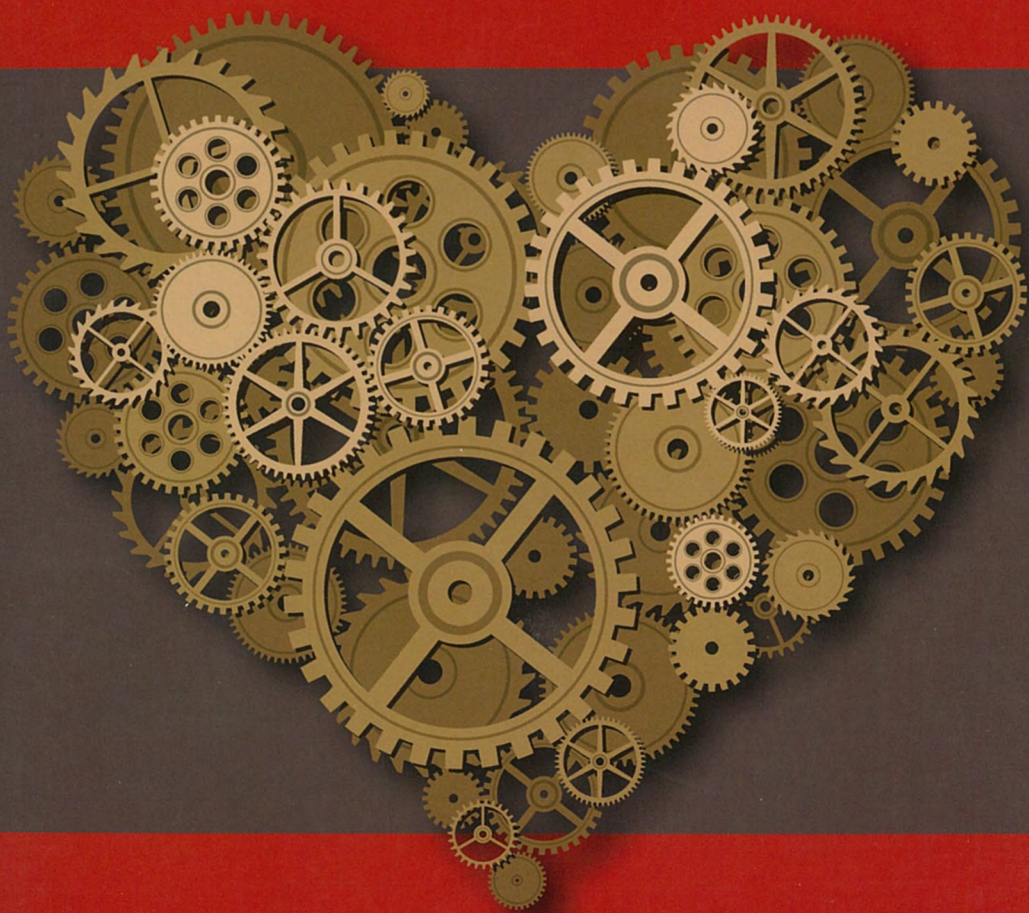


# AT THE HEART OF WORK AND FAMILY

*Engaging the Ideas of Arlie Hochschild*



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## Framing Couple Time and Togetherness among American and Norwegian Professional Couples

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In *The Second Shift* (Hochschild 1989), we meet several couples in which the two partners find themselves at odds over the man's allocation of attention and emotional energy between his work and the relationship. In one of those couples, Seth Stein voluntarily withdraws from his romantic life so that he can give all of himself to his job as an attorney. This shift of time and energy away from the relationship distresses his wife, Jessica. Eventually, she settles for a temporally and emotionally "downsized" relationship (Hochschild 1989). Stung by his retreat from family life, Jessica eventually puts herself at an emotional remove from their family life as well. But Seth is willing to pay the high cost his workaholicism exacts at home, even though he has two children to raise. Despite this emotional and physical disengagement, Seth is untroubled by guilt and does not agonize over his emotional and physical unavailability.

