A Labor of Love: Family Day Care Providers’ Feelings Toward The Children In Their Care

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Research problem:
Adults working in these out-of-home childcare settings are called upon to care for infants and very young children in loco parentis. This care consists of two highly interrelated dimensions: function and feeling (Abel & Nelson, 1990; Miller, 1990). Caregivers are expected to provide both labor, by caring for, and love, by caring about, the children in their care.

The tending functions of care provided by non-parental caregivers to very young children are similar, if not identical, to those of the natural parents: In out-of-home care settings, as in the home, young children are fed, diapered, protected and played with. Indeed, the declared aim of these settings is to provide a substitute setting that closely proximates the care infants and young children would receive at home (Baker & Manfredi/Petitt, 1998; Rapp & Lloyd, 1989; Rosenthal, 1994).

Yet the affective dimension of non-parental care is assumed to differ from that of parents (Katz, 1980). While parents are expected to have intensely intimate, loving relationships with their children, simply by virtue of their position in relation to the children, paid caregivers are seen as sympathetic, competent parent substitutes who are skilled in caring behaviors, but are also capable of managing and checking their emotions.

This "management of emotions" (Hochschild, 1979, 1983) is an integral component of the role of the paid caregiver. Yet overt rules regarding emotional display and management do not appear in professional training guides, course syllabi, or licensing standards. They are, rather, informally instilled through implicit expectations in the course of professional socialization.

Findings of a qualitative study on family day care (FDC) providers’ reflections on their professional identity (Kamowitz-Hareven, 2002) highlighted intense emotions, coupled with role confusion, in their everyday work. The proposed study aims to further illuminate the role of emotions in non-parental care of infants and toddlers in family day care in Israel, by exploring the affective dimension of the provider role. Through group interviews with FDC caregivers, coordinators, and parents, the study seeks to clarify the way emotions are experienced, displayed and managed in the everyday work of FDC caregivers.
Literature review:

**Child rearing and professional child care**

Caring for others’ children is an age-old phenomenon. Throughout history and across cultures, young children have been brought up by people other than their biological parents. Grandparents, aunts and older siblings, wet-nurses and nannies, teachers and trained caregivers have all shared in the task of rearing the young. Alongside these intermittent supplements to parental care, custodial institutions were established for orphans and needy children whose parents were incapable of rearing them.

Widespread, organized out-of-home care for the very young children (under age three) of functioning families, however, is a recent development in many societies. Seeking to accommodate the needs of many contemporary families in which both parents work outside the home, and acknowledging the unique developmental needs of infants and toddlers, Western societies have developed different types of child care institutions, including informal home-based care, out-of-home family day care, and child care centers.

Much of the research carried out in the field of early childhood educare over the last thirty years has focused on its effects on children's development and wellbeing. Very little attention, however, has been given to its meaning and ramifications for the caregivers themselves.

**The two faces of care: function and feeling**

At the base of the role of the early childhood educarer is the act of providing care. It has been suggested that care – whether carried out in the private context of families and friends, or through public contexts such as child care, nursing, or therapeutic counseling - consists of two highly interrelated dimensions: function and feeling (Abel & Nelson, 1990; Miller, 1990; Thomas, 1993). Caregivers are expected to provide both labor, by caring for (the instrumental, or functional, dimension), and love, by caring about (the affective, “feelings” dimension).

The instrumental dimension of caregiving is straightforward and easy to grasp. When caring for infants and young children, for instance, both parental and nonparental caregiving involve at the very least physical care, feeding, washing, and keeping children safe and out of danger. According to the child’s age, it also encompasses a variety of behaviors and activities which nurture the cognitive, social, emotional, and motor development of the child.
The affective dimension of care, on the other hand, can be elusive. While the care provided to infants and young children by parents and paid caregivers is often similar in function, it is commonly assumed that what distinguishes most parental care from professional caregiving is the amount and quality of feeling involved, or its “affective intensity” (Abel & Nelson, 1990).

Parents are expected to have intensely intimate, loving relationships with their children, simply by virtue of their position in relation to the children. Paid caregivers, on the other hand, are seen as sympathetic, competent parent-substitutes who are skilled in caring behaviors, but check their emotions. Caring among non-parental care providers has traditionally been viewed as a personality trait, a matter of temperament. Rather than attributing the emotional dimension of caring to the caregiving context, or to one’s relationship with the young child, paid caregivers are expected to have naturally gentle, understanding dispositions. Stonehouse (1989) has named them these “nice ladies who love children”.

**The child care provider role and emotional labor**

And yet, in recent years the affective component of care has been acknowledged to be more than a personality trait (Fineman, 1993). The study of emotions in organizations has highlighted the role of organizational norms with regard to workers’ feelings. Particularly useful to this conceptualization of feelings as a collective social construct is the work of Arlie Russel Hochschild (1983) on ”emotional labor”.

In her classic study of emotions and emotion management in private and public life, *The Managed Heart* (1983), Hochschild describes the emotional prescriptions, or “feeling rules”, that workers learn through professional socialization and explicit organizational or occupational codes of conduct. She coined the phrase “emotional labor” to describe the work involved in being “nasty” or “nice” on the job, proclaiming that most professions fall between these two extremes.

