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Watching as an ordinary affect: Care and mothers' preemption of injury in child supervision

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Abstract

As unintentional injuries continue to be the leading cause of hospitalization and death for toddlers between the ages of 1 and 4, the Centers for Disease Control has argued that child supervision is a key factor in reducing these injuries and fatalities. This article focuses on the affective relationships in the concept of supervision and practice of watching as an injury prevention method. Three parts frame our argument. First, we describe how watching is an ordinary affect. Second, as part of the ethos of caring, watching is embedded in a temporal frame of anticipation and gives rise to an affectsphere of watching and to a parents' subjectivity as 'good' or 'bad' supervisors. Third, these affective relationships generate seemingly contradictory outcomes wherein children are expected to gain independence and experience injury. The affective qualities of watching provide a critique of the individualizing forces of supervision and an analysis of subjectivities generated by gender and class.

Keywords

unintentional injury; affect; supervision; childcare; mothers

Introduction

As unintentional injuries continue to be the leading cause of hospitalization and death for toddlers between the ages of 1 and 4, the Centers for Disease Control in the United States has argued that child supervision is a key factor in reducing injuries and fatalities (CDC, 2002, 2006). Yet, according to injury prevention scholars, this key factor is not easily defined or measured (Schwebel and Kendrick, 2009; Morrongiello and Schell, 2010). While there is concern for the role of context and variability in types of supervision, a focus on definitions and measurements leads to an individualizing set of practices, and an assumed direct relationship between what the supervisor should have done and the injury event. Rather than focusing on what should be known about potential risks for injury or how supervision might be performed, we argue that questions of prevention must focus on

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affective relationships and subjective understandings of everyday life. Given the uncertainty of unintentional injury, we ask, in what ways is supervision the 'most protective factor' in preventing childhood injuries also over-determined as an individual intervention, and less understood as a relational practice? Individualizing supervision simultaneously overlooks the larger social implications mediated by socioeconomic status (Kusserow, 2004), access to safe environments, increased gendered expectations (Hays, 1996) and the meaning of raising independent adults. Considering supervision as integral to the affective relationships between caretaker and child facilitates an examination of a sociality where economics and gender matter in defining who is and is not a 'good' supervisor.

In examining the role of maternal supervision as a method of unintentional injury prevention, my research team and I spent 18 months interviewing and observing mothers as they supervised their toddlers at play. Some mothers let their children run and play with friends or siblings while they sat nearby on a blanket. Others played with the children, and some paid relatively no attention at all. Even when a mother would engage in injury prevention practices, the playtime activities were not so easily described. For instance, we watched a little boy explore each facet of the playground equipment: he crossed wobbly play bridges, simulated driving by grabbing hold of the steering wheels on the play structure's side walls, and used the stairs to climb up and the slide to go down. Throughout his adventure his mother was right behind him, following him each step of the way. Then, her cell phone rang and she answered. For the next 15 min she carried on an animated conversation, still no more than a foot behind her son while caressing another baby that was snuggly strapped into the baby pack in front of her. The mother was within arm's reach if anything were to happen. But was she *supervising* her son?

Given the importance of supervision as a concept and practice in reducing injury and death, what are we to make of the above scenario? Talk of 'super- vision' as injury prevention had little meaning to mothers in our study. For the mothers in our study 'watching' was equivalent to 'supervision' (75 per cent, 81/108), it was the word they used to describe part of their child-rearing work. We argue that watching as supervision is an affective state. The practice has the capacity to affect bodily motion, be affected and to stop movement in the anticipation of something yet unknown. The concept of affect, drawn from Spinoza (1959), often refers to a visceral capacity, beyond emotion and conscious knowing, it is a 'vital force' that moves us toward engagement in thought or action, but can also leave us suspended (Massumi, 2002; Clough, 2007; Seigworth and Gregg, 2010). Because we are always looking to notice people, behaviors, oddities and activities in our environment, watching is taken-for- granted as something that simply happens for those with sight. Yet, from a researcher watching the activities of the park patrons, parents occasionally looking or completely hovering over their child to parents pretending to watch a child, the activity of visual observation can generate affective relationships that produce subjective notions of care, safety and 'good' supervision. Attending to affect allows us to trace the pathways between what people think they should do, their feelings and expectations, their bodily practices in their daily endeavors (Hardt, 2007), and how these activities become part of the affective labor of women (Hardt, 1999).