Whether by choice or necessity, many professional men behave as Seth does, carving out sixty-hour workweeks and traveling out of town on a moment's notice. This is especially true for many of the men who work in demanding and remunerative professional jobs such as consulting, law, and finance. Lavishing their time and energies on work, many of the men who work in these "extreme jobs" let their job claim the lion's share of their time, energy, and attention (Hewlett et al. 2007).<sup>1</sup> As a consequence, these men give most of themselves to their work and little of themselves to their significant others. These men can end up depriving their partners of companionship and intimacy, aspects of romantic unions that many women cherish (Gerstel and Gross 1984).

Like Jessica, the women partners of professional men can easily find themselves sharing their lives with an absent partner who cannot or will not spare the time and energy needed for a healthy and fulfilling relationship. However, many women in this situation find themselves weighing this deprivation against the economic and social benefits they derive from a relationship with a successful professional man. For the woman who puts a high price on her partner's occupational achievement and earnings, it may be worth it to support him in his efforts to secure status and money through occupational achievement and the work hours that often go hand and hand with it. A less than ideal level of emotional and temporal investment on the part of a boyfriend or husband married to his job may be an acceptable price to pay for such women.

The tug-of-war between work and intimate relationships is one that can be seen through a variety of lenses by both women and men. Both parties must ascribe meaning, or "frame," the situation according to the norms and expectations relating to work and romantic companionship they find most resonant and compelling (Goffman 1959, 1974; Hochschild 2003). Framing rules also determine whether particular emotional responses are appropriate or inappropriate, given the situation at hand (Hochschild 2003). This chapter explores these acts of framing in contrasting cultural settings. It poses the question of how the men and women in heterosexual couples assess the man's career, his engagement with work, and his diversion of time and energy toward work and away from the relationship.

The frames individuals bring to these themes are not only the product of their own life circumstances; they also reflect the institutional and cultural landscapes of the societies in which they live and work. Individuals' judgments about work absorption and downsized relationships betray the presumptions about working life and couplehood that resonate most strongly in their society. The contrast between the frames favored by individuals socialized in different societies is best studied through a cross-national comparison. In this cross-national comparative study, I look at the ways in which men and women from two different countries interpret the man's commitment to his job, the demands of high-powered careers, and the importance of couple time and companionship in the life of the couple. By counterposing the framing work that occurs within quasi-matched groups of American and Norwegian couples,<sup>2</sup> this chapter pinpoints differences in the ways that upper-middle class American and Norwegian men and women grapple with the man's allocation of time and energy between his work and the relationship.

This cross-national comparison can reveal much about how men and women socialized in different societies differ in their approaches to both working life and intimate relationships. In terms of work culture, research has shown that American professionals have a strong attachment to occupational achievement and career success, often measured by money income. Occupational achievement has long stood at the center of the American upper-middle class life project focused on upward mobility (Lamont 1992; Bellah et al. 1985).

The upper-middle class Norwegians, living and working in a more egalitarian and less career-oriented society, experience less pressure to put occupational achievement at the center of their lives (Frønes and Brusdal 2000). As citizens of a prototypical Scandinavian social democratic state, Norwegians can count on a very generous state for myriad social services and supports, including a guaranteed year-long paid maternity/paternity leave, paid disability leave, and publicly funded daycare facilities. Moreover, there is a stark contrast between American and Norwegian policies on work hours. The Norwegian government's strictly enforced work hours regulations mandate a basic thirty-seven-and-a-half-hour workweek for state employees and employees of large private enterprises, with a maximum ten hours of overtime per week (Torp and Barth 2001). In order for nonmanagerial workers to exceed these hours, firms must obtain special dispensation and must often pay extra wages. As a consequence, the modal Norwegian worker works far fewer hours than the modal American worker, clocking almost 400 fewer work hours per year than her American counterpart (OECD 2004). Further, while only 5 percent of employed Norwegians routinely worked more than forty-eight hours per week between 2000 and 2005, 19 percent of American workers exceeded this threshold during this same span (ILO and Routledge 2007, 46–51).

The more "tender" Norwegian culture does not encourage the all-consuming dedication to work often embraced in the more performance-oriented "masculinist" work-life culture of the United States (Birkelund and Sandnes 2003; Hoftstede 1998). Cross-national studies lend support to the idea that Norwegians find the "live to work" ethic less appealing than citizens of most other countries; of all the nations in Europe, it was in Norway that the fewest people judged a successful career as a necessary ingredient of the "good life, and that the highest proportion of the population judged annual vacations an indispensable element of the good life (see Mykkeltvedt 2005). Such cultural differences also have consequences for the ways in which Americans and Norwegians approach romantic life. As Norwegian anthropologists have noted, partnered Norwegians of both genders tend to observe characteristically Scandinavian ideals concerning parity, equality, and reciprocity in their romantic relationships (Gullestad 1992; Lien, Lidén, and Vike 2001). These cultural differences between the United States and Norway make these two societies well suited to a cross-cultural comparison.

