/adult role makes for a smooth transition of the adolescent from childhood to adulthood.

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