The arguments of this article assume that the affect of watching is not only contained in its anticipation of preventing injury in the present, but also in its relationship to expectations for securing an expected future for the child. The emphasis on anticipation, as Adams *et al* (2009) argue, is a key feature of an affective state: 'anticipation is not just a reaction, but a way of actively orienting oneself temporally' (2009, p. 247). This temporal orientation is ultimately political and moral because the future is capitalized as the supervisor either having 'good supervisory skills', or presently creating a 'safe environment', despite the uncertainty of injury and the child's potential. Thus, this article examines how the affect of watching and anticipation generates a moral and emotional response of being or evoking demonstrations of a mother who cares for her child.

There are three main points to our argument. First, this article seeks to describe how watching as part of everyday life is an ordinary affect, a public practice that is in broad circulation, but is also intensely intimate (Stewart, 2007). Watching creates what Berlant (2010a) calls an affectsphere – an acknowledgement of knowing that connections exist before one even knows what the connections are or their potential impacts (p. 86). There may or may not be a narrative of injury or prevention to be told, but rather a host of social relationships that bring with them moralities, politics and physical spaces as the relationships course through the practice of watching. Watching your child demonstrates a sharing of affective relationships; that through the practice of watching you have been affected and are potentially affecting others in your encounters. Second, we argue that as part of the ethos of caring, watching creates subjective understandings of good parenting while disciplining others to engage in watching behavior or run the risk of putting the child in danger. These subjectivities are given increasing moral force through the temporal nature of visual observation that not only allows for an anticipation of present risks to the child, but also an anticipation of the child's future as an independent individual. Third, these affective relationships hold seemingly contradictory expectations, subjectivities and moralities. These contradictions emerge in the realm of 'expected injuries', which are injuries that occur despite a mother's practice of watching. The attachments to children growing up and learning run parallel to the practice of watching and preventing injury. Explanations of unintentional injury in these scenarios demonstrate the affective relations surging through the act of watching. Watching's affect can be halted or multiplied by economic access to objects and people that are thought to make environments 'safe'. Thus, watching becomes a conveyance of morality for mothers who care and protect their children from potential injury, and act on behalf of an expected future for her offspring.

The taken-for-granted quality of watching is intensified when we consider the multiple forms of its practice. Garland-Thomson (2009) argues that staring is more than merely looking, it is 'an intense visual exchange' and a meaning making process (p. 9). Moving beyond Foucault's (1977) gaze or disciplinary surveillance, Garland-Thomson emphasizes the 'generative potential' of staring to establish social relationships and create explanation through knowledge gathering. Watching as a method of child supervision is more similar to staring in that it creates social and affective relationships between parent and child through the focus on safety, care and knowledge. As a knowledge gathering process, parents can learn about their child's strengths and social capacities and use that knowledge to modify

parent/child interactions. Is this a child who is more likely to run off and take risks? Or stay close to the supervisor and play quietly nearby? Within these activities, any number of events or nothing at all can happen. Here lies the uncertainty. Nevertheless, the ethos of care demands that children must be watched.

Following the work of Stewart (2007), we argue that watching in and of itself holds potential to affect and be affected by an encounter, but not necessarily by a preconceived judgment. Watching is an affective state because it holds potential as a 'situation' (Berlant, 2010a). As part of the affectsphere, Berlant uses the idea of a 'situation' to describe 'a state of things in which something that will perhaps matter is unfolding amid the usual activity of life' (Berlant, 2010a, p. 5). It is only after the 'situation' becomes an 'event' – the child jumping on the bed (the situation) falls and cuts her lip (the event) – that watching takes on its multiple forms turning into a moral and political statement for or against a supervisor. The 'event' comes to define the strength of the relationship in the affectsphere. Because childcare is primarily the domain of women, their affective labor is embedded in the force of the affectsphere and thus comes to implicitly define the supervisory capabilities of women.

Independence and the Uncertainty of Watching

For anthropologists, child-rearing is entangled with expectations of how the child should behave in adulthood (Whiting, 1963; Quinn, 2005). This point is made most clearly in the literature on the socialization of children into independence (Ochs and Schieffelin, 1984; Miller *et al*, 2001). Child-rearing, in the United States in particular, is infused with the need to foster the independence of the child through experimenting, making mistakes and learning from those mistakes (Miller *et al*, 2001). Kusserow (2004) noted that the manner of fostering independence varies by depending on socio-economic status. Children from families with a higher income may be taught a 'soft individualism' that allows for the development of the internal self, versus a 'hard individualism' that focuses on developing resilience in dealing with hardship for children in families with lower incomes. Likewise, Ochs and Izquierdo (2009) demonstrate that the varying concepts of independence point toward an expected future for the child, which is intimately tied to parents' practices in everyday life. These practices include how parents respond to a child's questions, set expectations of daily chores, give advice on how to deal with aggressive peers, and more briefly mentioned, teach responses to an accident. For these scholars, understanding the socialization of independent individuals entails understanding the relations and expectations of everyday practices.