#### THE STUDY AND THE RESPONDENTS

I conducted twenty-four qualitative interviews with six American and six Norwegian heterosexual couples in which both the men and women were between twenty-eight and thirty-eight years of age. All the American couples reside in the San Francisco Bay Area, a California metropolitan area known for its large population of high-earning professionals and high cost of living (Florida 2005). The Norwegian couples all reside in Oslo, the country's largest

urban center. Like San Francisco, Oslo has a comparatively high proportion of professionals in its population and has a high cost of living in relation to other urban areas within the country.

Through a painstaking selection process, I assembled two groups of couples anchored by male partners who are "quasi-matched" with respect to their occupational and sociodemographic profiles (Crompton and Birkelund 2000). Half of the focal male respondents in each country were selected from MBA alumni lists kept by one of each country's most prominent business schools. The other half were either recruited through a specific employer, a particular global consultancy, or through referrals from other respondents. Both sets of men are of similar age, have undergone a similar education, and have traveled along very similar occupational paths, pursuing "big-time" professional success in competitive fields such as management consulting and banking (Orrange 2007). In each couple, the male partner works as a successful corporate professional in a demanding business services field. All twelve relationships were long-term committed partnerships, having endured for at least two years, whether the couples were married or cohabitating. Four couples in each country had not yet had children; the others had either one or two children under the age of five.

Two of the Norwegian men and four of the American men held extreme jobs that required in excess of sixty work hours a week.<sup>3</sup> Whereas four of the six Americans traveled out of town on a weekly or biweekly basis, none of the Norwegians traveled out of town more than twice a month. While the men in the two groups hold a narrow slice of jobs, and match up quite well in terms of their occupational and socioeconomic profiles, their female partners, who all work full time, hold a wider variety of positions. The American women included a dentist, a schoolteacher, and a marketing manager, while the Norwegian women included a store manager and an administrative assistant. All of the Norwegian women and all but one of the American women held full-time jobs. On average, the Norwegian women worked slightly less than their American peers, but both groups of women averaged around forty-five hours per week.

#### THE AMERICAN WOMEN: "ABSENCE IS A FACT OF LIFE"

Legitimizing and normalizing framings predominated in the American women's commentaries on their partners' work commitments, the consequences of these commitments for the relationships, and their own adaptations to their partners' work-related unavailability. Doing without long stretches of couple time was a burden that some of the American women found hard to bear. While they did not wish for a temporally downsized relationship and a romantic life without much couple time, they viewed these drawbacks as a price well worth paying (Hochschild 1997). Their partners' unavailability was interpreted as an inevitable by-product of a demanding business career in which they had a large

TABLE 6.1  
AMERICAN AND NORWEGIAN COUPLES' WORK HOURS

Couple	His typical work hours (per week)	Her typical work hours (per week)	Typical gap (hours)	Number of children	His occupation	Her occupation
<b>AMERICAN COUPLES</b>						
Carl and Kathy	60+	60+	0	0	Investment banking	Corporate accounting
Allen and Wilma	50	50	5	0	Corporate marketing	Elementary schoolteacher
Chris and Alyssa	60+	40	20	1	Management consultant	Dentist in private practice
Stan and Sara	60+	45	15	0	Management consultant	Retail executive
Victor and Nancy	60+	45	17	1	Management consultant	Marketing manager
Nick and Cara	65+	43	22	0	Management consultant	Corporate strategy consultant for retail firm
<b>NORWEGIAN COUPLES</b>						
Tobias and Elsa	45	45	0	0	Investment manager for bank	Investment manager for bank
Dag and Christina	45+	45	3	2	Independent entrepreneur	HR manager for engineering firm
Jørgen and Anita	50+	45	5	2	Management consultant	Marketing manager for retail firm
Matthias and Annette	55+	45	13	0	Management consultant	Public legal advisor
Gunnar and Hilde	65+	40	25	0	Principal in own business services firm	Manager of retail store
Stein and Vigdis	65	50	15	0	Management consultant	Administrative assistant for executive

stake. Many of the American women also cast their partners' working life as a legitimately all-consuming domain that had rightful claims on a large share of their partners' time, energy, and attention.

For the American women who enjoyed substantially more leisure time than their spouses, the man's success in his high-flying business career was an objective that necessarily involved long hours and frequent travel. Nancy, a corporate manager married to Victor, a management consultant, "understood" the imperative to put in many late nights at the office. She wanted to see Victor, a person she described as "driven," succeed in his high-powered management consulting job. He had "always wanted the job," she explained, so she "owed it to him" to support his efforts in the career department. And she knew well that management consulting was the kind of extreme profession where one has to "prove oneself" by putting in the "time and the sweat equity." Revisiting the period before their child, Nancy remembered that she managed to keep herself occupied during the evenings while her husband Victor toiled at the office. She explained, "I could go hang out with friends, and my parents live a few minutes away; I would exercise or read, go to bed early, I don't even know, but time flies, I could watch TV, I wasn't twiddling my thumbs. . . . I'm pretty good. . . . I mean I'm fine with being on my own. . . . and finding things to do." His evening absences did not constitute a "big issue" for her.

The ability to amuse oneself was also a point of pride for Cara, the younger partner of Nick, a management consultant at a high-powered firm. Because of Nick's frequent travel out of town, Cara was accustomed to very long and frequent periods of separation, some of them over five weeks. As she had worked herself in the same firm, Cara knew the lifestyle of the management consultant well. She realized she knew that she could not "realistically" expect to see Nick much during the week. But this unavailability was not a "big deal." After all, she declared, his absences during the week made her more "productive" and left her time to hang out with her friends and family.

Other American women also devalued leisure time companionship as a dispensable aspect of the relationship far less important than their partners' career success and job-related contentment. For Wilma, a successful corporate attorney married to Allen, an entrepreneur who often worked deep into the night, her husband's career success trumped her desire for leisure-time companionship. The priority for her was that her husband would do "whatever it took" to succeed in his work, even if this meant filling his evenings and weekends with work instead of spending the time with her. "If I could have my wish. . . of course I would wish that he would be home at seven o'clock if I'm home at seven o'clock, but I wouldn't say that I'm terribly unhappy about it. . . . I s'pose that you would find people who would wish their partner were around at any point in time. . . . for me I don't want to be married to somebody who has a job that they're not into." Wilma cared much more about Allen's willingness to work long hours than his ability to provide companionship.

Just as the American women normalized their partners' demanding jobs and their work devotion and tried to minimize the importance of couple time in their relationship, they framed their own acquiescence to this lack of togetherness as a justifiable and even rational response to the situation. This reflexive framing was particularly apparent in the commentary of Sara, a voluble woman in her early thirties with her own demanding career in the fashion world. Sara came closer than any of the other American women to acknowledging the problematic character of her partner's working life. During the entire lifetime of the relationship, from dating through marriage, her husband, Stan, had traveled extensively on out-of-town assignments. As a result, they had rarely spent more than two consecutive days together at a time. She remembered the early stages of the relationship when she barely saw him one day out of every week, and she was not even certain whether he was keeping "another family" in the Texas city where he spent the Monday through Thursday portion of the week.

Despite these weekly disappearing acts, Sara was very "patient" with Stan's absences in the beginning of the relationship. However, as the relationship progressed, she found it increasingly difficult to resign herself to occupying "second" place behind his career. Now that they were a married couple sharing a residence and planning a joint future, Stan's absences had become increasingly vexatious. She wondered whether they would ever be in a position to have children or even a dog on account of Stan's working hours and travel schedule. She dreaded her future as a "bosses' wife widowed by the company." But she had not pushed him to change jobs. She rationalized her own hesitancy to force the issue, explaining: "I'm not gonna push him [to get a more relaxed job at Sedate Corp.]. I don't know. I'm not going to ask for ridiculous things. I'm not an *irrational* person." From her perspective, by accommodating his work absorption she was not only adapting to an immutable reality, but also validating her own character as a rational person.