Emotional labor takes on varying degrees of authenticity. Hochschild differentiates between “surface acting” – that is, feigning an emotion that is not truly felt – and “deep acting” – which involves trying to invoke the actual displayed feeling. Ashforth and Humphrey (1993) expand upon her construct, and include authentic, “spontaneous and genuine” expressions of emotion. Although these qualities may in many cases be natural personality traits, they become emotional labor when prescribed as part of the job.
When we consider, as Ashforth and Humphrey propose, that even authentic emotional expression is construed as emotional labor when incorporated into the “job description”, we may arrive at a more refined understanding of the work of these “nice ladies who love children” (Stonehouse, 1989).

_Sponsored family day care in Israel: The mishpachton context_

A family day care (FDC) home is a group educare setting for infants and young children, carried out in the provider’s home. Many FDC homes are private, informal settings in which a woman (generally an experienced mother) cares for one or more children alongside her own. Other FDCs are sponsored, licensed educare settings, adhering to standards and regulations such as limits on the number of children allowable, home safety measures, and insurance requirements.

While professional literature, popular media and official guidelines often refer to the intimacy and “home-like atmosphere” inherent in family day care (Alston, 1984; Baker & Manfredi/Petitt, 1998; Feferman, 1994; Kontos, 1992; Morgan & Azer, 2001; Rapp & Lloyd, 1989; Rosenthal, 1994), an explicit articulation of why this is desirable is absent. However, the purported superiority of family day care over center-based care is presumably derived from contemporary images of ideal mothering and child-rearing (Dally, 1982; Glenn, 1994; Kaplan, 1992; Wearing, 1984), and from Western psychological dogma that emphasize the centrality of the emotional bond between young children and one primary mother-figure (Ainsworth, 1978; Bowlby, 1952).

The field of early childhood education in Israel, like its counterparts around the world, strives toward increased professionalism. This trend is positive and long overdue. Yet throughout this journey toward the heightened status and professional identity of early childhood caregivers, the emotional component of the job of caring for others’ children has been underplayed. And one may expect that this aspect of the role remain marginal, as long as the accepted definition of professionalism entails a claim to “emotional detachment” (Katz, 1980). In its exploration of the subjective meanings attributed to the emotional labor of FDC providers, the proposed study aims to help clarify the relationship between professionalism and emotions.

**Methodology:**

**Research design**

The design of the proposed study is based on the qualitative research paradigm, which assumes multiple, subjective perceptions of reality; context-specific knowledge; and
inductive theory generation (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In its exploration of the role of emotional labor in the work of family day care providers, the study seeks to understand how the informants themselves construct their reality, thus leading to the emergence of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

**Research questions**

The study asks three principal research questions:

"What is the role of emotions in the care provided by FDC providers in Israel?"

"How does the organization transmit its expectations regarding the feelings FDC providers have toward the children in the care?"

"How do parents of FDC children perceive the emotions providers feel and express toward their children?"

**Data collection**

Focus group interviews will be conducted with groups of family day care providers, coordinators, and parents. The focus group interviews will revolve around structured, written vignettes depicting a range of emotions in the work of the family day care provider. Vignettes (also coined “critical incidents” or “hypothetical scenarios”) have been described as “short stories about hypothetical characters in specified circumstances, to whose situation the interviewee is invited to respond” (Finch, 1987, p. 105).

Each vignette will be read aloud by one of the group participants. Following its reading, the group members will discuss the vignette as a group. A series of questions surrounding the vignette's relevance to their personal experience will accompany each reading, to assist the participants in creating meaning. As such, the vignettes will serve as “projective devices” (Tobin, 1997), encouraging participants to voice thoughtful responses that may reveal their beliefs, values and concerns regarding feelings and feeling rules on the job.

**Participants**

A total of ten groups, each consisting of six participants, will take part in the study. Of these, five groups will comprise experienced FDC providers; three groups will comprise FDC coordinators; and two groups will comprise parents of FDC children.

**Data Organization and Analysis**

Each interview will be taped and accompanied by informal field notes by the researcher and associate. The tapes will be transcribed verbatim, to ensure accuracy and ongoing access to the informants’ words. The transcriptions and field notes will then be reviewed, selectively coded,
categorized, and subcategorized. Themes will be drawn from the data, validated with some of the participants, and grouped into categories.

**Implications for research and practice:**

**Implications for research**
The proposed study shifts the focus of early childhood research from the developing child to the care-providing adult. It is hoped that findings of this study will stimulate more empirical research in this field, as well as contribute to theory development in the analysis of other professions characterized by emotional labor. For presumably the potential struggles and conflicts experienced by FDC providers when managing their emotions becomes an issue of professional identity are similar to those in other caring professions (for example, nursing, education, social work, etc.).

**Implications for practice**
By highlighting the emotional labor and display rules in the work of FDC providers, the proposed study may help generate an understanding in the field that the emotional experience of the FDC provider neither contradicts nor deviates from professionalism, but rather should be viewed as an integral and legitimate component of her role. The legitimization of caregivers' feelings toward the children in their care might also reduce some of the strain and frustration experienced by caregivers who fear they “care too much”, or feel ambivalent with regard to their emotions on the job. Such changes in the role perception of FDC providers may have ramifications for pre-service training, ongoing supervision, and parent-provider relations.
VI. Bibliography:


