The Business of Love: Managing the Challenges of Legitimizing the Work of the Babysitter

by

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Abstract

This thesis examines how babysitters construct their work as being more or less real work. I argue that babysitters construct their work as being both real and not real at the same time. In some ways, the work is real, like when the babysitters are working long hours and changing diapers. In other ways, babysitters construct the work as less real, like developing close, personal relationships with their employers. This project seeks to understand how babysitters structurally and discursively construct and, sometimes, deconstruct the realness of their work. By completing 18 interviews with babysitters, I was able to gain this understanding. Ultimately, this thesis explains how babysitters work within a marginalized field and due to internal and external influences, construct their work in a less real manner.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

According to DataUSA (2018), there are 983,000 people employed as childcare workers in the United States. There are a variety of industries that employ childcare workers, like public day care centers, after-school programs, and religious organizations. One of the largest areas of childcare employment is within a private household. In the United States, an estimated 133,897 people are employed as childcare workers in private households (DataUSA, 2018). These childcare workers can have various titles, like nanny or au pair, but one of the most common is babysitter.

Babysitting, and childcare in general, is a job primarily held by women with women holding 92.3% of childcare positions in the United States (DataUSA, 2018). Further, babysitting is a popular job for young girls. The American Red Cross offers babysitting training and certifications to those ages 11 to 15 (ARC, 2020). There are a variety of reasons women begin babysitting at such an early age. For many young girls, babysitting is a right of passage from being the babysat to being the babysitter (Kawata, 2010).

And for many girls who begin babysitting at a young age babysitting will continue to be a source of employment beyond girlhood. I began babysitting when I was 13 years old. As the years passed, it became an integral part of my life. I have spent summers with children—watching them learn to swim, read, and grow up. At one point in my undergraduate career, I moved in with a family and helped care for newborn triplets. Now, even though I have not babysat in almost two years, it still feels like an important part of my identity.

Reflecting on my personal experiences with babysitting, while learning more about the scholarly literature on work and careers, has led to questions about the broader babysitting experience. One of those questions, which I seek to answer here, is how babysitting is

constructed as real or not real work. As a young babysitter, I would often compare my work to my friend's, an intern at a law firm. I would tell myself *one day, you will get a real job.* I had constructed babysitting as not being real work. As I have talked with other babysitters, this seemed to be a common construction: babysitting is just something to do before getting a real job.

However, the construction of babysitting being not real work is almost ironic. Caring for another life is something that requires extensive attention and knowledge. A babysitter must rely on their ability to invest emotionally and develop relationships with the family. There are diapers to be changed, bottles to be stirred, and tantrums to be soothed. Babysitters are trusted with families' prized possessions. They are expected to keep the children alive and well, while being paid poorly and with little recognition of the work they are doing.

Previous research has examined how people talk about work (Clair, 1996). Work is a central component to our everyday lives and how we talk about work matters. As research has found, it enables some occupations to be constructed as real work and other occupations as not real work (Clair, 1996). However, this research speaks more generally about work. In my thesis, I seek to extend previous literature on real work by focusing on one occupation, babysitting, and focusing on how structural, discursive, and identity factors play into their construction of the work. I argue that babysitting is legitimate work that is often constructed as dually real work and less real work.

First, I review the literature on several relevant topics: childcare, real work, emotional labor, and identity. Following this, I explain my research methodology, which will include detailed information on my pilot study, participants and sampling, and procedures. Then, I present the results of my research. The results will focus on four main themes: job features,

domestic setting, the fun babysitter identity, and the gendered identity. After the results, I discuss theoretical and practical implications, as well as limitations.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The following literature review is divided into four sections. The first section is related to childcare and important aspects of the field, like job stress, duties, and relationships. The second section is centered on how the meaning of work is defined through dominant discourse. This section examines how discourse establishes some work as being real and other work as not real. The third section focuses on emotional labor, which is a large component of care work. The fourth and final section looks at identity and how that plays into the construction of work being more or less real.

Childcare

There are many titles for those working in the childcare field including babysitter, nanny, au pair, and childcare professional. Each job requires different tasks and depends on the specific needs of the children in care. However, there are also many typical tasks taken on by all childcare workers. Stitou et al.'s (2018) research suggests that childcare workers are responsible for physical care (feeding, bathing), emotional care (affection), special care (first aid), domestic care (laundry, cleaning), business administration (scheduling), and self-development. Childcare workers are expected to supervise, entertain, protect, educate, and care for the children in their charge.

Some are required to successfully complete first aid and CPR trainings. Other families might expect their nanny to be fluent in another language. The 13-year-old girl from down the street probably will not be held to the same standards as a live-in, full time nanny, but there are still some general expectations of a childcare worker. For example, Stitou et al.'s (2018)

research, found that childcare workers reported the need for compassion and understanding to be successful in the job. The requirements expected of childcare workers vary depending on various factors, like if the work is taking place at home or at a day-care center.

Home-Based and Center-Based Childcare

Home-based childcare is when the children are supervised in either the employee's or their own home. This is more closely associated with being the work of a babysitter, nanny, or au pair. A nursery or daycare is an example of center-based childcare. Center-based childcare will have administration and other caregivers. The main difference between the two is the number of children under care (Groeneveld et al., 2012). Groeneveld et al.'s (2012) research found that childcare centers have a larger workload and home-based care is higher quality.

The distinction between home and center-based care is important to consider here because some of the problems related to home-based care create an environment in which the separation of work and life can become blurred. First, the work-life overlap can create internal conflict for workers (Groeneveld et al., 2012). Faulkner et al. (2016) support this argument by suggesting that the boundary between work and life becomes unclear.

Another common issue is the isolation of the childcare worker (Faulkner et al., 2016; Stitou et. al, 2018). While center-based childcare relies on multiple adult caregivers, home-based care tends to fall on one person. This isolation can produce feelings of loneliness and resentment. Tracy and Tracy (1998) discussed how 911 call center operators relied on sharing stories and talking with their co-workers to help relieve some of the emotional labor stress. While a childcare worker can share work stories with friends and family, they will not be able to relate as much as would a co-worker, which would not be as fulfilling.

Lastly, home-based care can become tricky due to the lack of formal administration (Faulkner et al., 2016). The relationship between parent and worker is typically informal and relational (Stitou et al., 2018). Unlike the flight attendant who goes through formal training on his or her duties and emotional expectations, an in-home childcare worker must communicate with the parents to figure these out. In some situations, the informality can be a perk, but it can also have negative consequences on the childcare worker. For example, it can make it difficult to confront the parents about late payments and unavailability.

This project focuses specifically on home-based babysitters and nannies for the reasons just discussed. The home-based childcare worker is in an interesting situation. Their work takes place in the private sphere of someone else's home. They are a part of the family, but she or he is also a paid employee. This tension can lead to identity conflicts as workers struggle to know if they should lean in to their identity as an employee or accept their adoption into the family.

Gendered Work

Historically, caring roles have been assigned to women. Padavic and Reskin (2002) describe the ideology of separate spheres, which argues that family life and paid work should be kept apart. More specifically, the ideology of the separate spheres argues that men belong in the workplace while women belong in the home. Under this ideology, women's primary role is to keep the house clean, cook meals, and raise the children. Although women have moved into the workforce, this ideology still lingers, particularly in the way childcare positions are filled.

Murray (1998) argues that, "the gendering of childcare as women's work (women's work best suited to mothers in families) shaped the way workers think about caregiving" (p. 150). As a result, the tasks around childrearing become maternal in nature. For example, neither gender should be considered better at changing a diaper, but cultural ideas about caring and gendered

work have made people assume that a woman will be more able to complete such a task and to complete the task in a loving manner. As a result, when a childcare worker does not match the feminine ideal, it leads to ambivalence and suspicion from society. This suspicion can be partially blamed for the lack of men in childcare positions (Rolfe, 2006).

Rolfe's (2006) examined gender segregation in childcare and asked the question, *where are the men*? Rolfe (2006) looked at what barriers prevent men from joining this field. Some of these barriers were low pay, diversity of hours, poor terms and conditions of employment, and the perception of it being "women's work" (Rolfe, 2006). Another barrier is the attitudes coming from parents and guardians. First, there is a fear of abuse that prevents families from hiring male childcare workers. Second, the idea of a male babysitter or nanny is a relatively new concept. However, Polanen et al.'s (2017) research examined whether there are differences in how men and women perform childcare roles. Specifically, their research looked at levels of attention, sensitivity, and stimulation. The results found that there was little to no difference between men and women caregivers in levels of attention, sensitivity, and stimulation given to the children. Polanen et al. (2017) ultimately argue that both of the genders have parallel roles and "respond to children's signals and activate them to explore in a similar way" (p. 421). This finding is significant because my data demonstrate that women are usually assumed to have natural caregiving skills.

Parent-Caregiver Relationship

Salami and Meherali's (2018) research describes three common types of relationships between parents and caregivers. The first type is that of professional employee and employer. This relationship does not emphasize emotions and expects respect from both parties. In Salami and Meherali's (2018) research, this relationship was valued by caregivers who were cautious of

being exploited for their emotions. The second relationship type is based off friendship, not employment. This parent-caregiver relationship allows the caregiver to more fully take on the role of "counselor, confidant, supporter, and surrogate family member for the parents" (Murray, 1998, p. 158). Salami and Meherali's (2018) third type is a mix of the previous two. It is a relationship that recognizes the professional aspects of the job while understanding the emotional nature, too. While the parent-caregiver relationship can sometimes be ambiguous, it is an important aspect to how well a caregiver feels they should construct their work.

One way to comprehend the relationship dynamics is to understand parent expectations. Hochschild (1983) discusses these notions of parent expectations:

> Parents have different expectations about what a day-care provider should feel. Some want sympathetic interest in "educational experiences." Others want warmth and physical nurturing for their children. Still others want full emotional substitutes for themselves and therefore place deeper demands on the day-care provider. (p.150).

It is up to the parents to communicate their expectations for how a babysitter should function within the family dynamic.

Job Stress

Working in childcare, no matter what level, can be stressful. It requires physical and emotional attention that can wear away at the caregiver's wellbeing. Linnan et al.'s (2017) research looked at the overall health of a sample of childcare workers. Their research found multiple cases of high blood pressure, excessive weight, and sleep disorders. There were common depressive symptoms among several of the childcare workers (Linnan et al., 2017). The long hours and job demands can clearly have a negative effect on the caregiver's physical health.

Real Work

Through dominant discourses, society has continuously reinforced the idea that some work is real, while other work is not. In this section, I look at previous literature that focuses on this idea and how it applies to the present research. First, it is important to understand generally what is work. Merriam-Webster offers multiple definitions of the term. As a verb, work means to "perform work or fulfill duties regularly for wages or salary" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). As a noun, work is defined as an "activity that a person engages in regularly to earn a livelihood" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Simply put, work is something a person does to earn money.

Job is another term closely connected to work. Jobs are the positions or roles that allow people to complete their work. In some circumstances, people do not have the privilege of choosing their job. However, in most cases, people have the freedom to make an occupational choice. Tracey and Hopkins (2011) research looked at what factors influenced a person's occupational choice. They found that both personal interests and self-perceived abilities played a significant role in that decision. These two factors, personal interests and self-perceived abilities, illustrate an internal influence on occupational choice. It is important to consider what external factors could also play into this decision.

One major external factor could be the dominant discourse surrounding work. Previous research has shown a dominant ideology of labor that reinforces what jobs are considered valuable (i.e. heart surgeon) and less valuable (i.e. blogger). In placing more value on certain jobs and less value on others, society has created a hierarchy of work. This hierarchy of work has been continuously reinforced by everyday discourse (Clair, 1996). The conversations and stories told about work shape how and where a job falls in the hierarchy of work. Thus, it is important to examine this discourse to recognize how it is actually placing jobs in this hierarchy.

Clair (1996) argued "everyday discourse produces a meaning system that acts to socialize or control people by supporting one dominant meaning of work to the marginalization of other meanings" (p. 253). Her research looked into the popular colloquialism "a real job" to determine what implications it has on the ideology of work. Clair's (1996) research illustrated how the colloquialism was used in everyday discourse. In doing this, Clair (1996) contributed to our understanding of what factors make a job real and not real.

Clair's (1996) analysis of discourse revealed characteristics of a real job. The most dominant characteristic of a real job deals with money (Clair, 1996). A real job makes a salary significantly above minimum wage pay. Additionally, a real job requires an employee pay taxes, work takes place during the traditional 9 A.M. to 5 P.M. hours, and the employee works within an office. A real job may not be enjoyable. It will require the employee to utilize their education or skills. Typically, Clair (1996) found that a real job likely would be associated with working within an organization. Jobs that are not real are typically paid under the table. They have poor management. The management they do have will mistreat their subordinates. These are jobs that take place outdoors, not within the confines of an office building.

O'Connor and Raile (2015) found similar results in their follow-up study regarding the colloquialism. In their study, participants described real jobs as "more desirable and different than 'starter jobs' or 'just jobs'" (p. 283). They suggested that the phrase was often connected to being in the "real world." However, in contrast to Clair (1996), O'Connor and Raile's (2015) research found that many participants rejected the real job colloquialism. Some participants described the phrase as insulting and arbitrary (p. 284). Other participants argued that a real job "is subjective and should be defined by the worker" (p. 283). This is similar to some of Clair's (1996) findings.

Clair (1996) found that if a participant held a job that aligned more with the characteristics of being not real, the participant was likely to argue that what is a real job for one person may not be a real job for someone else. For example, one woman argued that her work at a children's home was real work because it met her personal goals of work, which were to be happy and to help others. She acknowledged that her job did not measure up to the dominant discourse of a real job, which sometimes brought down her self worth. Clair (1996) found "the depression induced by holding a marginalized job or wanting to hold a marginalized job can be nearly overwhelming" (p. 262).

In order to reduce this feeling of marginalization, people may seek ways to reconstruct their work as more real. Sanders and McClellan (2014) examined the way nonprofit employees talk about their work. They realized that the nonprofit employees challenged the belief that nonprofit work was not business-like through their discourse. Sanders and McClellan (2014) said, "staff members often evoked non-business-like discourses compatible with nonprofit work, yet quickly rearticulated these concepts within the language of business" (p. 79). In choosing to utilize business-like discourses, the nonprofit workers sought to legitimize their work, which likely increased the employees' belief that they were doing real work.

Along with nonprofit work, blue-collar work often does not meet the "real work" characteristics defined by dominant discourse. Lucas (2011) studied how blue-collar workers negotiate their work as being real. She found they do this based on three beliefs. The first belief is that all jobs are important and valuable. One of the participants said, "in this life, you've gotta have garbage men, you gotta have ditch diggers" (p. 363). From the ditch digger to the CEO, there is a job to be done, thus it is real work. Secondly, blue-collar workers constructed work as real based on hard work. One participant illustrated this point quite eloquently:

My parents taught me that any job was—if you worked hard—was a good job. Even if you flipped a Whopper, if you did it honestly, it was a good job. Just that they're, they're working as hard as they can and doing the best they can is a real job. Be it shoveling shit, digging a ditch, flipping a Whopper, or being a lawyer. That's a real job. (p. 364).

The third way Lucas (2011) found that blue-collar workers were reconstructing work was based on the way people are treated and treat others. One participant said that a McDonalds burger guy is doing real work as long as he is showing up and being good to the customers. The participant added, "you can be a corporate executive that is bent on the bottom-line. And you may have the best house, you may look good in a suit, but you can layoff people and not care" (p. 366). Lucas's (2011) research adds to the general understanding of real work. Her research approaches the topic differently than Clair (1996) and O'Connor and Raile (2015) because she studied the internal ways people construct their work when being challenged by the external dominant meanings of real work.

It matters to people to feel they are doing real work. Although some might say that it should not matter how one's job is labelled, work is personal and whether one's job is seen as legitimate or not by society makes a difference for how one understands themselves and their work. Cheney, Lair, Ritz, and Kendall (2010) looked into the phrase, "it's just a job." They said:

On the one hand, this kind of containment protects the self from being overwhelmed by work. But such compartmentalization also prevents one from fully examining how the meanings of work, and the meaning constructed by individuals and organizations at work, can be tied to our personal aspirations. (p. 22)

As they said, work can be tied to our personal aspirations. And when a person's job aspirations do not meet the standard of real work, it could feel disheartening. This goes back to Clair's

(1996) statement about the overwhelming depression associated with holding or wanting a marginalized job.

One field that is often marginalized is care work. Care work comes in many forms, like eldercare and childcare. As Degiuli (2007) argued, care work is hard to compare to other careers due to the amount of emotional involvement. Care work is a unique occupation. It usually takes place within the domestic sphere. While there are duties to be done, a large part of the work is developing and maintaining a relationship with another person (Anderson, 2001).

The emotional aspects of care work may be a reason that it is often not seen as real work. Dill, Price-Glynn, and Rakovski (2016) said, "care work is devalued because of cultural assumptions that workers should provide services because of love, not money" (p. 338). Care workers likely do develop loving relationships with whomever they are working for, but that does not take away from the fact that they are still doing work. However, from the outside, it may be a large factor in constructing care work as not being real work.

Another reason that care work is marginalized comes from the lack of proper job features. It is often an under-the-table job, which per Clair's (1996) research, is not a characteristic of real work. León (2013) described care workers as working within the shadow economy. While not every care worker works unofficially, many do and some may argue this delegitimizes the work, lacking many of the features of "real jobs." Further, Degiuli's (2007) research found the lack of a written contract and vague job description worked to delegitimize care work as a profession.

Care work is just one field that has been marginalized by the dominant meaning of work. The work has fallen short of what qualifies other work as real. There is usually no office, the hours are irregular, and it can involve changing another human's diaper. It often does not involve

a high degree of physical labor. However, it does require a significant amount of emotional labor. In the next section, I explain emotional labor, a concept that plays a role in the construction of babysitting as real or not real work.

Emotional Labor

Hochschild (1983) defines emotional labor as "the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display" (p. 7). Like other forms of labor, emotional labor has exchange value (Hochschild, 1983). There is an expectation for someone working with children to be caring, loving, kind, and gentle (Monrad, 2017). These values are displayed through the emotional labor performed by the childcare worker. They can come in the form of physical and emotional affection displayed to the children. In some cases, nannies are trained to display and promote positive emotions to the children and in interactions with the parents (Fu et al., 2018).

Feeling rules, which Hochschild (1983) discusses, vary by the job in the childcare field and existing research has examined emotional labor for childcare workers. First, for center-based childcare, emotional displays are regulated by policies and administrative staff. Murray (1998) described how policies prevented caregivers from reacting in anger. For example, if a child bites a caregiver, she is not allowed to display anger towards the child. She must control that emotional display and replace it with a more appropriate one. Another policy controlled emotional displays of love. The caregivers were expected to love the children, but they were not allowed to display that love excessively in front of anyone at the center. Murray (1998) described this as intimacy in the shadows. The emotional labor required them to love the children, but prevented them from displaying that emotion in front of others.

Additionally, emotional labor can affect the pay of childcare workers (Besen-Cassino, 2018), returning to Hoschild's (1983) concept of quantifying appropriate emotional displays. Besen-Cassino's (2018) conducted an experiment to determine if participants would give the babysitter a raise or not. There were several factors involved. First, the participants were either given a female or male babysitter. Second, the participants were able to understand the emotional connection the babysitter had with the job. These two factors affected the participants' reactions to the babysitter's request for a pay raise. The results show that the female babysitter with an emotional connection was least likely to get the raise. The participants saw her as less competent. This goes against what research has shown to be the socially constructed ideal caregiver. This raises important questions about how parents can misuse a babysitter's emotional involvement against them as an employee. Further, Besen-Cassino's (2018) research further contributes to our understanding of the devaluation of childcare work.

The emotional labor associated with childcare is unavoidable (Andrew, 2015); it is inherent to the nature of the job. Unfortunately, the emotional aspects can lead to what Yu (2018) calls a prison of love. This prison is built upon self-sacrifice and blurred lines separating work and life. It is created when a childcare worker's genuine love for a child is taken advantage of and abused. Yu (2018) noted an example of a caregiver feeling obligated to continue caring for someone even when they are not being compensated. While the caregiver probably has genuine feelings for the person, it leaves them vulnerable for exploitation. Over time, this expectation for self-sacrifice can wear at the caregiver's wellbeing, eventually leading an individual to lose his- or her-self and burn out.

Some occupations require a significant amount of physical labor. For example, a construction worker physically labors during the workday. He or she may come home with

blistered hands and dirty clothes, which are a testament to the amount of work he or she is doing. A caregiver does not have those physical testaments. She may go home and describe how exhausted she is from being emotionally connected at her work, but the caregiver does not have blistered hands or dirty clothes. She does not have anything physical to show for the fruits of her labor. And because of this some may perceive what she is doing as being not real work. Thus, furthering the delegitimizing the work and influencing how it is constructed as real work or not.

In the next section, I examine previous research on identity and how it factors into the construction of work being real. Also, I look at previous literature on common identities of childcare workers.

Identity

Identity is a concept that has been studied in a variety of different fields. One of those fields is organizational communication. Identity plays a major role in how people understand themselves within an organization. While babysitting does not happen with what would normally be considered an organization, the family-babysitter assemblage can be seen as a micro-organization. Thus, babysitters develop identities related to work in this context. It is important to understand identity because it is "so crucial to how and what one values, thinks, feels and does in all social domains" (Albert, Ashforth, & Dutton, 2000, p. 14). Further, identity is "at the core of…why they approach their work the way they do and why they interact with others they way they do during that work" (Ashforth, Harrison, & Corley, 2008, p. 334).

So, how are organizational identities formed? One way is top-down. Organizations establish their identities (and their members' identities as a result) "through the stories they tell directly or indirectly, about themselves, their past, their ambitions, and their perceptions of the environment" (Cheney, Christensen, & Dailey, 2014, p. 697). Organizations encourage members

to adopt these identities through accepting the organization's stories as their own. Organizations can push their stories on their members through a variety of methods, like training programs, mission statements, and posters (Alevesson & Wilmott, 2002; Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004). As Alvesson and Willmott (2002) said, the individual is encouraged to embrace the 'We'. Organizations want this identification because it helps members "to cope with the demands the organization places on us" and "pushes us to act (e.g. to make decisions) in the best interests of the organization" (Barker & Tompkins, 1994, p. 225).

The other way is from the bottom-up (Ashforth, Harrison, & Corley, 2008). Individuals recognize a need for identification and seek out an organization with which they identify. This identification "allows the individual to vicariously partake in accomplishments beyond his or her own powers" (Mael & Ashforth, 1992, p. 105). For example, a sports fan may feel he or she played a part in his or her team's big win. The sports fan's identification with the winning team works to boost the fan's self-esteem. Simply put, "people identify to provide the basis for thinking of themselves in a positive light" (Ashforth, Harrison, & Corley, 2008, p. 335).

Identities are also formed through interaction with others (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). An individual recognizes the organizational identity through watching what is valued and not valued from other members. Still, individuals have a say in how much they choose to identify with the organization. As Dutton, Dukerich, and Harquail (1994) said:

> Members vary in how much they identify with their work organization. When they identify strongly with the organization, the attributes they use to define the organization also define them. (p. 239)

For example, if a nonprofit employee perceives his or her organization as being altruistic, caring, and giving, he or she may attach his or her own identity to those characteristics. Dutton et al.

(1994) said, "the perceived organizational identity—a member's beliefs about the distinctive, central, and enduring attributes of the organization—can serve as a powerful image influencing the degree to which the member identifies with the organization" (p. 244).

One interesting aspect of identity and work is that people will seek work that they feel allows them to express their true selves. Previous literature has demonstrated the idea of person-job fit (Humphrey, Ashforth, & Diefendorff, 2015). People apply for jobs they feel are a good match with their personalities. A caring, playful person may pursue jobs that match them, like babysitting. Further, a person-job fit can result in attitudes and behaviors that indicate stronger identification with the organization (Dutton et al., 1994). That does not mean that the job will always be easy. Humphrey et al. (2015) pointed out that once a person is feeling burnt out from the job they perceive to be a good fit, it could make them feel inauthentic.

Again, babysitting can be seen as taking place within a micro-organization. One of the main tenets of babysitting is the ability to be a caregiver. The caring identity is one that many care workers, not just babysitters, adopt. Skeggs (1997) argued that the caring-self identity is "constructed through concrete caring practices and through investments in these practices" (p. 57). Women primarily take on this identity. It is used in domestic settings as well as occupational labor. Andrew and Newman (2012) argued this caring-self identity makes it hard to defend self-interest, "such as in arguing for better pay and conditions, because this undermines the caring selves in which they have so heavily invested" (p. 243).

Other research has examined childcare workers' identity construction. Wu's (2016) research examined nannies in the U.S. and their identities. Her research shows that there are two common identities of those working in childcare. The first is an identity constructed on the premise that childcare is hard work that requires skills and services. This identity defends the

value of the job. The second identity seen is built on the premise that the work is just temporary. This identity is associated with the shame felt for feeling like childcare is not a real job. It is important to consider how a childcare worker identifies with their work in order to understand how they value the work.

McGillivray's (2008) research also examined how childcare professionals construct their identities. Many of the identities were built upon a feminized discourse. This discourse is one that promotes the ideal childcare professional as "being maternal, being a mother, a liking for children, having a good sense, being kind and loving, being warm and sensitive" (McGillivray, 2008, p. 250). Hochschild (1983) suggests that women are likely to adopt this self-image: "the world turns to women for mothering, and this fact silently attaches itself to many a job description" (p. 170). It seems that mothering is a job requirement attached to childcare. This discourse affects how childcare professionals construct their own identities, and thus, can construct the realness of their work.

Taking all of the previous literature mentioned into consideration, I seek to answer the following research question:

RQ: How do babysitters construct their work as real and less real?

Chapter 3: Methods

In this section, I will explain the research method I used in pursuit of answering my research question. I begin with a brief history of how my methodology came to fruition. Following this, I explain how participants were chosen based on criteria and sampling. Lastly, I clarify the research procedures.

Last spring, I began working closely with Dr. Larson on completing a pilot study for this project. After designing the study, which included creating the interview protocol and figuring

out the sampling methods, I submitted my application for project approval to the Institutional

Review Board (IRB). Upon receiving approval from IRB, Dr. Larson and I began preparing for

the actual interview process. Before this project, I had minimal experience with interviewing.

However, after reading literature on the interview process and discussing interviewing with

experienced researchers, I became more comfortable with the method. As I began interviewing

participants for the pilot study, I quickly figured out what worked and did not work. I used what I

learned from the pilot interviews and the initial findings to shape a new interview protocol that

was used for the next round of interviews.

Participants

For both of the interviews, I chose to interview female, home-based babysitters who

considered themselves temporarily employed in childcare. I chose this sample for several

reasons. First, I limited the research to focus specifically on females holding childcare positions.

The childcare field employs significantly more females than males. According to DataUSA

(2018), approximately 92.3% of childcare workers are female. While a male babysitter's

perspective could be an interesting addition to the research, it will not be a part of this study,

particularly as I am interested in understanding feminized expectations related to care.

Another requirement was that the participant has worked as a home-based babysitter. A

home-based babysitter will have a different perspective than a center-based childcare worker.

This would eliminate day-care and nursery workers. In Murray's (1998) research on childcare

centers, she emphasized the effects of the center's policies and procedures on restricting

interactions between families and employees. Further, the home-based childcare worker is in a

more vulnerable position. The lack of formal guidelines, administration, and professional

workspace can greatly influence how a babysitter constructs her work.

Finally, for this study, the participants should consider themselves temporarily employed in the childcare industry. For example, the babysitter could be enrolled in university courses and seeking a degree in a field outside of childcare. Wu's (2016) research demonstrates differences in how childcare is perceived by those who consider themselves more permanent employees versus those who consider it a "temporary stepping stone" (Wu, 2016, p. 305). I was curious to see if this identifying factor impacts a babysitter's construction of her work as real or less real. Also, a permanent, full time childcare employee might not take on the title of babysitter, which is a specific part of the research focus.

For both the pilot study and the second study, I retained the same participation requirements. I also continued the requirement that the participant be currently employed in a childcare position or have been employed within the previous 2 years to ensure the participant has had recent experience to reflect upon during the interview process. Additionally, per IRB regulations, participants were at least 19 years of age.

Sampling

To find participants for the pilot study, I used my personal network. Tracy (2013) wrote, "good ethnographers live full and complex lives, and they rightfully turn to their personal networks for research inspiration, resources, and samples of convenience" (p. 135). I worked in the childcare field for several years, which allowed me to make connections with others holding similar positions. I used these connections to reach out to potential participants. I contacted the potential participants through a recruitment email or phone call. In the end, 10 people who met the requirements were willing to participate in the pilot study.

For the second round of interviews, I moved away from convenience sampling. While it provided an easy method for finding participants, it is considered by some to be less credible

(Tracy, 2013). Looking back on the pilot study, I can see how the pre-existing relationships between the participant and myself could have impacted the interview. For the second set of interviews, I recruited participants through purposive sampling (Tracy, 2013). This helped reduce the chance of bias. To recruit the new participants, I used several methods. First, I attended a large lecture class, presented information regarding my research, and provided them with my contact information. This method was not fruitful in producing participants.

The second method I used was posting on a Facebook page dedicated to babysitters and families seeking babysitters in East Alabama. Potential participants on that page were asked to leave their email address in the comments if they were interested in learning more about their involvement. Ultimately, I received three comments and four direct messages regarding the post. I reached out to the seven potential participants and informed them of more details on the interview. Four of the seven potential participants ended up completing the interview.

I realized that I still wanted to complete more interviews, so I posted on my personal Facebook page asking for potential participants. I requested that potential participants comment their email address and to tag anyone they thought would be interested in participating. I received several comments on this post. Ultimately, I was able to email 11 potential participants with more information regarding the study. From that group, four individuals completed interviews. Between both studies, I interviewed 18 total babysitters.

Procedures

For both of the studies, I completed interviews in person and over the phone. The interviews were semi-structured, which allowed me to dive deeper into the conversations (Lindof & Taylor, 2011). For example, I was able to adapt my questions based on the participant's experiences, which allowed for flexibility. On average, the interviews lasted around 45 minutes.

After I completed an interview, I transcribed the audio recording and removed any identifying information to facilitate participant privacy.

The interviews focused on the participant's experiences during their time as a babysitter. The original interview protocol (see Appendix A) was designed to gain information regarding how the babysitter perceives her relationship with the family, how the participant conceives her role as a babysitter, what an ideal family and babysitter would look like, and how babysitting will affect their future. The revised interview protocol (Appendix B) still includes these parts, but I added more questions regarding emotions and emotion regulation, because at that point in the study, I was most interested in studying the emotional labor that babysitters perform.

After I completed the interviewing process and transcribed the audio recordings, I began to code the data. For the pilot study, I tried two different methods for coding. First, I coded the transcriptions by hand. This took a significant amount of time and, ultimately, was not the most productive method for me. Dr. Larson pointed me towards computer programs that help with coding. I ended up using TAMS Analyzer to code the transcriptions. This program helped me organize my codes more efficiently and comprehensively.

For my second study, I analyzed the interview transcriptions multiple times. First, I coded the data by hand. I read through the transcriptions and pulled out important parts. Then, I coded the data using TAMS Analyzer. Finally, I recoded by hand a second time. This thorough attention to the data, helped me to make sense of the data and pay attention to the patterns in it.

Throughout the entire process, I looked for emerging themes from the data. Tracy (2013) calls this an iterative analysis, which "alternates between emic, or emergent, readings of the data and an etic use of existing models, explanations, and theories" (p. 184). I used this methodology as I looked for themes that helped answer the research questions. When I first started this project,

my intentions were to focus solely on emotional labor aspects on babysitting. Through conversation and analysis, I realized that real work became more relevant. Upon this realization, I revisited my data. I primarily coded the data based on if they suggested real work or less real work. Some times, the data would overlap. These overlaps allowed me to see tensions within the data. As I dug deeper, I was able to pull out themes that were within the codes. In the following section, I will discuss these themes in detail.

Chapter 4: Results

In this section of my thesis, I will present the recurring themes found throughout the interview data. These themes demonstrate how and why babysitters construct their work as real or less real. I will break down each theme and discuss how babysitters are internally constructing their perception of their work and how external factors may influence this construction. In doing this, I hope to demonstrate different ways babysitters legitimize and, sometimes, deconstruct their work as being real.

Four main themes emerged from the data. The first theme is centered on job features. This theme illustrates different aspects of work, like job qualifications, the hiring process, and contracts, and how babysitters discuss their experiences with these aspects. In this theme, there appears to be a number of internal and external influences affecting how babysitters construct the realness of their work. As the different job features are discussed, it becomes clear that the lack of "normal" job features, like trainings and contracts, greatly influences how babysitters perceive their work as less real.

The second theme is about working in a domestic setting. A babysitter will most often be performing her work while in another's domestic sphere. Not only will she be working within the physical setting of another's home, the babysitter will also be working within a family. The line

between being an employee and being another family member can quickly become blurred, which can lead to confusion on the realness of a babysitter's work. In this section, I dive into how working in a domestic setting can impact a babysitter's construction of their work.

In the third theme, I move away from job aspects and look more at identity, specifically that of being the fun babysitter, a common identity presented throughout the data. This identity, one of being fun and happy, was the dominant ideal identity throughout the interviews. As this section shows, the desire to be a fun babysitter stems from internal and external influence, and does play into how a babysitter constructs their work as real or less real.

The fourth and final theme relates to gendered identity. In this section, I discuss how a gendered identity seems central to how a babysitter constructs their work as real or not. As was stated in multiple interviews, women are assumed to be natural caregivers who should naturally desire a role that allows them to perform care. This idea can greatly influence how a babysitter constructs their work as real or less real. Through discussing several issues, like how young most babysitters begin their work and ideal babysitter traits, this theme is explicated further.

In analyzing these four themes, I seek to answer my research question: how do babysitters construct their work as real or less real? As the following sections will demonstrate, the answer is multi-faceted.

Job Features

In this section, I will discuss features commonly associated with work, like contracts, paychecks, and training, and how the babysitters discussed these features. In their discussions of these features (and the fact that they are often absent from babysitting), it was often clear how babysitters were constructing their work as real or less real.

Qualifications

Many job listings have sections that outline the ideal candidate's qualifications. These qualifications can vary depending on the field. In the childcare field, the qualifications are contingent upon what each family is seeking from their employee. Some families may require their babysitter to have CPR/First Aid certifications. Other families may want their babysitter to have their driver's license and access to a vehicle.

However, it appears that the main qualification to being a babysitter is rooted in the ability to be a caregiver. Alexa commented, "I think you have to have a nurturing quality about you. I don't think someone who is not nurturing at all can just show up and be like 'hey, let's do it.'" Other babysitters made similar comments. Evelyn said, "I think everyone would be able to do it, but like—I think it definitely just comes natural to people." She added, "I feel like—I feel like most people can do it and they're not going to kill your kid so just be like flexible with it. But also to know like what qualities you want your child to be around. And kind of just like being able to read whoever it is."

Evelyn's comments are interesting because, essentially, she said that anyone could be a babysitter. There are really no specific degrees or experiences or requirements necessary for one to obtain a babysitting position. As mentioned earlier, the family hiring the babysitter ultimately decides what qualifications they seek in a babysitter. It seems that the qualifications are not based on the dominant construction of what hard skills are, like the ability to analyze and code computer data or perform basic medical procedures, but more so on dominant construction of what soft skills are, like one's ability to love and care for another.

In doing this, families are externally shaping the realness of the work. The lack of tightly set qualifications has to impact how a babysitter perceives their work as real or not. Most often,

the lack of qualifications probably leads babysitters to feel like they are not doing actual work. This was apparent, too, when the babysitters mentioned their work outside of childcare. For example, Camille, who now works as a certified public accountant, mentioned how accounting and babysitting cannot be even compared. She said they are on opposite ends of the spectrum of work. It seemed like Camille felt her simply being a big sister is what qualified her to babysit, but for accounting, Camille had to go through years of schooling, pass exams, and prove her ability to perform the job.

Hiring Process

The hiring process greatly varies across fields, careers, and employers. For some fields, the hiring process may be tedious and extensive, requiring multiple interviews and tests. In other fields, the hiring process may be simple and quick. Regardless of what field a person is seeking a position, typically, they will go through a hiring process. In the childcare field, the hiring process can look much different.

There are several reasons for this. First, most babysitters start working at a young age. A 13-year-old girl being asked to watch her next-door-neighbor's children would most likely not be expected to go through an extensive hiring process. She may be asked if she knows how to change a diaper or fix a baby bottle. There will likely be no mention of background checks or multiple rounds of interviews. Even as the babysitters get older, the process seems to stay relatively the same. For example, Jessica started her babysitting career at a young age. She described how her neighbor came over one day and simply asked Jessica if she could watch the neighbor's children. As Jessica has grown up, she has continued to experience the same casual process. When asked if she had ever gone through an interview process, Jessica said:

I wouldn't say like a formal one, like how you would for a job. They asked me questions about how comfortable I am with like certain ages and how long I would be comfortable being there for. It's not really the same as like a job interview, but definitely asked me questions to gauge if I could help enough.

Jessica's comment is interesting because it demonstrates how she views babysitting as not a job. She compared the babysitting interview process, or lack thereof, to that of a real job, which she said would be formal. Her construction of babysitting as less real work is probably rooted in the casual hiring processes she has experienced.

A second reason is that the employers, which would be the families, seek out their employees, the babysitters, differently. Most often, the babysitters interviewed mentioned that they found their work through pre-established relationships, like family friends or cousins, and word of mouth. Hope said, "A lot of it is—like people you already know. People you meet or like word of mouth." Another babysitter, Gracie, commented on getting hired through pre-established relationships, "That's how I got a lot of the jobs. In some shape or form. So like I went to church with them or from the pool. Or they were family themselves." This casual beginning must have some effect on how a babysitter perceives her work. She may question if she is just helping a family friend out or actually performing labor.

Primarily, participants stated that they did find their jobs through personal contacts. However, there were a handful that had gone through the website Care.com. Care.com attempts to professionalize the field by allowing families to list job postings seeking caregivers. Babysitters can list themselves on the website and connect with families looking for childcare. Care.com assists in the hiring process by performing background checks, setting up contracts,

and verifying payments. It seems that Care.com would help to legitimize babysitting by putting more of these standard job features in place.

> For example, Lola, a 24 year old babysitter, talked about her experience on Care.com:
>
> So I went through Care.com and I had a phone interview with a lady and then we met in public and then I met at their house. We were both basically getting a feel of each other. We were good people and I wasn't going to hurt her kids. She wasn't a crazy person. Just a feel of each other.

Lola was one of the few participants who actually went through a formal interview process. Not only did she have to be interviewed, she had to do it three times. Even still, Lola said that the interviews were not formal. They were just so she and the mom could get a feel of each other. It is almost like they were establishing a relationship before Lola began working, which goes back to the traditional method of babysitters being hired by people they know. Even through this process and platform that should seem to provide more legitimacy to the work of babysitting, relationships and perceptions are still central.

> Another babysitter, Alexa, also used Care.com to find her job:
>
> So I found this couple on there. I checked out all of their stuff that was listed and I thought they sounded good, but I still had my boyfriend ride out there with me when I met them and he sat in the car while I was in the interview. Kind of just looking at the area and making sure it felt okay. We didn't know them, but it worked out well.

Here, Alexa admitted that while the situation worked out, she was still hesitant using Care.com. Alexa had previously found all of her babysitting jobs within her family friends and relatives. When she moved away from her hometown, she had to post herself on Care.com to find work. It is interesting that Alexa brought her boyfriend along for her interview. It seems that Alexa

recognized a vulnerability of being alone in the new family's home. Additionally, it seems

unlikely that she would have felt the need for him to accompany her for a more formal job

interview in an organization, again showing that babysitting is constructed differently from other

forms of work.

Other babysitters expressed feelings of distrust about Care.com:

Care.com can be scary. Normally, I feel like a lot of people on there are just trying to find a

cheap babysitter real fast. This was a very unique process for me. (Lola)

I mean I don't really like Care.com. That freaks me out. I don't like that. I'm more

personable—not personable, but I would rather like know them. Like I would rather is be like

my best friends' daughters or something. Finding someone off the internet sketches me out,

like somebody random coming in my house sketches me out. Not that I don't trust, but just

like I would rather it be someone I knew prior to like keeping my kids. (Gina)

I would be nervous to hire randomly off like Care.com or something. (Gracie)

I don't know how comfortable I would be hiring someone from like an agency or like online.

If I can't ask people that have already used them. You just don't really know and that's a

huge thing for someone to be doing. They come to your house and your personal space and I

would be very aware of trying to find someone I could validate as being good. (Jessica)

There are mixed feelings regarding using Care.com. As seen with Lola and Alexa, it may make

the hiring process more professional. Some form of interview would be expected, be that a

formal meeting or chatting over coffee. There may be more expectations regarding contracts and

payment plans, which would lend support to arguing childcare is a real job.

Still, some babysitters seemed to rebel against Care.com and its ability to professionalize the

hiring process. There may be a few reasons for this. First, as the process becomes more

professionalized, it requires more effort from the babysitter. When they are used to an easy

process (i.e., Jessica's neighbor walking over and asking Jessica if she could watch her kids), it

could be difficult to transition into a more complex process (i.e., background checks, interviews).

Secondly, if a babysitter is seeking work within a pre-established relationship (i.e., babysitting

for a family friend), the professionalization of the hiring process could feel like a threat to that

relationship. For example, if Jessica's neighbor had come over and asked Jessica to fill out

paperwork, go through a background check, and be interviewed, she may have experienced an

uncomfortable shift in that relationship. Lastly, babysitters may be pushing back on the

professionalization of babysitting because they feel the work does not compare to their "real"

work. Many of the babysitters talked about their careers outside of babysitting. It was often clear

that they considered their career as work, but babysitting as just something easy to do on the

side. It could be that the women were not trying to delegitimize babysitting as work, but more so

attempting to professionalize what they consider their more serious career.

Looking externally, families may have reasons for keeping the hiring process casual, mostly

because it makes the process easier. When a babysitter is already close to a family or has been

referred by mutual friends, there is little need to go through an interview process or background

check. There may be little discussion of duties and expectations. The lack of these conversations

could lead to a babysitter feeling like she is not doing real work, just helping out loved ones.

A babysitter's hiring process appears to be limited and an insignificant factor, but still seems to

set the foundation for how the rest of the job will go.

Contracts

In many jobs, once an employer decides to hire a job candidate, the new employee will be

asked to sign a contract. Whether simple or detailed, a contract protects both the employer and

employee by outlining expectations, duties, deliverables, wages, and rules of employment. Contracts are not limited to specific fields, but may be more common in some fields. In the field of childcare, contracts are rare—especially for occasional babysitters. Ruth explained it this way:

> I almost feel with babysitting you don't consider it a real job so you don't feel like you need to have a contract, right? Like you don't consider it—it's kind of an under the table, easy job. And I think that makes it really easy to get taken advantage of.

> As Ruth said, babysitting does not feel like a real job, so there does not seem to be a need for a contract. However, she concluded her statement by saying that those factors are what make the position more vulnerable for being taken advantage. It seems that Ruth recognized the downside of the work being less real, while also maintaining that she did not consider it a real job.

> Only one babysitter, Lola, mentioned signing a contract for her current position. She said, "I actually signed a contract. Yeah. It was all basic statements like—her intentions and if something were to happen, like if I were to cross this line—I would not be working there anymore." Lola talked extensively about her contract. She had worked other babysitting jobs, but her current job was unique compared to her other experiences. Lola praised the mom for creating the contract and argued that the contract was what gave her the ability to feel comfortable getting close to the family. It enabled her to understand her role and fulfill the duties expected of her. She said, "Even within the contract, they don't expect me to do any housework. I'm not expected to take care of the dogs. My only role is to take care of the kids."

> The contract protected Lola from any internal or external pressures to take on duties outside of her boundaries. Many of the babysitters expressed negative feelings about how their duties would extend beyond childcare with little negotiation. Babysitter duties were usually

discussed in person and it was often an informal conversation. Ruth made an interesting comment about these discussions:

> Usually I'd come in for an hour or so and chat about what this looks like. That's when expectations were discussed. Or during the email exchange. We're looking for someone for this many hours a week, this would be the pay. This is how many children. I feel like that's how that was communicated to me. But often times, the expectations expanded. I don't think anyone ever says I'd like you to do a load of laundry every day. I don't feel like that was communicated to me. It was like once I was deep in the job, oh can you also do this?

Another babysitter, Nicole, had a similar thought:

> I was asked by a couple of families to clean and obviously I'm not their housecleaner. Things like that. Or like deal with their dog, as well. I'm mainly there to keep the kids. I'm not like a dog sitter also unless you like want me to be. There were some duties that I didn't necessarily like—like I agreed to, but that weren't a part of the original deal.

Alexa had a comparable experience:

> As time went on, I was expected to do things outside of like what I signed up for. Like I was starting to work on cleaning the house and I had to sweep and vacuum so much.

Without the security provided by a formal contract, these babysitters felt that their role was expanding too far beyond what they originally agreed on as job duties. However, babysitters did not describe asking for a contract. This fact could be rooted in how many babysitters find their work: pre-established relationships. It would be strange for a niece to ask or be asked to sign a contract while working for her aunt. Another reason is the idea that babysitter's lack agency to make the request. As Hope said, "I think it's a thing with like being in their house and you don't want to tell them what to do and they're paying you. But I don't know." Both the informality of

babysitting and the lack of power that babysitters have contributed to a norms of babysitters not asking for contracts.

From the perspective of the families, they are entrusting babysitters with the care of their children and it seems odd that they would not insist on a contract with their babysitter. Babysitters are invited into a personal space, a family. They are entrusted with caring for children. However, other than Lola, none of the babysitters had been given a contract. It seems that, through the lack of contracts, families want to keep the babysitter's work more casual. This could be due to the unpredictability of some babysitting jobs (i.e. getting asked to work when a child is sick and cannot attend school, date nights). Families may not want to make the work that serious if the babysitter is only working every so often. Whatever the reason may be for the lack of a contract, it does send a message for how the work is viewed: less real. Although contracts for babysitters are uncommon, they serve to protect both the family and the babysitter. A contract also functions as a way to legitimize a babysitter's work by formalizing it.

Training

Out of all the interviews, none of the babysitters mentioned receiving any form of supervised training on the job. Most often, babysitters expressed that they were just expected to figure it out or already know how to do the required tasks. Agnes stated, "There was a high expectation for me to figure out what needed to happen on my own. Just use your better judgment." Although it could seem trivial to think training should be required for babysitters because much of the job involves play and fun, there are serious aspects to the job. Tasks like properly installing a car seat, measuring and mixing baby formula, and performing first aid are all critical tasks that babysitters often perform. In those areas, there is a need for training.

The lack of this training demonstrates, again, how babysitters, who are most often women, are expected to naturally be able to perform these duties. Gracie commented on her experience: "It was pretty free range. I feel like that's been all of my experiences. Kind of like take 'em." In doing this, the parents were placing their faith in Gracie's ability to naturally perform her duties as a caretaker. The fact that Gracie is a woman was evidence enough of this ability. Gracie's experiences probably impacted how she viewed the realness of her work. She did not go through any training, but leaned on her natural ability. This likely led her to view the work as less real, as the lack of training downplays the seriousness of the work.

Even for unusual situations, training did not come into play. Evelyn, who babysat for a toddler with Down syndrome, described her lack of training for taking care of a special needs child. Evelyn took the job with no prior experience working with children who had special needs. She said, "I had literally no training and did not qualify for this." She talked about how her lack of training affected her relationship with the toddler. Evelyn was expected to learn how to communicate and interact with the toddler by figuring it out on her own. She said, "There was a lot of adjusting. I guess on both of our parts because he knew I wasn't familiar with a lot of things in his world."

In her situation, Evelyn could have greatly benefited from some form of training from either the parents or an expert. It demonstrates how the parents viewed Evelyn's work with the toddler as less real. They did not see the need to train her for the work, probably because they did not view it as work. This, again, goes back to the idea that caregiving, which is supposedly a woman's natural ability, is not real work. However, Evelyn was doing real work. She said, "It did feel kind of heavy with him having Down syndrome. I felt like it was kind of an extended role with him. I took on a lot with that." Evelyn worked with the toddler for two summers and,

ultimately, developed her own ability to communicate and care for the child. Evelyn's experience is a prime example of how training, or the lack thereof, can factor into the realness of the work.

Scheduling

Many jobs have set hours, like 8:00AM to 5:00PM. Babysitters experience less consistency in what hours they are expected to be on the job. Some babysitters, like Lola, have had positive experiences with their work schedule. In Lola's current job, she informs the parents of her schedule in advance and they craft their schedules around that. While she does have a lot of freedom in when she does and does not work, Lola's hours are still unlike many other jobs. She said, "My schedule is changing regularly. Some days I work 8 to 1. There's some days that I'm there from 5am to 8pm."

Other babysitters experienced different scheduling situations. For example, Lucy described how when she was babysitting, she was never sure what her hours would be. She compared it to her other job working at a clothing boutique:

> The boutique was definitely like, here's your role and here's your job, this is what you do and when you are finished at 5pm, you leave. Babysitting I didn't know if there was a certain time, I didn't know if something was going to happen. I was taking care of a life. Whereas retail is just a store.

Essentially, Lucy is saying that, with babysitting, you cannot just leave the kids alone when the shift is done. A babysitter has to be prepared to stick it out in case something happens, like a parent coming home late, which participants noted was a frequent occurrence. The lack of set hours probably does influence how a babysitter constructs their idea of the work by establishing

an informal system of when work is happening. Ruth explained how this informal system functioned in her work:

> There were times like when I was engaged and traveling to see him on the weekend and they would still ask me to do things outside of the regularly scheduled hours and I would feel really bad saying no. Sometimes I was like—I felt like I owed them something or they were expecting me to fulfill this. Especially because the expectations with this family were not clear. With other families, they would say like 'oh if you're not available, that's totally fine" like this family would not. It was just like 'hey could you do this for us'. It wasn't like an opportunity for me to say hey I really don't want to do this.

This informal system appears to work as if families think of babysitters as always on call. This can lead to the babysitter feeling frustration. Charlotte said, "They will text me last minute and be like can you stay late or can you do this or this or this? And I might have already had a plan for that day. So it frustrates me." Another comment on this informal system came from Gina:

> It was always last minute, but I felt like I had to do it because I was close with the mom. I might would already have stuff planned but I would go to work anyways because I knew she needed the help, but like, it was kind of bad towards the end. She wasn't bad to me, but just in the sense of like she knew I would it and so she would ask.

For Gina, she felt an obligation to go to work when she was called in because of her close relationship with the mom. Here, the informal scheduling system worked to the advantage of the family and restricted Gina's ability to set boundaries. If the roles were reversed and Gina had randomly called off of work with little advance notice, she would likely lose her job. It would be deemed unprofessional. Further, due to the close relationship she shared with the mom, Gina probably felt obligated to that relationship to be available. If it were Gina's friend who needed

her help, she would likely go and help without concern. But when the employer-employee aspect of the relationship is added into the equation, Gina could easily find herself in a vulnerable position. Gina likely struggled with constructing how she viewed her work as real or not, with scheduling playing an interesting role in the construction.

Scheduling revealed an interesting tension. The tension was between the expectation for a babysitter to be on time to work and available to stay past set hours and parents not coming home on time and relieving the babysitter from their work. It seems that babysitters feel an external pressure to be professional about being on time to work. However, babysitters did not feel parents took their responsibility of coming home on time seriously. Alexa experienced issues with this and commented that she wants "someone that respects me and my time just like I respect them and their time. So when they tell me to be there at 7:30, I'm going to be there at 7:30. When they tell me they are going to be home at 6:30 and they show up at 7:30, that's not respecting my time."

For families, there seems to be a shift in how scheduling works to construct the realness of the work. A babysitter is expected to be on time, which constructs it as real work, but the family can be late coming home, which constructs it as less real. A professional boss would likely not come back to the office late and simply laugh it off as losing track of time. For the babysitters, scheduling can either work to construct it as a real job (i.e. Lola's ability to set her schedule) or construct it as less real (being on call, working small shifts).

Paychecks

Many people find security in working a job that earns a paycheck. For some, babysitting is a way to earn an income. Unlike most jobs, in the childcare field, wages can be a taboo subject. As Ruth explained, "I feel like wages are hard. People ask like what's your rate. I feel

like I always undersold myself. I just hate talking about money." Ruth is not alone in this feeling. Take Gracie, for example. She said:

> I've had a couple of times when people have asked me what I charge, but it's more so—well I guess in the summers in high school, we would talk about it up front. This is what I'm going to pay you per week. I've never had like a set rate of $20 an hour. You have to charge me that. Or you have to pay me that. I was always just kind of like, whatever you pay me I'll be happy with and it usually turned out that they would overpay.

While Gracie does not say she hates talking about money, it still seems that she does not feel comfortable asking for a set rate. This shows that Gracie likely has constructed the work as less real. In another job, Gracie would likely not tell her boss that she will be happy with whatever they decide to pay her. Money plays a significant role in how a babysitter constructs her work as real or less real. Another example of this comes from Anna:

> Typically parents will ask me my rate. If they're kind of new to me, they'll ask me a rate and I'm not like super picky so I'm kind of like whatever you want to pay me. That's not typical I'm sure, but um, so yeah not really. It's kind of—I do it more to just help the families than to make the money. I mean the money is a plus for sure—but yeah, again, I know that's not typical.

Again, Anna allowed the family to decide how much her paycheck will be. To Anna, her ability to help another family was more important than a paycheck. There may be a connection to how women are just expected to be caregivers. Moms do not get paid for taking care of their own kids. Anna may feel like she does not deserve the money for doing something that others, like the mom, are not being paid for.

Another interesting argument was that babysitting is just something fun for babysitters to do. It is not necessarily wrong to assume someone enjoys her job. Several of the babysitters mentioned that they started working in childcare because they do like children and enjoy the work. It becomes an issue when someone, like an employer, assumes that an employee's main reward from the job is the fun they get out of it, rather than financial compensation. In the context of babysitting, it could be seen as the parents thinking that their babysitter just needs something to do and likes kids. In reality, the babysitter's main priority is a paycheck. Agnes explained:

> You're thinking this is a job, I have to save. I have bills. I think that a lot of parents don't understand that. I think they see a caretaker—especially a young person—as someone who just needs to fill some time up and that they should be grateful that they are getting paid at all. This is really just a fun thing—I think parents think it is that way.

Ruth shared a similar sentiment:

> I guess it goes back to the idea of "we're giving you this opportunity to be with children and get paid for it—how lucky are you!"

Agnes and Ruth reveal an important way parents think that devalues the work babysitters are doing. If parents believe a babysitter just needs something to do to fill time and are lucky to even get paid the small amount they are offering, this greatly delegitimizes the work. When parents think like this, they are deconstructing the babysitter's job and turning it into just a fun activity for women to do. Agnes and Ruth recognized this line of thought, and both seem to disagree with it.

Not only could this line of thinking affect a babysitter's salary, it can also play into the expectation for a babysitter to be full of cheer and a source of constant fun for the children.

Gina made an interesting comment discussing how love can affect a babysitter's paycheck:

> I was getting paid $9 for three kids. But at that point, it was just like, I didn't see the need to voice my opinion because I needed the money, but if I told other people about it, they would just be distraught over my wage. I think I didn't know it was crazy because I didn't know I should ask for me and by the time I realized I should I was already invested in their family, so I wasn't going to—I took in the family and the money together.

Gina claimed that she knew she deserved more money for her work, but she felt too invested in the family to make any changes and risk losing her job.

All this to say, wages are tricky for babysitters for several reasons. The hiring process and lack of contractual agreements can make discussing wages uncomfortable. It could be especially difficult when a babysitter is working for a family friend or relative. Should they be paying a normal rate or do they get a family discount? What happens when a babysitter feels too invested in a family to advocate for a higher salary, like Gina demonstrated? How do you put a price on keeping children alive? Babysitters have to decide for themselves how they approach paychecks.

In their decisions, they construct their work as more real or less real. For someone like Anna, who said she will accept whatever a family offers, the work is probably less like work and more like a natural service she can provide. It probably feels more like just hanging out with children. Others, like Alexa and Gina, felt they were not being paid enough for the labor they were doing. For them, they probably felt like it was real work. They recognized that their paychecks were not equal to the amount of labor they were putting in. For very few others, like Lola, they felt they were getting paid well and this likely reinforced their construction of the work as real.

As for the parents who are paying the babysitters, there is something to be said about how much they are willing to pay a babysitter to care for their children. One might be able to think they would be willing to pay a significant amount. Someone is coming in and caring for their loved ones. They most likely want the best care possible. However, they are often paying next to nothing. It goes back to the idea that women are just naturally meant to be caregivers and babysitting is not real work. It is what women are just meant to do. Ruth touched on this in her interview: "There's this idea that unwaged or lesser-waged labor belongs to women."

Job Title

There were several instances of babysitters trying to professionalize their work through their job title. For example, Charlotte said it hurts her feelings to be labeled a babysitter. Instead, she prefers a more professional title. She said, "I say I was a caregiver to three children for two years. I try to make it sound more professional." Like Charlotte, Jennifer also changed her title to sound more professional. Jennifer prefers childcare facilitator.

For some, babysitting is a step down to what they believe themselves to be doing, which is nannying. Several babysitters made it clear that there is a huge distinction between the two roles. They explained this distinction:

> I mean I would literally tell them I feel like a mom. I never used the term babysitter. I always said nanny. I feel like babysitter is someone that comes over once in a while and watches a kid whereas a nanny is someone who is—those are just different roles in my opinion. (Gina)

> I think that babysitting sounds like they're a lot younger and you're just maintaining their basic needs, when you think of just like the term. (Jennifer)

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I feel like those are two different roles. For babysitter, I'm coming in and just helping

give some free time to go on a date night. I kind of feel like I'm here to serve y'all and

give y'all time to work on yourselves and be married and not just be parents. I'm here to

help you. For nannying, I feel like I'm more of like—and again this can get

complicated—but I'm kind of like another member of the family. Which can make

expectations vague. I am here as kind of a more permanent figure with a little bit more

authority than a babysitter. (Ruth)

I know my friends that are nannies become like very close with the family, but since I

was more like a step down from a nanny, like a part time babysitter, not as much. (Hope)

It matters to babysitters which title they take on. For some, babysitter was too much. Like Hope,

who said she considers herself more of a part time babysitter, even though she was working three

days every week. Another babysitter, who was working long hours and doing extensive labor,

described herself this way: "I was a part time babysitter. I pretty much took on the role as their

parents, especially during overnights." It seems strange that they would be wary of identifying as

a babysitter. They both added in that it was more part time work, but it does not appear that they

were doing part time work. Ruth made an interesting comment that might offer an explanation:

It's kind of funny because I have trouble even articulating yes, I was a nanny. I didn't do

it every day. It didn't even feel like I was doing them a lot. It's hard for me to say yes I

was nannying, but I was. It's like I'm not doing as much work as actual nannies, but I'm

still doing work. I don't know.

For some, it is important that they legitimize their work through choosing a more professional

title. Others, struggle with even calling themselves a babysitter. This name of work plays an

interesting part in how they perceive the work they are doing. For Jennifer, who calls herself a childcare facilitator, babysitting probably feels like a very real job. For Gina, who was working a significant amount of hours per week but still labeled herself as a part-time babysitter, the work probably feels less real.

The previous section focused on different job features that may demonstrate how babysitters negotiate their work as real or less real. Without formal job features, babysitting is often constructed as less real work. However, babysitters seem to push back against adding in features, like contracts, which suggests they like the lack of formal job features. Now, we will look at how working in a domestic setting affects this negotiation.

Domestic Setting

Hochschild (1983) described a concept called the "marketized private life." This is when someone is at work, but the work is taking place in someone else's home. Hochschild (1983) argues that this kind of work can be very confusing for employees to navigate. They must learn how to function as an employee, but within the confines of a family. The employee must "draw on complex mixes of both work and family cultures" (p. 204). As she draws on this mix of work and family cultures, a babysitter may realize there is a (clear or blurry) line between being an employee and being a part of the family.

Throughout the interviews, it became clear that there were two common sides of the line: a professional relationship, like a boss and employee, and a familial relationship, like family member. The babysitters interpret their role, be it more professional or more like an older sister, through communication and interaction with the parents. While the parents may not explicitly make this distinction, it comes out in other interactions. For example, one of the babysitters, Lucy, said, "it was more than just, ya know, boss gets home and you leave. We would talk a bit. I

got invited to birthday parties, some events at their church, um, their christening." Through these interactions, Lucy felt like she was treated more as a family member than an employee, which probably played into how Lucy perceived her work.

Jennifer shared a similar comment:

If you've been with somebody for years, you kind of become more like family and ya know, at least in my experience, you will start exchanging Christmas presents or cards and birthday presents and you just develop a deeper relationship and in some cases it doesn't even feel like you're working for them, it's like I don't know, more of a friendship, but you still get paid.

In this comment, Jennifer explicitly says that this type of relationship can make it feel like it is not work, but a friendship. In a friendship, if one friend asked for another's help with babysitting, it would not feel like work, but more like hanging out with a friend's children. From the family's side, the friendship they share with Jennifer could influence how they construct her work. It may feel more like a friend doing them a favor, not an employee.

This familial relationship, of course, is where vulnerabilities can arise. Jessica commented on the vulnerability of a familial relationship: "It's tricky when it's really like friendly because then you feel like you don't have any professional boundaries."

Here, Jessica is arguing that a friendly relationship leads to the loss of professional boundaries. Alexa shared a related experience:

She wanted it to be so professional but then randomly would be like come to my kid's birthday party or hey, can you stay late and come to the school with us? It was like it got on to the family side whenever she wanted. And I wasn't getting paid. And that made me upset. Like she didn't want to pay me to go on the school visit or go with her to the mall

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because she thought at that point that I loved the kids so much that I was doing it because

I liked them. And those expectations were just getting so high.

Alexa understood how much influence the babysitter-family relationship could have on her work. Alexa described how she felt the family she worked for took advantage of their close relationship. It is clear that while Alexa did grow to love the kids, she still constructed a professional boundary that allowed her to understand what was work and what was not, like going on school visits without being paid.

Alexa's comment also demonstrates some things about how the mother viewed what was work and what was not. Alexa being invited to the mall may seem like it is not work to the mother. It is an outing with her and the children, but Alexa will still have to perform some type of work. She may be expected to change a diaper, keep the children from not touching merchandise, and deal with upset children. While the setting may be outside of the normal place of work (the house), Alexa is still doing work. To the mother, Alexa may not be doing work. She may just be hanging out, like a friend would do. While there is nothing inherently wrong with this, it still puts Alexa in a vulnerable position to not be paid for her time and effort and threatens how she has constructed her work as real.

Others, still, argued that the familiar relationship was ideal and allows them to feel more connected to their work. Jennifer said, "It's not just some kids you're watching for money, but people that you actually really care about and you're invested in them as a person." This could be a way babysitters are crafting their work to be more meaningful. They are not just coming in to a person's house, keeping the children alive, taking their pay, and leaving. They are developing close relationships, going to the children's events, and genuinely caring for another's life. In this

situation, maybe it is not about the work being real or less real, but more about the work being meaningful.

The other type of relationship, the professional one, was rarely mentioned as the ideal. Only one babysitter, Evelyn, said she would prefer a professional relationship at work:

> I would say more professional. I don't want to be uncomfortable with them. If they had something personal pop up, I wouldn't want them to feel like they couldn't talk to me about it. Like if they had to reschedule or come home later. But also I wouldn't want it to be so comfortable that they feel like they can do whatever they want to and you're just going to go with it. There has to be a separation—a professional level so that they don't walk all over you.

Here, Evelyn recognizes the threat of losing professional boundaries and mitigates that by arguing for separation between work and family. In doing this, Evelyn has constructed the work as more real. She understands her role as an employee and wants to protect her professional identity through maintaining a comfortable, but professional relationship at work.

Most of the babysitters recognized a need for finding their place on the line of being more professional or more familial with the family. Molly said:

> I think there has to be a balance of both. I feel like a lot of aspects, I try to be professional because it is work and it is a job still. I think there is that once you've babysat for someone for so long you do become like family because you are a big role within the family. So I would want there to be a balance of both. If you lose the professional, it might cause some issues.

This balance that Molly described is interesting. It almost seems like the balance of a professional/familiar relationship is also a balance of real/less real work. It is important to have

the professional relationship because it keeps the real work features more legitimate, like paychecks and scheduling. The familial relationship leans more towards less real work, which is also important for both the family and babysitter in terms of trust, open communication, and being comfortable at work. The familial relationship also offers the perk of the work not feeling like a job. This may lead to positive attitudes for babysitters related to the work they are doing. At the same time, a familial relationship makes it more difficult to ask for a raise or time off.

Babysitters have to figure out the dynamics of the relationship between themselves and their bosses. This relationship could be what makes or breaks the babysitter's experience on the job, so it is imperative babysitters determine what type of relationship works best for them. As Lola said, "It's really just important to choose your family wisely. If you're spending day in and day out with them, you've got to be really careful who you're getting involved with." To figure this relationship out, most babysitters relied on communication with the heads of the family: the parents.

The Mom and the Dad

None of the babysitters explicitly discussed the families they worked for as their bosses. The babysitters would most often use terms like "the mom" or "the dad." While this seem insignificant, this form of communication may impact how the babysitters are constructing their work. It would be hard to see someone as "boss" when, in their mind, they are the mom or the dad. To dive deeper into understanding how the parents function as bosses in a babysitter's work, it is important to break down how each parent assumes the role.

Throughout the interviews, the babysitters rarely mentioned the father. When pressed about their relationship with him, several said it was practically nonexistent. Gina had an interesting story about her interactions with the father:

I was so close to the mom, but I never even had the dad's number, which I think was kind

of weird. I kept their kids for three years and never even had your number. Not saying

that I wanted his number or anything, but just like in general, I kept your kids for so long

and the mom would text me and be like 'oh, I'm on the way home', but the dad would

just show up and not say anything. I mean obviously you're going to be closer to the

mom. I think that's common. Like that's normal, but just like I don't know. There would

be times when the mom wasn't even in the same state and I would like have to contact

her to contact the dad. And that was weird to me.

Through these interactions, Gina was able to determine that the father did not play an active role

as a boss in her employment. Gina could read this as him not viewing her role in his family as

significant. This could suggest that he saw Gina just as someone who came in and kept the

children alive, nothing more, nothing less. Thus, influencing Gina to perceive her work as less

real. On the other hand, maybe the father's lack of desire to build a relationship suggests that he

perceived Gina as an employee. She was there to work, not join the family.

Another babysitter, Lucy, shared a similar experience:

The dad really didn't talk. I couldn't tell you if I ever had a whole conversation with him.

Like, that was a straight up, he comes home and I wouldn't even really tell him how the

children were unless it was something big that I needed to mention—other than that I

would just message the mom because he was so socially awkward so it was weird. I feel

like with him if he would have been like hey how were the kids? I would have told him.

But sometimes I wouldn't even know he was home because he was so quiet. I would hear

noises and be like "oh your dad must be home or there's a robber." I don't know. I never

talked to the dad. I didn't even have his phone number. It's so strange because if there

was like a big emergency, you would think that they would have wanted me to have his

contact stuff, but no. I mean I know his name and that's about it.

Lucy could have interpreted this lack of relationship as a sign of her lack of importance, which

could work to make her construct it as real work or less real work. For real work, Lucy could feel

similar to Gina, as an employee just doing a job and not developing a familial relationship with

the father. On the less real, the lack of relationship could lead Lucy to feel like she is not doing

significant enough work that would warrant a relationship.

Other babysitters mentioned the dads, but it was always brief. This may not be related to

how a babysitter constructs their work as real or less real, but it could still play a factor in that

construction. Most often, the babysitters discussed the moms as the primary person in charge,

which reinforces the gendered nature of care work. Several of the babysitters discussed their

relationships with the moms. For Gina, it was a rocky start:

I feel like they were very skeptical of me at first because they loved the girl so much that

I replaced. I felt like they saw me as coming in and taking her place. And I don't know,

the mom was kind of intimidating at first. And the mom was just like—I remember this

time when I was over at their house and she was like crying because the other girl left and

she was like we wish she could stay and said 'no offense, Gina, but I wish you didn't get

this job' and I was just like 'what?'

The mother put Gina in an awkward position when she said this. Gina admitted that throughout

the course of their relationship, she continued to have interactions with the mother that made her

confused by her role as her babysitter, which would ultimately affect how Gina viewed her work

as real or less real. At times, Gina said the mom would be relaxed and make her feel like a family

member, making it feel like less real work, but other times, the mom would switch the

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relationship to being more like a boss-employee. Of course, in some situations, this would be fine, but often, it left Gina feeling confused about the status of their relationship:

> I feel like sometimes—well I love her so much, but I felt like sometimes she was passive aggressive about…I think because I was so close to her, but also I'm a pushover. So I was more like taken aback by stuff like that. Like she would text—I feel like she never would say stuff in person, it was always like whenever I left the house. She would sometimes talk badly about the other babysitters, which was awkward.
>
> I think that I would say that I loved how close I was with the mom, but I think that sometimes got in the way of me sticking up for myself in the sense of like paying me. I would let stuff slide because I was close to her. Then coming home late. Just like not telling me stuff. It would piss me off. It was always last minute, but I felt like I had to do it because I was close with the mom. I might would already have stuff planned but I would go to work anyways because I knew she needed the help, but like, it was kind of bad towards the end. She wasn't bad to me, but just in the sense of like she knew I would it and so she would ask.

For Gina, it is clear that the mom set the tone of their relationship. And that tone seemed to shift according to whatever mood the mom was in that day. It seems like Gina having to deal with these shifts was work in itself. Ultimately, Gina was able to tell that her relationship with the mom interfered with constructing her work as real. She was too close with the mom to have the ability to bring up work stuff, like her paychecks being late. As Gina said, she just let stuff slide. This goes back to the idea that a familial relationship could make the work feel less real and more like a favor. One would not push a friend to pay them for watching their child. One would push a boss for their paycheck.

Other babysitters mentioned positive relationships with the mothers. Lola talked about how her relationship with the mother shifted from being more professional to familial:

The relationship between me and the mom—so a lot of times she would be there while I was there—and she would breastfeed and then go run errands and then come back—we spent a lot of time together. I truly consider her like a sister or friend now. Almost like a best friend. I've met her family—all of her family. She's met all of my family. It's like 4/5 months into this. They've trusted me and they're taking me on family vacation. There was a huge change in the trust and bond—almost like a sisterhood between me and the mom now.

While Lola has only been working for this family for a brief amount of time, she has quickly developed a close bond with the mom and Lola felt that she benefited from this relationship. She expressed that it made her feel more comfortable bringing up issues like not being available to work and needing a break. This is kind of an interesting irony. Her close relationship with the mom probably made the work feel less real in some ways, like hanging out with a friend, but more real in others, like her ability to comfortably communicate about work related issues.

However, other babysitters were still wary of creating this close of a relationship. A couple of examples of this came when babysitters discussed how a familial relationship extended the boundaries of their expected duties. One of those duties was staying to talk with the mom once she came home. These talks could be extended and babysitters who developed a close relationship would often feel obligated to stay. Some did not mind, like Gina, who said, "I mean I didn't mind that because I felt like the mom didn't have that many girlfriends that she went and did stuff with because she just doesn't have time for that. I didn't mind it. I listened and responded and stuff." Others had mixed feelings:

Sometimes I would be all about it. And then sometimes they would get home at midnight

and I would be so ready to go home but we would sit around and talk in the kitchen for

30 minutes and I would feel weird saying I need to leave. (Gracie)

As far as day to day, I would get to work and listen to the mom complain about her day

or her work. She would definitely get home and talk about her life and complain. It was

not work. (Alexa)

It seems, to Gracie and Alexa, that this familial relationship blurs the lines between work

and play. While it was a mixed opinion on which relationship type was better, the babysitters

were clear that the relationship highly depends on interactions with the mom. This relationship

and the father relationship seem to strongly influence how a babysitter constructs the realness of

their work. The blurred lines of being an employee working in another family's personal space,

which would feel like real work, and being an adopted member of the family, which would feel

like less real work, are navigated by these relationships.

A babysitter is not going to an office. She is going to someone's house. She is not

working at a desk, but in someone's living room. It is not her space, but it is her space when she

is in charge. She does not have a formal boss who sits in an office and can file reports on her.

She works with parents to understand her role, her position within the family. A babysitter may

feel like a professional childcare worker, expected to complete her duties and clock out. Or she

may feel like a surrogate aunt or older sister with duties that extend beyond her work hours.

Either way, a babysitter may lean into that role to construct how she views her work as more or

less real, professional, and legitimate.

The previous two sections focused primarily on job features and crafting. The next two sections will be primarily focused on how babysitters construct identities that contributed to constructions of the realness of their work.

The Fun Babysitter

One common identity found throughout the interviews is the "fun babysitter." The fun babysitter is a family's ideal babysitter. She is fun and full of energy. She is loved by the parents and even more by the children. Jennifer said, "you're the fun one that plays and is less strict than a mom or dad." A fun babysitter will not sit on the couch and play on her phone. She will play dress up (Jennifer), build forts (Camille), and go exploring outside (Agnes).

While she may be less strict than mom or dad, a fun babysitter recognizes her position of authority (most of the time). When asked about what traits a good babysitter should have, one babysitter answered:

> The most important ones would be that you're fun but also pay attention. You have to balance both because you want them to have a good time, but also that they're safe and getting what they need. So it could be like oh I'm really good at keeping them safe, but I'm really boring or vice versa because that's kind of what parents are looking for. A balance of both.

Several babysitters mentioned their struggle with finding the balance between being the fun babysitter and being an authority figure. It appeared that the babysitters' identities more closely aligned with being fun, not as an authority figure. There were tensions between balancing the two roles demonstrated throughout the interviews. Gracie commented:

It's like I'm the babysitter but I don't want to have to be the mean person, but there were times it has to be done. You want to be the cool, fun babysitter, but then again there comes a time that you have to discipline.

In this comment, Gracie connects the act of disciplining the children to being a mean person. This connection is interesting because it demonstrates another tension in a babysitter's identity. Gracie wants to be the fun, cool babysitter, but knows that that identity will be challenged when it comes time to discipline. Towards the end of our interview, Gracie reiterated this notion:

When I first started, I was scared to discipline or be the opinionated. But you have to remember that you're the one in charge, they're not. If you let them run over you, they'll have zero respect for you. You want to have fun, you want to play with them, but also like you're the boss and you are in charge.

Gracie recognizes the tension in wanting to be fun and having to be in charge. This tension could play into how a babysitter constructs her work as real or less real. It could feel like real work when the babysitter takes on the authority role. This could be due to them not feeling like that part of the work comes naturally, like being fun does.

It is not surprising that babysitters align their identity with being the fun babysitter. Placed on them, both internally and externally, is the expectation for entertainment. Internally, it appears that babysitters believe themselves to be naturally fun and caring. But what happens when a babysitter is tired and not able to keep up the fun babysitter act? Molly gave some insight on this question:

I think you have to have a certain personality to work as a babysitter. You kind of go into it with different expectations as you would for like another job. I would think it is more

of a natural thing. I think you can lose it, though. You can get burnt out on it. So you

might have to do other things to kind of maintain those feelings.

Another interesting example came from Agnes, a self-proclaimed introvert. During her

interview, Agnes mentioned several times that she felt the need to be the fun babysitter, but for

her it did not come naturally.

I personally am more of an introverted person and a lot of what we were doing was very

social. And you're with this kid all day, every day. Weekends were good for me to

recharge. I also struggle with other mental health things and I felt like I was just

completely drained. Summers are big. They are full of activities and there's a lot of

expectation for you to go and make that kid's time away from school enjoyable and full

of opportunity and experiences. And I feel like a lot of times babysitters put more of an

expectation on themselves to fulfill that than even the parent's expectation. I know I did.

So by the end of the summer I was completely drained. It was really hard for me to even

go and do little things. Some days I just wanted to say "Hey, let's have a movie day." So

a lot of days I couldn't do that when I wanted to. That expectation to do my job was still

there.

To Agnes, being fun was work. Agnes recognized the role she played in creating this high

expectation for a fun-filled summer. Combining that with what the parents had communicated

regarding how the child should be spending her summer outside, creating and learning, Agnes

wore herself out. Agnes realized that she had to work for the fun babysitter identity that she saw

as an ideal. She likely felt she was doing preemptive work (taking on an extroverted identity)

necessary to perform her other work (babysitting). This likely made babysitting feel like real and

draining work to Agnes.

Not only is there an internal pressure to be the fun babysitter, there is also an external expectation coming from the parents and the children. Gracie discussed this in her interview:

> I guess maybe subconsciously I thought 'oh I need to feed them and keep them alive' but also too it was more like I wanted them to have fun with me and I wanted them to ask me back to work. It was more so let's have fun and do fun things. We can have fun together. And then also too, oh we really like her let's ask her to come back.

In other words, Gracie is saying that she knows she has to perform as the fun babysitter in order to be asked back. This could stem from an internal or external expectation. Internally, there may be a chance that Gracie believes if she acts more professional she may not get the job. If this is the case, playing the fun babysitter is actually a smart business move. Either way, it is clear that there is an expectation for a babysitter to be fun. While most of the babysitters seemed to comply to this expectation, Nicole offered a different take:

> I would say that sometimes it's not worth it to be the fun babysitter. I think you need to be the babysitter that is willing to discipline them in an appropriate manner because they need to learn how to be disciplined by other authoritative figures in their life. And I don't think that allowing them to have their way around is necessarily a good option.

The fun babysitter identity leans on the idea that the work is fun. It relies on the idea that there is a way to make it less like work and more like fun. This argument leads to the conclusion that the work is less real. Fun work is not work, it is something else, and if it is work, it is easy work. While there is nothing wrong in work being fun, it does delegitimize how others perceive the work as real.

Previous research has also demonstrated this idea. Bryman's (1999) research showed that Disney employees are trained to portray a sense of joy and happiness while on the job. This is

often translated into the idea that the Disney employees are not actually working, but actually are having fun. They appear to have chosen their careers based off a personal pleasure, making it seem like they are not doing real work.

A similar notion is attached to babysitters. Of course, some of the babysitters told me about how much fun they had with the children. Jennifer said, "I have fun with the kids. I enjoy it so it feels natural." Another babysitter, Anna, said she thinks of babysitting "as a source of stress relief, which might sound a little contradictory, but just as a way to get away from typical work and just kind of spend some time with kids." Jessica added:

> I enjoyed the kids that I babysat and we did fun stuff. It's just like easy. They want to
> color or paint and that's fine because it's not a disaster. And sometimes that can be kind
> of relaxing cause you're not doing your own stuff.

Nonetheless, a babysitter enjoying their work does not make it any less real. Another common misconception is that babysitting is easy. This misconception also works to delegitimize babysitting as actual work. However, some of the babysitters did perceive the work as relatively easy. Camille, who now is a certified public accountant, said babysitting "was something easy that I could kind of go do instead f a regular 8-5 job." Evelyn said, "I feel like it's a really easy job. I mean you just get to hang out with kids." Several other babysitters expressed similar sentiments, like Gracie, who said, babysitting is "not rocket science." While all of these statements support the idea that babysitting is easy, they do not negate the legitimacy of the work.

Other babysitters offered a different take. It is clear that some of them wanted to let it be known that babysitting is not simply a fun, easy job, but one that requires a considerable amount of effort and emotional involvement. A person can only continue this effort for so long before

they are worn out. Gina shared about the times she would struggle to get the baby to eat. She said, "I literally cried. Like the mom would come in there and I would be crying." She added that the mom offered to help her only one time, which she found odd. Gina was exhausted from her job. She felt that the parents should have helped more, especially during the times it was clear she was struggling. But, at the end of the day, it was Gina's job. She said, "I had to have a job. But looking back that's ridiculous. She took advantage of me, knowing I had to have a job."

Molly brought up an interesting point regarding burnout. She said, "I think you have to have a certain personality to work as a babysitter. You kind of go into it with different expectations as you would for like another job. I would think it is more of a natural thing. I think you can lose it, though. You can get burnt out on it. So you might have to do other things to kind of maintain those feelings." We apply for jobs we feel are a good match with our personalities. A caring, fun person may pursue jobs that match them, like babysitting. That does not mean that the job will always be easy.

Towards the end of Alexa's babysitting career, she began to feel this. She said, "I was emotionally exhausted and I was really just tired of faking it." Alexa felt a growing distance between herself and the parents, which probably contributed to some of the burn out. She had expressed concerns about the job, but felt like they were unheard. To Alexa, an ideal family to work for would be "someone I can talk to and be honest and have my feelings heard. I don't want to feel like I'm walking around on eggshells."

Throughout the interviews, it was obvious that each babysitter had contemplated the legitimacy of their work. Some downplayed the authenticity, like Gracie, who stated that she basically got paid to sit at the pool all day. Others, like Alexa and Gina, did the opposite,

claiming babysitting to be tiring, hard, and draining. But one of the most interesting comments made during the interviews came from Ruth:

> Yeah, I didn't have to dress up for the job and I didn't have to pay taxes on it. I could sometimes bring my boyfriend. Or my homework. Or stuff like that. But it was so exhausting at the same time.

Ruth's comments perfectly sum up the idea that babysitting is complex. It can be fun and easy, but it can also be exhausting. No matter how it is being perceived, it is still a real job. It still requires an investment of time and energy. Even while Gracie is sitting by the pool, she is still in charge of keeping track of the children. Even if Jennifer enjoys playing with the kids, she is still in a position of authority. Even if they are the fun babysitter, they are still the babysitter nonetheless.

It is interesting to consider that maybe babysitters, in taking on the ideal babysitter identity, are expected to not perceive the work as real. The fun babysitter identity may be rooted in the idea that the work is not work, but is fun. While the babysitters may internally recognize that what they are doing is real and tough work, they may perform as if it is not. Thus, keeping up with the idea that babysitters all consider the work fun and natural. This identity, while not inherently negative, can deconstruct the work as legitimate and real.

The next section discusses how babysitters understand the gendered identity of their work and how that functions to define their work.

Gendered Identity

Gender is another identity facet that is closely connected with how a babysitter understands her work as real or less real. Throughout the interviews, gender played a large role

in a babysitter's identity. Sometimes it was implicit, like when the babysitters described traits of an ideal babysitter. Some of the most popular traits mentioned were loving, caring, and kind, which are typically associated with being feminine. Anna said, "Being caring and kind is obviously very, very important." Additionally, a good babysitter is someone that is happy to do the work. Camille, described a good babysitter as "someone that is happy and chipper coming through the door; someone that is happy to be there and will really care about the kids."

Other common traits mentioned were honesty, trustworthiness, and patience. While these traits were often mentioned, it did seem that they were of less importance than being loving, caring, kind, and happy. For example, here is what Gina said when was asked what traits she would look for in a babysitter:

If I was going to hire a babysitter, I would look for somebody that is loving, sweet, personable, easy to talk to, nurturing. Somebody that when I tell them something they don't take it to heart and they can fix it and not get their emotions involved. Um, definitely respectful, trustworthy, honest, yep.

Another trait mentioned several times is a love for children, specifically. So not only is the babysitter a loving person in general, she also is drawn to loving on children. Lola said a good babysitter "loves kids regardless if they're in a bad mood." In Nicole's interview, she said a good babysitter should have "a passion for kids to an extent because obviously if you hate kids, that wouldn't necessarily be a great gig." Molly offered another example of this trait:

I'm a very like helping other people kind of centered person, so I think that's kind of why I do it. I also just like to be around kids and working with kids and just knowing that you can someway be a mentor or make an impact that could be positive.

Molly sees herself, in general, as a "very helping other people kind of centered person." This identity is grounded in caregiving. Not only does she like to help people, she specifically likes to help kids, which is a characteristic commonly associated with being a woman.

It is interesting to consider how these traits work to shape a babysitter's identity. A trait, like being caring, is turned into a skill, a qualification that babysitters must have to do the job. Also, it was mentioned multiple times that some of the lesser-valued traits, like responsibility and patience, could be learned on the job. Contrarily, most of the babysitters suggested that the important traits, the ones that are rooted in one's ability to love another, come naturally. When asked about the traits coming naturally or being learned, Lucy said, "Well, I just think you can't teach someone how to be nurturing and caring and loving and fun-- like you can't just teach that."

These descriptions raise the question of who gets these traits naturally. Often, the babysitters explicitly tied the traits to women. It leans on the idea that women are naturally loving and caring. This belief has led to the expectation for women to be the dominant caregivers. Throughout the interviews, several babysitters expressed their thoughts on this expectation for women:

It's just our natural instinct. We have a natural motherly, nurturing—yeah. I think it's just more fitting for a woman to take that role than a man. Not saying that a man can't do it—but I don't know—I think it's just more natural for a woman to take care of a child. (Gracie)

We're built to be mothers—I think our personalities—this is not true of every woman—I think we tend to be more caring. More compassionate. Not that men aren't, but they're a little more rough and tough. Kids don't necessarily look for that when they're young. (Anna)

I think women are more caring. That may not be all the time, but they are just more sensitive to situations and honestly I think that's—the woman has been the caretaker for like all times, so I think it's just rolled over from that. (Camille)

I guess it's just the stigma that's been on women for so long. We are the ones that take care of the children. I don't know. Women have so many more emotions than men. It's in our DNA to be more emotional and connected. I think men just don't have that. (Lola)

In these quotes, several of the babysitters noted that the caregiving comes naturally to women. Lola went so far as to say it is in a woman's DNA. To these babysitters, women are born with the ability to offer care and love to others. While this may be true, it is also true that young girls are raised to fulfill the role, too. Evelyn said, "It is indoctrinated in women to be mothers. We had baby dolls as kids and cared for things." Evelyn made an interesting point. Little girls are given baby dolls with which to play. As they get older, babysitting simply becomes an extension of baby dolls.

Playing with baby dolls is not considered real work. It is fun. This could also translate into how others perceive babysitting as real work. It might still be considered just play. Little girls play mom with baby dolls. Babysitters play mom with children. This argument works to delegitimize babysitting as real work. It devalues the work women are doing in caring for the lives of others.

Women are taught from a young age to be caregivers. This indoctrination leads to many babysitters beginning their career at young ages. Jessica exemplified up this idea, "I did it a lot when I was younger; that was just what younger girls did. They babysat." Jessica's quote

suggests that babysitting is constructed as a natural, perhaps maternal, activity for young girls to do. Nicole, a 24-year-old woman, stated, "The first time I worked in childcare, I was a child myself. I was 10 years old and I kept a 3 year old and a 1 year old and I changed my first diaper." While Nicole had the earliest start age of the women interviewed, the average age was not much higher than 10 years old. On average, the babysitters started working at around 13 years old.

Gracie reflected on how young she was when she started babysitting: "Looking back now, I cannot imagine letting a seventh grader come over to my house and babysitting my four boys. But maybe it'll be different when I have kids." As Gracie reflected on her experience, she noted the shock she feels about how must responsibility she took on as a seventh grader. It is questionable that a 13-year-old would be left alone to care for four boys. This seems to point to the idea that babysitting is not real work. There are not many other jobs a 13-year-old girl would be trusted to do.

Another reason for the young start age may be that many participants started babysitting because they were the oldest child in their family and were responsible for watching younger siblings. Several of the babysitters mentioned keeping their siblings while their mom was away and during the summer. They were used to assuming the title and this experience probably bled into their idea of babysitting.

One babysitter, Lucy, commented on babysitting her younger siblings: "With my sister and brother, I grew up with them so I just understood like what they needed and when and they didn't have to ask." Lucy's identity as a babysitter was shaped through her early experiences of caring for her younger siblings. This, again, likely shaped how Lucy constructed her work. Was she working when she cared for her younger siblings? It may have felt like work, but she

probably did not think of it as a job. This feeling may have carried into her other babysitting jobs.

Some of the women commented that starting at a young age was simply due to them liking the work. Camille, said:

> I started when I was young. It was a great easy job, just to start out. I started doing it with like my younger cousins and it was just like an easy way to make money. Especially like before I could drive, my mom would just drop me off and come get me. It was easy and something I liked to do.

Another babysitter said, "They asked and I loved kids and so I was like yes, this is a source of money and I enjoy so it was just kind of a natural falling into that."

Regardless of what leads women to start babysitting at such a young age, it does affect how they view themselves as babysitters and how they perceive the realness of the work. Ruth said, "I think that it is perceived—like if you can babysit when you're 14 what's the difference from that and nannying when you're 27?" In other words, the job does not greatly evolve as the babysitter ages. It requires the same duties. And if we do not think a 14-year-old is doing real work, why should we think a 27-year-old is doing real work? This could be a question babysitters face from within and one that is externally asked, too.

A babysitter's identity is deeply connected to them being a woman. This identity is rooted in hegemonic ideals of gender-appropriate roles. The woman is the caregiver. The caregiver is a woman. At the core, this identity is grounded in one's perception of their own gender role. But it is also shaped by making comparisons with what one is not. Several babysitters did this when they discussed men as caregivers. Lucy stated:

I feel like they are not as nurturing as the girls that I know, but sure, if a guy was

nurturing to the extent that I think they are capable then, yeah, um, like I would take that

more into consideration for sure. Just because I feel like boys are a little more like—I

don't want to say like aggressive, but just like more heavy handed and strict and want

things their way.

Here, Lucy is telling us what men are like, but also what women are not like: aggressive, heavy

handed, strict. Another example comes from Lola:

Even like the dad has struggled with taking care of the kids at the same time. I don't

know why I think men just don't have that. It's also probably like a stigma thing. Like a

man said he's a babysitter, you would probably be like okay that's weird—especially if

he's babysitting a baby girl. That'd be weird. If I were to have a kid, I don't want a man

to take care of my little girl.

In this comment, Lola said men just do not have the natural ability women have to care for a

child. She said she would not hire a man to take care of her little girl, which could demonstrate

that she recognizes the intimacy of the job. This recognition could show that Lola has

constructed her work as more real. She understands the duties that require this intimacy and feels

it is her duty to perform those, not a man's.

Another way babysitters demonstrate a gendered identity was when they compared

themselves to being a mom. It seems that a lot of babysitters identify as a mother. For example,

Charlotte said, "I mean I literally am their second mom." Gina shared similar feelings:

I pretty much just told people I was the kids' parents because their parents were never

home. I would explain it like I was doing everything for the kids. I felt like I was a mom.

I felt like I was a parent. I was with them for so long.

It is not surprising that babysitters align themselves with mothers. Essentially, they are hired to be the stand in mother. While that is probably rarely expressed explicitly, over time, babysitters adopt this identity. One babysitter shared about this adoption:

> I feel like I became more of like—like in the beginning I was a babysitter, like I was just there to watch them, but towards the end I felt more like a parent, like I was able to tell them what to do and what not to do.

Babysitters identifying as a mother can deconstructs the job as real. A mother is not doing work when she is caring for her children. She is simply caring for her children. As a babysitter begins to feel like a mother, it can take away the realness of the work. It is not a job anymore, but an act of love. It is not a professional experience, but one grounded in intimacy and caring for another. While there is nothing inherently wrong with a babysitter taking on this identity, it could delegitimize their employment.

On the other side, this identity could make the work feel more real. Mothers do not get time off. They do not get to take a break from the children. They have to sacrifice their needs for the children. A babysitter may feel the same way, which could increase the amount of work they feel they are doing. If they are committed to this identity, they may feel like their work never truly ends.

In sum, it is apparent that a babysitter's identity is closely linked to their identity as a woman as constructed by society. It could almost be suggested that just by identifying as a woman, one is seen as fit to care for children. She simply needs to be loving and caring of others. The ability to love and care for a child does not compare to the need for a degree in accounting to be a Certified Public Accountant. These are natural traits that women are just expected to have or

to learn at an early age. This, in itself, constructs the work as less real. It could lead babysitters to say, "Well, I'm naturally a caregiver, so babysitting is not work; it is just who I am."

More broadly, women's work is often devalued. Babysitting is no different. It is a job left for women to handle. It is a job that girls are trusted to do from a young age. It is almost constructed as a woman's obligation, not a job. It is like an internship into motherhood, which is not considered work. These beliefs come from inside and outside. They lead to low wages, blurred professional lines, and self-sacrifice. And they are used to take advantage of babysitters continuously and construct the work as less real.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This study explored how babysitters construct their work as being real or not real. The results showed that many babysitters construct their work in both ways. In some areas, they construct the work as real. When they would discuss their work duties, like making lunch, diaper changes, and discipline, it was often constructed as real work. On the other hand, they often talked about babysitting as being not real work. This was illustrated when they discussed their relationships with the families, the ease of their job, and the lack of proper job features. There appeared to be a back-and-forth tension between the work being real or not. It was not like each babysitter had decided one way or the other, but more like a continuous construction and reconstruction of babysitting.

The research did support Clair's (1996) research on this dominant discourse of work. The babysitters had discursively constructed their work as either real or not real. Most often, it leaned on the side of being not real. Several of the babysitters mentioned the work as being under-the-table, easy money, which fits with the discourse of not real work. A more explicit example came from Ruth when she stated that babysitting is not considered a real job.

Another striking statement came from Jennifer, who stated:

A lot of times people are like why are you babysitting that's not applicable. That's not a real job. That's not an adult job, why are you doing that? It's kind of insulting.

Here, Jennifer is demonstrating the marginalization that Clair (1996) discussed. Jennifer likely feels the depression that is induced from holding a marginalized job. However, she also does what Clair (1996) predicted some do. She fought back against the idea that babysitting is not real work. Throughout her interview, Jennifer would mention the hard work that babysitting requires. She said that it is more than just sitting on your phone and watching the children. In making these statements, Jennifer was defending her work.

Jennifer was not the only one to defend the work. Other babysitters mentioned how hard the work can be. This fits with what Lucas (2011) found in her study of blue-collar workers. The blue-collar workers knew their place in the hierarchy of real work. However, they challenged their position by reconstructing what real work actually is. Several of the babysitters did the same thing. One of the best examples of this came from Ruth, when asked what advice she would give to someone starting out in babysitting:

What you're doing is work. It's not easier. In some ways it's more challenging because other people aren't cleaning poop at their jobs. Or getting puked on. Know that your work has value.

Here, the babysitter is not only defending babysitting as real work, but also reconstructing it as being more challenging than other jobs.

One interesting addition to the research is the fact that love seems to negate real work. In other words, the presence of love turns the job-related duties into acts of love, not just job duties. A babysitter is not just changing the diaper, but she is doing it with love, which means it is not

work. This relates back to Dill, Price-Glynn, and Rakovski's (2016) idea that care work is devalued due to the belief that care is done out of love, not for money. Many of the babysitters noted that they did love the families they worked for, but often that love would mean sacrificing their schedules and plans to meet the needs of their employers. For example, Alexa discussed how she felt the family she worked for took advantage of her love of the children by asking her to attend events and go on outings with them without being paid. While Alexa felt like she was working, it was not considered work to her employer. Thus, Alexa likely had faced confusion on how to construct her work as real or not real.

This idea also fits with Yu's (2018) concept of a prison of love. This prison of love was seen in the babysitters when they would do things like stay past their shift and gossip with the mom. While some noted that they wanted to participate in these after-work chats, others said they only did it out of obligation to the relationship. They were not being compensated for their time, yet it still felt like work.

Another example of this prison of love came from Gina's experience:

I think that I would say that I loved how close I was with the mom, but I think that sometimes got in the way of me sticking up for myself in the sense of like paying me. I would let stuff slide because I was close to her. Then coming home late. Just like not telling me stuff. It would piss me off. It was always last minute, but I felt like I had to do it because I was close with the mom. I might would already have stuff planned but I would go to work anyways because I knew she needed the help, but like, it was kind of bad towards the end. She wasn't bad to me, but just in the sense of like she knew I would it and so she would ask.

Gina was in a prison of love. Throughout her interview, it was obvious that this love that she felt

greatly influenced how she constructed her work. At times, Gina would mention the long hours and the tears and the exhaustion she felt from the job. She would construct it as real work, based on the amount of emotional labor she was putting in. At other times, Gina would discuss how much she loved the children and felt more like a family member doing acts of love, not work.

Love is the element that most greatly influenced the babysitters' constructions of the work. Its presence made the duties feel like acts of love. It made the employers feel more like family and less like bosses. It made the workspace feel like a secondary home. Love made the crazy hours, poor pay, and emotional drainage worth it for the babysitters. This matches what Degiuli (2007) found in her research on eldercare workers: "They consider performing this love work as a redeeming aspect of the job, what makes it worthy and irreplaceable" (p. 198).

The research findings also demonstrate that identity does play a factor in how babysitters construct their work. It was clear that many of the babysitters leaned into the fun babysitter identity, which is grounded in the idea that the work is not work, but is simply fun. The findings also support Wu's (2016) research regarding childcare worker identities. Wu (2016) illustrated two common identities of childcare workers: one that values the skills and labor the job requires, and one that perceives the work as temporary. My research found that many of the babysitters leaned into the second identity. This was demonstrated through repeated comments about what career they were pursuing.

One of the key elements of this temporary identity that Wu (2016) described is shame. This shame is rooted in the idea that childcare is not real work. Lola demonstrated her experience with this shame: "Honestly, I was embarrassed because I am a recent college graduate. And this is like my full time gig at the moment." To Lola, babysitting was not what a recent college graduate should be doing. Thus, she felt embarrassed by her work. However, it is important to

note that throughout her interview, Lola repeatedly described how much joy she found in her job. But joy, much like love, works to deconstruct the work as being real.

The findings also supported McGillivray's (2008) research on childcare worker identities being built upon a feminized discourse. This feminized discourse suggests the ideal childcare worker is much like a mother. The babysitters repeatedly mentioned how they felt like a mom to the children they kept. When asked about what duties she was expected to perform, Gina said, "to just be like the mom." Other babysitters made similar comments. While this may seem harmless, it could further delegitimize the work being done. A mom is not working when she cares for her children. She is simply caring for her children.

As for emotional labor, the research found that babysitting is a job that requires a significant amount of emotional labor. An interesting example of emotional labor came from Ruth. She said:

> Obviously like I need to be really smiley for this baby. I felt like I had to come in like I'm so excited to be here. Like there's no place I'd rather be than here. Which is kind of ridiculous to say because people don't feel that way about other jobs. Ya know? Yeah like I could never complain because it's like an easy job. I had to be really positive and upbeat.

Other babysitters shared similar sentiments on feeling expected to be happy and cheerful on the job. As Ruth said, this is not an expectation for other jobs, but it is for babysitting. This was likely a contrast recognized by many babysitters. Further, it likely influenced how the work was constructed as less real.

For many of the babysitters, the emotional labor was rooted in genuine feelings of love for the families they cared for. However, it was clear that the emotional labor and the love would

often blur and create confusion for the babysitters. Not only would it create confusion, it would sometimes create feelings of frustration. Alexa illustrated this when she said, "Towards the end, I was emotionally exhausted and I was really just tired of faking it." Alexa pointed out that she did really love the children she kept, but she felt she had to fake aspects of that love in order to keep her job.

This research adds to our understanding how workers in a devalued field structurally and discursively construct their work as real or not. This research examined a group that may often be overlooked. Babysitters tend to be younger, sporadically employed, and temporary. They are not solving the climate crisis or saving lives in medical emergencies. Yet, they can play a significant role in family's life.

Their work is seen as being too fun to be real work, yet they are caring for another human's life. As Ruth said, "you're doing all this labor, but you don't have a lot of authority. But you do. In like, you're taking care of a life. Like if you were by yourself, you would not survive, right? But at the same time, you're not my child." There is an obvious tension in a babysitter's work. On one side, they are there to entertain and care for the children. On the other, babysitters are trusted with keeping children alive.

So often, babysitting is written off as not real work. Even within childcare, babysitters are at the bottom with nannies and childcare professionals constructed as higher status even though their duties are often the same. Babysitters deserve more respect. They deserve to be treated as professionals.

For many women, babysitting is the first introduction to working a job. Young babysitters likely partake in anticipatory socialization, which is how we learn about the meaning of work. Thus, babysitting can set the stage for how a woman understands work, in general.

Future research could examine how babysitting functions as anticipatory socialization and what it is teaching women about the workforce. This future research could seek to answer the question, *what is babysitting teaching young women about work?*

Even after completing this research, and feeling like an avid defender of babysitting as real work, I still struggle with constructing my own experiences with the job. Recently, I was working on my resume for a job application. I did not include my experiences in childcare, because I thought it would not be valuable. However, now, I regret not adding it in. Babysitting taught me how to communicate with people. It taught me how to handle conflicts, how to schedule feedings, how to navigate work within someone else's life. It might have looked different than my friend's internship at the law firm, but it was still real work. Not only was it real, it was valuable work.

Practical Application

This research demonstrated a few areas for practical applications. First, babysitters need to decide for themselves what is important for them in terms of job features. For some babysitters in the study, they could have benefited from the existence of a signed and written contract that outlined duties and expectations. As Ruth mentioned, it does seem strange for a babysitter to request a contract. It does not mesh well with the idea of having a familial-style relationship between employer-employee. But, as Lola demonstrated, it can actually benefit and enhance a comfortable relationship. Lola stated that her contract made her feel safe enough to relax into a friendship-style relationship with her employer. Going forward, I would strongly suggest babysitters consider adding a contract to their employments.

Along with that, babysitters should sit down and have a conversation with their employers about expectations regarding their relationship. Sitting down with their employer

could allow a babysitter to express concerns about what is work (taking care of the children during scheduled hours) and what is not work (attending family functions). A babysitter can use this conversation to establish boundaries, confirm the duties expected of her, and clarify any areas of misunderstanding. The conversation could clarify the babysitter's expectations as well as the family's expectations.

The next practical application applies to both the babysitter and families seeking babysitters. I suggest both parties should consider taking advantage of websites like Care.com. Care.com has worked to make caregiving more professional and legitimate. They offer resources like background checks, payment processing, and contract negotiation. By using these resources, a babysitter can work to legitimize her job and protect herself at work. Families can take advantage of this site and clearly define what they expect from a babysitter, which ultimately serves both parties well.

Lastly, babysitters need to recognize the role love plays in their work. Gina recognized that the love she had for the children she worked with was actually what hindered her in the job. The family Gina worked for knew Gina loved the children and would not leave, which allowed them to take advantage of her. Of course, it is hard to not feel love as a babysitter. And it is not necessarily a bad part of the job. However, it is something babysitters should think about as they are working. There has to be some form of boundary between love and work. Easier said than done, of course.

Limitations

This research is not without its own limitations. First, many of the participants of this study came from my personal network. In some cases, I had previous knowledge of their experiences as a babysitter. While this could have allowed for the participant to feel more

comfortable sharing intimate details of their experiences, it could have also skewed the data. If I were to repeat the study, I would want to go outside of my personal network to find participants.

Another limitation is the lack of variety in the demographics. I had already set specific criteria for my participants. They were to be female, 19 years of age or older, and have worked as a babysitter within the past two years. While these standards were set for specific reasons, they could have limited the research. One of the demographic limitations came from the area that the babysitters live. All of the babysitters interviewed are located in the southern part of the United States. This could have played a large role in how the babysitters discussed their work.

This research was limited by the lack of variety in work experience. Only one of the babysitters had a contract. Only four babysitters had used Care.com to find work. Most of the babysitters would classify their work as being informal. This lack of variety could impact how the data that was collected. With less diversity, there is less room to make broad statements regarding the data. If I were to do this study again, I would want to interview more participants to increase the chance of finding more variety of work experience.

Lastly, this research could have been influenced by my personal experience as a babysitter. My personal experience is what guided me into this research. There were times that I felt I was guided too much by my own experiences. Ultimately, I believe my experiences were a valuable addition to my research, but it also could be seen as a research limitation.

Going forward, additional research could be done to examine how families construct babysitting as real/not real work. This could illustrate the external influence the families have on a babysitter constructing her work.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

In conclusion, these research findings illustrate important ways that babysitters discursively construct their work as being more or less real. The findings demonstrate that babysitters lean on their internal perception of the work and external influences, like interactions with their employer, to construct their understanding of the work. Many of the babysitters seemed to construct the work as less real, which aligns with what previous research has found to be the common assessment of care work. However, there were a few of babysitters that challenged this assessment and argued that their work is just as real as any other job. These findings are important because they give insight on how babysitters use their personal experiences to legitimize or de-legitimize the work broadly.

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Appendix A

Original Interview Protocol

This interview will be used for all participants, interviewed both in person and by telephone.

We are studying childcare workers, specifically babysitters. We will be asking you questions about your time working as a babysitter. This interview will take about 45-60 minutes. We will be recording the audio of this interview, which will then be transcribed into a written document. All names and identifying information will be changed in the transcripts in order to protect the confidentiality of the participants. You may ask us to skip or rephrase questions. If at any time you want to end your participation in the interview, you can let us know and we will stop. I will begin the interview now.

Introduction
- Tell me about how you started working in childcare.
- How long have you been babysitting?
- What is your favorite part of the work?
- How many families have you worked for?
    - Have you noticed a "type" in the families that you have worked for?
- Tell me about your typical day at work.
    - What's the best part of your day?
    - What's the worst?

Questions about relationship with family
- Tell me about how your relationship with the family has changed from when you first started to now.
    - Do you like the family you work for?
    - Do you feel like your relationship is more professional or like you're part of the family? Has this changed over time?
    - Do you feel closer to them than when you started working for them?
- How has your relationship with the children changed over your time working with them?
    - What do the children call you?
        - Where did that name come from? How do you feel about it?
    - How have the children expressed their like or dislike for you?
    - Do you feel attached to the children?
- Say one of the children called you 'Mom', what would your reaction be? What if either of the parents were present when the child called you this?
- If one of the children turned to you when they were upset, instead of the parent present, what would be your reaction?
- What happens when a child needs to be punished?
    - Are you expected to take action or just report the incident to the parents so they can do the punishing?
    - How were the expectations regarding punishment discussed?
- How involved are you in the family's life, outside of your time keeping the children?
    - Do you get invited to birthday parties?
    - Does the mom gossip to you?
    - Have you interacted with extended family members?

- Did you feel comfortable talking openly with the family?
    - Were there topics that felt off-limits?
    - When you had issues at work, who would you go to?
    - When the family had issues to bring up with you, which parent would usually take the lead?
    - Did you feel like you could talk about your life outside of work to the family?
- Tell me about trust. A lot of families have nanny cams and expect hourly updates. How do you feel about the level of trust between yourself and the parents?
    - Has this trust been verbally expressed? Like, have the parents told you how much they trust you?
    - Is it something you see in your interactions more so?
- What forms of communication do you engage in with the family?
    - Since you have stopped working with the family, do you try to maintain contact with them?
    - Are you friends with any of the family members on social media (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc.)?
- Are there any rules regarding what you post on social media about the children?
    - How did you discuss this topic with the family?
    - Are you more likely to post a Snapchat story venting about the mess the children made or post a photo on Instagram expressing your love for them?

Questions about role
- What does it mean for you to be a babysitter?
    - Do you feel you take on other titles than babysitter in the context of your work in childcare?
- Do you feel like you have to control your emotions at work?
- How do you explain your work to your family and friends?
    - Do they support you?
    - Have you ever felt like you were in a position where you had to defend your role?
- How do you describe your role on your resume?
- Do you have friends that work in childcare, too?
    - Do you talk about your experiences? What do you share with each other?
- When you've had a frustrating day at work, who do you talk to? What information do you share?
- Say you've had a bad day at school or you're fighting with a friend. Is it hard to go to work when you're having a rough day?
    - Do you feel like you have to push your life to the side when you're at work?

Questions about ideals
- What would the ideal family to babysit for be like?
    - How many children?
- What would be the ideal relationship between you and the family look like?
    - Would it be more or less professional? Or more or less familial?
- What would be your ideal, but realistic wage be?
    - How does that compare to your actual wage?
- What characteristics do you think a good babysitter should possess?

- o Do you think these characteristics come naturally or are learned?
- o What personality traits are important for babysitters?
  - ▪ A lot of times people think of babysitters as being happy and caring, are those essential?
- o Why do you think women hold most babysitting positions?

Questions about the future
- When, and if, you stop working in childcare, will you miss the children?
- How does babysitting compare to your future career plans?
- Have you been employed in other fields? How does that job compare to babysitting?
- How do you think your time in babysitting will affect your future role as (POTENTIALLY) a mother?
  - o If you have children in the future, how will your time as a babysitter affect how you hire and interact with childcare workers?

Closing
- Is there anything else you think I should know about your time as a babysitter?
- What advice would you give to someone starting out as a babysitter?
- How old are you?
- Do you have a preferred pseudonym?

Revised Interview Protocol

This interview will be used for all participants, interviewed both in person and by telephone.

We are studying childcare workers, specifically babysitters. We will be asking you questions about your time working as a babysitter. This interview will take about 45-60 minutes. We will be recording the audio of this interview, which will then be transcribed into a written document. All names and identifying information will be changed in the transcripts in order to protect the confidentiality of the participants. You may ask us to skip or rephrase questions. If at any time you want to end your participation in the interview, you can let us know and we will stop. I will begin the interview now.

Introduction
- Tell me about how you started working in childcare.
- How long have you been babysitting?
- What is your favorite part of the work?
- Tell me about your typical day at work.
  - What's the best part of your day?
  - What's the worst?
- Babysitting requires a lot of work. Some of it, like feedings, are biological needs. Other duties are more like entertainment.
  - What are some of your duties that are biological needs?
  - What are some of your duties that are outside of those needs?

Questions about relationship with family
- Did you go through an interview process with the family?
  - What expectations were discussed?
  - Did it feel more formal or casual?
  - Were any rules established regarding what you could do or couldn't do with the children?
  - How were wages discussed?
- Tell me about how your relationship with the family has changed from when you first started to now.
  - Do you like the family you work for?
  - Do you feel like your relationship is more professional or like you're part of the family? Has this changed over time?
  - Do you feel closer to them than when you started working for them?
- How has your relationship with the children changed over your time working with them?
  - What do the children call you?
    - Where did that name come from? How do you feel about it?
  - How have the children expressed their like or dislike for you?
  - Do you feel attached to the children?
- Say one of the children called you 'Mom', what would your reaction be? What if either of the parents were present when the child called you this?

- If one of the children turned to you when they were upset, instead of the parent present, what would be your reaction?
- What happens when a child needs to be punished?
    - Are you expected to take action or just report the incident to the parents so they can do the punishing?
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- How involved are you in the family's life, outside of your time keeping the children?
    - Do you get invited to birthday parties?
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    - When you had issues at work, who would you go to?
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- What forms of communication do you engage in with the family?
    - Since you have stopped working with the family, do you try to maintain contact with them?
    - Are you friends with any of the family members on social media (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc.)?

Questions about role
- What does it mean for you to be a babysitter?
- If you were listing yourself on a website, like Care.com, how would you describe yourself in the context of babysitting?
- Do you feel you take on other titles than babysitter in the context of your work in childcare?
- How do you explain your work to your family and friends?
    - Do they support you?
    - Have you ever felt like you were in a position where you had to defend your role?
- How long do you foresee yourself working in childcare?

Questions about emotions
- Do you feel like you have to control or hide your emotions at work?
    - Anger?
    - Frustration?
    - Sadness?
    - If yes, then why do you think those need to be hidden?
- What emotions are appropriate to be displayed?

- o How are those emotions displayed?
- o For example, if happiness is an appropriate emotion, how is that displayed? Smiling?
- What's your general feeling as you head into work and how does that change throughout your shift?
  - o When you get off work, how do you feel?
- When you've had a frustrating day at work, who do you talk to? What information do you share?
- Say you've had a bad day at school or you're fighting with a friend. Is it hard to go to work when you're having a rough day?
  - o Do you feel like you have to push your life to the side when you're at work?

Questions about ideals
- What would be the ideal relationship between you and the family look like?
  - o Would it be more or less professional? Or more or less familial?
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  - o Do you think these characteristics come naturally or are learned?
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  - o Why do you think women hold most babysitting positions?

Questions about the future
- How does babysitting compare to your future career plans?
- How do you think your time in babysitting will affect your future role as (POTENTIALLY) a mother?
  - o If you have children in the future, how will your time as a babysitter affect how you hire and interact with childcare workers?

Closing
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- How old are you?
- Do you have a preferred pseudonym?