Supervisors gather information by making sense of and modifying their child- rearing practices in the hopes of creating a socially acceptable future. In part, they do this through what they visually see their child doing. Because unintentional injuries by definition are uncertain and unintended, the potentiality of watching should not be over-determined by a focus on individuals. Because of the desire for independence, watching remains open to a myriad of meanings, actions and relationships. Using affect theory, we can draw out the uncertainty, temporality and sociality that must be re-considered in unintentional injury prevention. This effort prevents a premature foreclosure of the problem of supervision as

merely an issue of definition and measurement, and moves us toward understanding the production of supervisors' subjectivity within this social and political entanglement.

Methods

In 2007 we began a 4-year study to examine supervision as an injury prevention method. The data reported herein were collected in Riverside County, California between October 2007 and August 2011.[1] In 2007 the region had one of the fastest growing populations in the United States and the eleventh highest population density in the state. The 2007–2011 American Community Survey estimates a total population of 303 871 in the city of Riverside. Of the 65 288 families, 16.2 per cent who had children aged 5 and under were below the poverty level (USCensus,2010).

Women who participated in the study were 18 years or older and had a toddler between the ages of 1 and 3-years old. These women self-identified as Latino or White and spoke English only, Spanish only or were bilingual. Women were contacted through multiple sites: community organizations, referral by mothers who had already participated in the study, Women, Infant and Children (WIC)[2] programs, and impromptu recruitment at a public park. As WIC is a federally funded program designed to supplement family incomes, 26 per cent of the women we spoke with fell below the poverty line. Ninety per cent of the women were married (n = 79) or living with the father of their children (n = 18).

During the first phase of the study we conducted semi-structured interviews with a total of 108 mothers and recorded fieldnotes of mothers caring for their toddlers during the interview. Interviews lasted between 1 and 3 hours and were audio recorded with the permission of the participating mother. Open-ended questions included topics that addressed hopes and expectations for mothers' children, narratives relating incidents of injury of their own or someone else's child, views of supervision, and their estimations of good and bad supervisors. Other questions included demographic information, access to health care and whether or not they thought unintentional injuries could be prevented. We did not establish any *a priori* responses against which mothers' knowledge was tested, but rather elicited their thoughts on the suggested topic. Mothers were never asked about 'watching' their children. The concept emerged as a recurring theme from the interviews. Fieldnotes included descriptions of the neighbor- hoods, activities in which the children were engaged during and after the interview, systematic observations at a local public park, and opportunistic observations of parental supervision in Riverside more generally.

Our analysis focuses primarily on responses where the mothers spoke about what supervision meant to them, how to prevent and respond to injuries, and definitions of good or bad supervisors. The resulting analysis of these responses and fieldnotes describes an emergence of relationships between the practice of watching and a host of contradictory understandings of what is expected from its practice. The simultaneous holding of multiple

[1]Human subjects approval was received by the University of California, Riverside's Human Research Review Committee #HS-06–065.

[2]WIC is a federally funded program that assists families by providing financial and social support to supplement the purchasing of nutritional food, education and help in finding health care for their children.

expectations and moralities runs through varying forms of watching that connect to context, needs, hopes and desires of mothers as supervisors.

The Ordinary in Watching

Despite the call for better definitions and measurements among injury prevention scholars, 'supervision' is not always effective in preventing injury – 69 per cent of child walker device injuries occurred when an adult was observing the child in the same room (Smith *et al*, 1997), and 59 per cent of child-pedestrians' injuries occurred when a supervisor was touching or within reach of the child (Winn *et al*, 1990). Lapse in attention, distractions and competing activities for parents have been found to influence supervision and are frequently cited as reasons for why supervision 'fails' (Landen *et al*, 2003). Even though these studies are critical of the capacity of supervision, they are also primarily concerned with the injury event, overlooking the forces that create the moment of unpredictability. In contrast, we ask how is the mundane activity of watching affective and ultimately, enrolled in political and moral attachments through its affiliation with supervision.

During our observations at the public park it was not uncommon to see parents letting children play while they carried on conversations with friends or on a cell phone. One afternoon we observed a group of five adults, two men and three women, who were sitting on a blanket near a shady tree. The three children with the group were approximately 50 feet away and playing on the equipment or running through an area designated for water play. While the children were busy playing, the parents carried on an animated conversation, occasionally looking over to where the children might be despite their view being blocked by the playground equipment. As one of my research assistants walked over to talk with one of the mothers about our project, the second couple stood up and proceeded to actively look for their own child, pointing in one direction and commenting in acknowledgement of their child's play on the equipment. Their child, however, was in the water area in the opposite direction of where the parents were looking. According to the supervision literature, we should note the proximity of the parents from their child: how often the parent looked to see what the child was doing, if the parent could see through play equipment, and if the parent could hear the child if she/he yelled? Missing are how the specific moralities, expectations and social relationships were carried through the attempt to watch the child. The research assistant's entrance into the scenario sparked a pattern of activity that oriented the second couple to the possible location of their child. In a longer conversation with the second couple we discovered that they noticed us watching them, and the last few minutes of their conversation, before the assistant's approach, was about how to manage the people who were staring at them. They in turn began to watch us, distracting them from the location of their child. In this chain of researchers watching parents, who were watching children and researchers, affective connections were made and bodies were moved into action. Watching created a moment of uncertainty, where anything could have happened; the researcher as a potential danger to the child, and then back to the child as someone who must be cared for and protected. The affective relations of watching emphasize the boundaries of an affectsphere; the patterns in activity, the generative relationships, attachments to a child's potential future and, as the empirical studies described in the previous paragraph, the uncertainty of the act of watching.

Typically, when mothers spoke of watching, their description varied in degrees of intensity, from general awareness to solely observing the child. Watching as an ordinary affect of everyday life was described as situations in which a mother, who may be attending to other needs, stops to intermittently check in on a child who is located in a separate room, or as Betty, who is 28 and has a 2-year-old son, states:

> … as a parent I think it [watching] needs to be pretty much an almost-all- the-time. Now that he's a little bit older, I'm a little more comfortable if I'm inside in the living room; for instance, folding laundry and I can see him in the backyard. I feel like that's still supervising him … I think if I were to ask someone 'can you keep an eye on him', I hope that they would do that and I would do the same for someone else's kids.

'Watching your child' serves as an act of surveillance, but it also has the potential of constraining the mother's activities. By stating that she watches her son, Betty generates a flexibility where 'all of the time' becomes watching at a distance. The equivalence of supervision and watching is open and can be affected.

In contrast to the flexibility of distance and intermittency, other mothers defined watching as needing to know exactly what the child was doing and not letting the child out of her sight. Cassandra who is 30 and has four children, one of whom is a 2-year-old boy, told us that when she goes to the restroom in her own home, all the children went with her so they would not be left alone. Likewise, Joan, who is 27 and has a 1½-year-old daughter, defines supervision as watching: 'that's the point of supervision … it's having an eye on them at all times, what they're doing, and being almost in arm's reach; if something were to happen you can be right there'.

Throughout our conversations with mothers, we heard the consistent use of 'watching', 'keeping an eye' or 'having an eye' on the child to describe supervision. The force of watching varies, with some mothers more rigidly spending time on the singular focus of 'paying attention' with no mention of other distractions or any attempt to multi-task. Mothers who held a more vigilant version of watching often waited until their child took a nap to start dinner or do the laundry. The desire to care for their children with little distraction was apparent in the scheduling of our conversations. Thirty-seven of the mothers either scheduled the interviews during the child's nap time or they arranged for another person to care for the child during our visit. Notably, mothers still considered themselves to be 'watching' their child during the nap, or the child as being 'watched' by another person. By using the term 'watching' to describe supervisory activities, the meaning and intensity of the practice simultaneously freed the supervisor to engage in other activities; to multi-task household and personal responsibilities. The forms of watching practiced by these mothers demonstrate the potential for a host of relationships and/or events to occur, or not. In their effort to generate a caring and safe life for the child, a mother's hypervigilance is an attempt to solidify an attachment toward safety, or 'good supervision' within the uncertainty that watching opens as part of an affectsphere. Watching in instances of hypervigilance is similar to the effect of manners that 'provide an infrastructure of sociality alongside other ones …' (Berlant, 2010a, p. 172). By engaging in the practice of watching a child, the mothers in our study attend to the knowledge that a connection exists between people in the scenario and

the potential for injury, although they may not know the impact of that connection. The manners of hypervigilant watching provide an entry for practicing and emergent supervisors, guiding them through the uncertainty of everyday life.

Watching is embedded in the daily labor of caring. In our conversations, the ordinariness of watching is striking. The mothers used the practice to trace the shifts in its contingency from the age of her son or daughter, an understanding of his or her development, and the allowance of its mediation by other everyday affects that intimately connect the mother to other members of the family, and ultimately to a set of relations in the community. 'Keeping an eye on' children is an example of the affective capacity of watching; an everyday practice of sociality, of manners, and connecting mothers with others and others to her, thus generating expectations within the affectsphere.

Anticipating Injuries and the Bad Supervisor

The flexibility embedded in the perspective of watching as supervision is not without limits. Morality – judgments about who is or is not a good supervisor, and who can or cannot socialize their children into good citizens – course through the affectsphere of watching. One feature is the anticipation of injury. Anticipation as an affective state has a temporal dimension. On the one hand, watching is supposed to prevent injury; on the other, it opens the space *for* injury by allowing the child to experience the world move beyond the impacts of everyday life. This contradiction poses the practice of watching as part of an affectsphere in that it serves as a gap wherein anything can happen. Mothers enter a temporal state that simultaneously pushes on the bodies of their child toward an independent future, pushes on mothers to intervene in the present moment and potentially pushes on the bodies of any other emergent supervisor to act if a 'situation' occurs. Mothers noted that parents who are too preoccupied with their own activities or thoughts were deemed as inadequate supervisors because it prohibited them from watching their child. This same reasoning was given when asked if older children should supervise a toddler. Good supervision was not a matter of age but of maturity; whether or not the individual was so absorbed with his/her own conversations, watching TV or engaging in other activities that they were not concerned with the toddler. As described by Linda, a 37-year-old mother of 3, a good supervisor is someone who focuses on the child, someone who 'will slow down enough to pay attention to him [her son] for a minute'. Indeed, she only leaves her 2-year-old son with particular people:

> There are very few people I would leave him with. Just three ladies, and … I trust them … They have children of their own, so they have experience … [They do the] same thing that I do, just watch (laughs); they make sure that they [the toddlers] are not, and we joke about this, make sure they aren't killing themselves … because literally, if you aren't thinking, like the Purell sanitizers … the toddlers were getting sick on that stuff … But people [the women] are just aware of those little things. They aren't preoccupied with a whole lot of stuff when they are watching my child.

Good supervisors watch their children, are aware and can anticipate potential dangers. Experienced supervisors are better because they understand how the child might hurt

themselves through overlooked 'little' things, such as ingesting hand sanitizer. This type of watching is more than being in close proximity to the child, rather it is an active and knowledgeable anticipation of present dangers defined through relationships between supervisor, child and objects in the environment. The evocation of the hypervigilant caretaker becomes the model of the good supervisor, someone whose watching and whose affects are not over- determined by their own internal concerns.

Good supervisors anticipate accidents. Bad supervisors lack awareness that permits injuries to occur. For example, Grace who is 30 years old, has a 2-year- old daughter, and lives in a middle-class neighborhood on a street with little traffic, stated that:

> When I just see kids running up and down the street out here and I don't see a parent in sight – and I get that a lot in this neighborhood – it drives me crazy … a lot of times they're little ones … I was coming home today, this little boy had to have been three, possibly four; I saw his ball coming down, so I knew it was coming out in the street. He at least stopped. His dad … was totally oblivious, had his back turned to him, didn't even know his kid ran out into the street to get a ball.

In this quote, Grace situates herself in relation to her neighbor and his child. She affectively responds to the situation as a responsible supervisor and citizen because she watches and cares for the children of others. In turn, the neighbor is dismissed from the unfolding situation as 'oblivious' and distracted by other tasks. Grace thus negates his affect as someone who is incapable of watching/ supervising/caring for a child. Eighty-eight per cent of the mothers mentioned that, while their own husbands were good supervisors, men in general were bad supervisors because they could not focus on the needs of the child. As Hardt (2007) notes, the power to act depends on the sensitivity to other bodies, and to external ideas. If a supervisor is not seeing the activities of the child, nor other bodies, nor other events in the space, nor a notion of the manners of care, he/she does not have the power to act; the supervisor is not affected.

The extension of supervision as watching into forms of caring and community citizenship is implicitly tied to expectations of parent and child. Citing Berlant again, it is an expectation of manners. There are a host of behaviors by parents and children that can be considered bad manners and they were often framed within a context of parents not watching:

> … they just basically let their kids play outside … They occasionally fall off the stairs, they hit each other, you know, they play with swords or whatever, but they hit each other over the head and start wailing their heads off. Their parents are inside … I guess they're confident that they're just in hearing distance so everything's okay … they're not paying attention. They're not supervising their kids.
>
> (Sally, 29 years old, 2½-year-old son)

Sally speaks of a supervisor for whom watching seems to be irrelevant. This parent literally closes the door on the affective relationships of watching. He or she is attending to the uncertainty of injury as the probability of an event *not* occurring, rather than the possibilities opened up by watching (protecting a child's immediate and future welfare). Alternatively,

not ‘paying attention’, often times diminished injuries by normalizing the event into a simple statement of ‘kids will be kids’. In this framing, anticipation of present and future dangers or potentials are held in a moral balance, unintentional injury is equivalent to children learning about their own affective capacities. In either case the non-watching supervisor has severed him/herself from the sociality created by watching and diminished his/her power to act.

This moral attachment to watching reveals flexibility through referencing specific women’s and mothers’ subjectivities related to knowledge of good parenting and recognition of the need to foster good citizens. According to the mothers in our study, people who let children run around without boundaries are deemed selfish, immature and negligent supervisors. Linda went so far as to state that ‘selfish people should not have children’. A failure to engage in watching indicates that one cannot or is unable to anticipate what may happen, to account for what is going on in the environment, to intervene and teach the child how to behave – how to solve problems without hitting – and importantly, to prevent an injury from occurring. The ability to anticipate injuries generates meaning associated with watching that indexes an affect toward and knowledge of the surroundings and potential harms. In their failure to watch, bad supervisors expose their own children and others to intentional and unintentional harm. The watching activity of other parents like Grace and Sally may draw the non- supervising parents into the affectsphere through community demands for something to be done, like an injury that requires medical treatment, or a call to Child Protective Services. In these scenarios, the affectsphere is enmeshed in expectations of good citizenship that can ultimately be enforced by governmental agencies and their prostheses.

Accidents and Expected Injuries

Between the extreme of governmental intervention, lack of manners and the hypervigilant supervisor, is a gap where watching is designed to foster a child’s subjectivation as an independent individual. In the child-rearing literature, debates about the socialization of independent children focuses on the benefits and hazards of ‘permissive’ versus ‘authoritative’ parenting (Baumrind, 1971), or the more colloquial phrasing of ‘free-range kids’ versus ‘helicopter’ parents (Skenazy, 2009). The injury prevention literature also engages in the debate about these different supervisory styles by arguing that children of more permissive parents are at increased risk for injury (Morrongiello *et al*, 2006). In this section, we focus on mothers whose watching generated affective relationships that create moments when a child could safely play alone. These situations demonstrate how the connecting ends of watching are pulled simultaneously. Tension between freedom and intense observation was apparent in the mothers’ descriptions of managing a child’s need to explore versus keeping them safe.

Within the context of defining supervision, the difference between the intensity of knowing what the child was continuously doing and intermittently checking in was consistently matched by the mothers’ goal of watching a child in order to ‘keep the child from harm’. Some of the mothers discussed how, if they had not been right there, the child would have drowned in a pool, fallen and hit his/her head, or been bitten by a dog. This protective

capacity extends into the daily activities of mothering, as Eva, who is 30 years old and has a 2-year-old son, noted:

> Nothing really terrible [has happened] that I can think of, but mostly you know falling down and I've caught him before he's hit his head. Actually, I feel like that happens – has happened – often enough that you get to the point where I'm reaching for him before I've even thought about it.

In highlighting her intuitiveness, the visceral reaction watching generated, and her abilities as a responsible mother who is able to protect her child, Eva normalizes incidents where a toddler falls. The normalization of these incidents serve multiple purposes. First, it reveals the potential benefits and limits of watching for preventing injuries. If the mother can intervene, as in Eva's case, watching fulfills its relational aspects. Second, if the child is injured despite the mother being right there, then it is an accident (a random event that just happens).[3] It explicitly acknowledges the contingency of watching. Alternatively, when an injury occurs while the mother is there, it can also be seen as an 'expected injury', an activity wherein children play and learn about their bodies. As children grow, they are expected to fall, which sometimes results in an injury and at other times does not. The result is a kind of moral equality given to the expected injury and a child learning about his/her body and the world. Watching in this case ties the supervisor to the affectsphere and traces the movement from a 'situation' to an 'event'. This movement creates moments that demonstrate the mother doing what is needed and expected as a responsible supervisor. She is able to maintain a sense of control over the perceived randomness of accidents because she has been watching her child and has an intuition, an unconscious expectation of a fall or injury, while simultaneously holding action in suspension so that the child may develop his or her independence.

Despite the efficacy of watching as a supervisory method, the women we spoke with noted that sometimes, no matter how close you were to the toddler, accidents still happened; toddlers do fall. In our sample, the majority of mothers (67 per cent, $n = 72$) were in the same room or within arm's reach of the child when an injury occurred. Other accidents happened while the mother and child were simply walking and someone tripped. Even Grace, who noted her neighbor's inattention to his surroundings and the harm that his child was exposed to in the street, watched as her daughter ran into a wall, fell back, and cried. This minor injury and act of running into the wall was explained as 'oh, she always does that'.

The tension between anticipating an injury, understanding that sometimes a child will unintentionally be injured and allowing a child to learn is carried through the affectsphere with the value of raising children to be independent adults. This tension, like Kusserow's (2004) findings on teaching hard and soft individualism is one area where variations in income levels exert their affective capacities on watching. Mothers with higher incomes

[3]The injury prevention field uses the terminology 'unintentional injury' rather than 'accident' because of the seemingly randomness that accidents evoke. Accidents just happen, cannot be predicted and rarely can anything be done about the event. Reframing the terminology to 'unintentional injury' allows researchers to count how many injuries occur, to note the type of injury, the cause of the injury, and develop interventions before the occurrence of the injury. It is argued that this switch in terminology has produced a more rigorous scientific field (IOM, 1999).

spoke more frequently about unintentional injuries as a way for the child to learn about their body and abilities. In contrast, mothers with lower incomes spoke about the need to make an environment safe in order for the child to explore and learn about their abilities.

Recall Betty, who watches her toddler play in the backyard while folding clothes in the home. The supervised distance between her and her son allows him to learn and to independently test his abilities. Betty defines him as someone who is not always going to have his parents with him and who will know what it feels like to be hurt. In this way, Betty's quote conveys how to manage limitations, unexpected events or expected injuries:

> I think that that's a good experience and he has tripped and fallen or climbed up and realized he can't grasp or pull his own body weight up or things. I don't over supervise in the sense that I'm not allowing him to get hurt, and not that I want him to but I also feel like to an extent they have to learn a little bit that way and if it's, he's not hurting himself significantly … scrapes and bruises, I mean that just is part of play. He can bruise himself walking through the house and tripping you know.

This learning was not only about having an injury experience; it also fits into larger expectations that her son internalize his family's ethics. With a family income of over $70 000 per year we see an emphasis on the internal development of her son, a soft individualism. In Betty's practice, watching provides an opportunity for him to expand his imagination, test his abilities, solve problems and foster social relationships within the safety net of his mother's oversight. The affective capacity of watching to prevent injury is held in suspension for Betty. She does not need to act. And yet, watching is simultaneously attached to her son's development as evidence that the lessons were learned.

Sylvia is 25 and describes her 2 year-old son as active and very loving. Unlike Betty, Sylvia expresses more immediate anxieties about the inability of the landlord to fix hazards in the home, or the presence of local gangs potentially influencing her son's future. The desire to keep children away from dangers in the environment was a common issue for mothers with incomes of $20 000 or less. These mothers often discussed concerns over heating vents with covers that were not fixed, landlords prohibiting the installation of door and cupboard locks, and the general deterioration of rental properties.

Despite her concerns with the neighborhood, Sylvia works to create a 'loving home that has few problems'. Her family (2 year-old son, 6 year-old daughter and the children's father) home has a large yard where her children can play. Sylvia says she watches her children, and if there is no danger then she just lets them play. She teaches them about sharing and believes that if the children are not hurting each other they should be allowed to work out their problems without parental intervention. In her conversation, she describes numerous dangers around the home such as a bucket of water, the child running out the door, or jumping on the sofa or bed. She says that she watches her children all of the time, leaving off cooking and chores until nap-time.

> I almost always let him play on his own. If he is playing right then I let him play and not interrupt him he can look at things on his own … Right now, at two-years-old is when he is starting to, if they see a liquid they will want to drink it, if they see anything they want to put their hands into it, like the electric plugs and all that.

> If you see them do that then take him away from there but if you see them playing healthy then let them play on their own ….

While Sylvia never explicitly links watching with independence, ‘playing healthy’ references the child’s ability to grow and develop in a safe environment. The overarching concern with finding or creating healthy environments where the child can play without parental restraint emphasizes her value in the child’s freedom to explore. Watching, however, is also affected by the relations that make low income and rental properties ‘situations’ where increased injury can occur. Sylvia is concerned with the dangers in the environment and creating safe, healthy spaces so that the affective relations of independent individuals can claim her and her children as belonging to that affectsphere. Watching courses through the seemingly contradictory relations of unintentional injury and independence. The ‘situations’ in which mothers find themselves watching are uneven. For mothers with less access to environments that are presumed to be safe, the relations they must create and bring into their affectsphere multiply to include landlords, safety device objects, public health officials and the unknown qualities of the neighborhood.

In these scenarios, watching takes on the role of what Berlant calls ‘lateral agency’: ‘a model of agency without intention … a mode of coasting consciousness within the ordinary that helps people survive the stress on their sensorium …’ (2010a, p. 18). Some mothers had the ability to expect a specific set of relations to their environment that easily produced their subjectivity as a good supervisor. Other mothers had to create numerous relations or build relations to their environment that could foster good supervisory subjectivity. What watching does in these affective relations is to allow these two cases to appear equal, thus obscuring the economic differences and structural limitations. Instead, an agency that can maintain the uncertainty of ‘situations’ and avoids ‘events’ that would push a mother out of watching’s affectsphere and its moral attachment to good parenting is favored.

In the categorization of expected injuries as ‘part of growing up’, or ‘the need to explore’ the child moves toward independence. In this move, the supervisor’s subjectivity as one who keeps the child safe is put at risk. The affective connection is being pulled at both ends. Watching, as a form of lateral agency, generates multiple potential subjectivities wherein the supervisor is still ‘good’ because she was watching regardless of the child getting hurt. In these instances, the locus of control is attributed to the child’s own actions. The child is hyper, running, tripping, jumping on beds or throwing fits. This is not to say that mothers do not feel responsible or care about the child. Many of the mothers thought they could have prevented the injuries, particularly through creating safer environments. Despite acknowledging their responsibility, mothers’ descriptions of their children’s minor injuries emphasizes the production of individuals. In addition, attributing injury to the child’s agency is yet another indication that expected unintentional injuries, particularly when they occur while a mother is watching, are an example of lateral agency and normalized as part of socialization toward independence. The entanglement of injuries with the social values of raising independent individuals references the affectsphere of watching as an injury prevention method; it highlights the subjectivity of the mother within a contingent world of income, immediate and future risks, as well as potentials. It is a world in which her efforts to keep her child safe must be contradicted by allowing for expected unintentional injuries.

Conclusion

> We know that we act habitually and impulsively all the time, and that life would be unimaginable if we were actually forced to decide consciously at every minute, if we were hypervigilant about matters of life and death like movie monsters waiting to be crossed … The discourse of responsibility and consciousness fights against the contradictions and vagaries of how humans must actually operate. This doesn't mean that we're doomed to chaos all of the time either. But we must begin thinking about how to survive and thrive not by imagining people in the tableau of their greatest self-conscious control but by seeing the patterns of activity that at once advance and contradict survival in light of the pressures of contemporary everyday life. Then we need to rethink everyday life.
>
> (Berlant, 2010b, p. 30)

Considering the affective role of watching allows us to see it as part of patterns of activity that both advance and contradict survival. Watching becomes the everyday affect through which relations flow. It has the instantaneous affect of generating immediate action to thwart imminent harm, or to allow for pause. This moment of pause can be filled with the uncertainty of what may occur and the anticipatory hopes for a child's future. As an affect, watching helps us to understand how moral judgments are brought into circulation under the rubric of prevention and supervision. The goal of 'defining' and 'measuring' supervision creates an expectation that individual supervising mothers will be hypervigilant despite the competing pressures of everyday life. More importantly, it reduces the possibility of gaining any knowledge about the relations within a supervisor's sphere. The ability of watching and the attendant anticipation to affect and be affected by multiple desires, pressures, politics and moralities allows us to see a fluid circuit through which mothers can maintain their subjectivity as good supervisors while simultaneously affecting the conditions around them.

Hypervigilance, as Berlant (2010a, b) would argue, can also be exhausting. The pathways of watching raise a host of questions with regard to gendered labor, class and culture. In what ways might these desires, moralities and politics flow through watching and produce forms of exhaustion? Of suffering? Wherein families with lower incomes are caught in an affectsphere fraught with situations in which the force of the relations are more likely to result in unintentional injury events, the exhaustion of these relations may push them out of the sphere of relations where the politics of parenting would bestow 'good supervision'. Moreover, in the case of unintentional injury prevention, the primary focus is on the activities of mothers as they are linked to the act of being with and seeing the child. As public health calls for increased hypervigilance on the part of supervisors, tracing the affective relations of watching can lead to greater insights on gendered constraints on time and the shifting role of fathers.

Reframing supervision as watching through affect allows us to trace the generation of political, moral and physical relations that are embedded in managing the parenting details of everyday life. Events categorized as unintentional injury set relations that signpost supervisory actions as 'good' or 'bad' because they allow us to see the boundaries of the affectsphere, we presumably know who is affected by the practice of watching. But this is

only true if we do not account for the multiplicity of the connections that affect watching, such as additive relations for families living in low-income rental properties, or mothers whose affective labor is obscured (particularly because watching is ordinary). The 'event' – the injury – alone cannot elucidate the affective connections that move bodies into certain actions over another. Focusing on the mundane features of watching allows us to trace the relations, their force and vitality as they are located in circuits of sociality. While the role of parents continues to be ensuring the safe development of their children, describing the affect of watching as part of child-rearing and insuring safety moves us beyond conversations of individual risk, beyond the exhaustion and responsibility that hypervigilence evokes, and toward a quest to bring to the fore the politics, morality and physicality in assumptions about social organization and subjectivity that have the potential to change everyday life.

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