For the women, their partners' career aspirations, however disruptive to their relationship, deserved their deference. And yet, in their framings of both their partners' working life and their relationships, they all enlisted frames that rendered greedy jobs and downsized intimate relationships both normal and legitimate. Such was not the case with their Norwegian counterparts.

#### THE NORWEGIAN WOMEN: "WHY CAN'T WE BE TOGETHER MORE OFTEN?"

In the commentaries of the Norwegian women, such legitimizing and normalizing frames were nowhere to be found. Even though the Norwegian women's partners did not work as many hours or travel as much as their American counterparts, the Norwegian women assailed even relatively mild forms of work absorption and work overcommitment as unwarranted and detrimental to their quality of life. Whereas the American women characterized their partners'

live-to-work approach as necessary and even virtuous, the Norwegian women refused to rationalize what they framed as an overcommitment to job and career. They expected to see their partners during the week, as well as the weekends. There was no good reason, they asserted, that their partners had to regularly work longer than "normal" hours and sacrifice their legitimate needs for frequent companionship. It was only because their partners had fallen under the sway of an illegitimately greedy institution, in their framing, that the men gave up so much of their private lives for work and shortchanged their relationship.

Annette could not understand what possessed her partner, Matthias, a management consultant, when he allowed his client work to spill over into their evenings and weekends. In her view, there was no reason why he should make himself available to clients in the evenings when he should be spending time with her and their friends. Given that he was already working over ten hours a day at the office, she declared, he "could well afford to avoid working after the official workday was over." As she explained, "He won't let go of the endless work which the workday consists of, if you know what I mean by that. He always thinks a little bit about work and takes the laptop computer home when he arrives and works for a half hour or so. And I don't like this. I think that when there is free time, which is my time in a way, then he shouldn't use it for work. If he works an hour per evening, it sets limits for what we can do together later on." Annette felt duty-bound to call him on this downright "stupid" habit. It was not fair that he sometimes worked during what was "her time."

Like Annette, Hilde did not think that her partner's job warranted so much of his time, energy, and attention. She excoriated her longtime partner, Gunnar, for his habit of fielding phone calls from clients during the evenings and weekends and his routine of disappearing for an hour or two into his home office in the evenings in the middle of a TV show or a conversation. She did not think that he should be "trading away" so much of his free time just to ensure that his numerous clients were happy all the time. In direct contrast to the American women who rationalized their partners' absences, Hilde refused to justify the parallel life she led in her spare time. She bemoaned the fact that "our [private] lives are independent of each other," charging that "this arrangement doesn't always work out so well." If Gunnar had worked less during evenings and weekends, she argued, then "we could have escaped to the mountains, attended cultural events, seen friends together, or gone to various restaurants and cafés around Oslo." Like Annette, she found it galling and distressing when Gunnar vanished into his home office in the evenings, claiming that he should be working since they weren't doing "anything special" together. In her eyes, it was unreasonable of him to neglect her legitimate desire for evening companionship. "He has to remember that he doesn't live alone. He must remind himself that there is another person who also would like to spend time with him, and who in a way needs some social and physical contact with him, who needs predictability in daily life, especially during the weekends." Instead of minimizing or suppressing

her own claims on her partner's time and attention, as the American women do, Hilde framed her desire for companionship as entirely legitimate.<sup>4</sup>

The three Norwegian women who enjoyed a "reasonable" amount of companionship expressed gratitude for the couple time they had at their disposal. According to Anita, whose husband Jørgen had chosen to work for a Scandinavian management consultancy that did not require sixty-hour workweeks, a matching work schedule served as one of the primary foundations for a well-functioning partnership and a healthy family life. Anita was glad that her husband got to work "reasonable" hours and had no trouble "setting aside" enough time to spend with her and their two children. It was important for her that he return home before six o'clock in the evening and eat dinner with the family most nights of the week. It would be "inappropriate," she declared, if she got to see him for only an hour every night.

Whereas the American women framed their partners' twelve-hour workdays and frequent out-of-town travel as a "fact of life" to which they had to adapt, the Norwegian women perceived these hours as unreasonable infringements on their partners' private lives and, by extension, their own private lives. They could not bring themselves to represent the emotionally and temporally downsized relationships as entirely legitimate. This was especially true in regard to the weekday evenings. In the eyes of the Norwegian women, these blocks of time were meant for couple-oriented activities rather than work.

#### THE AMERICAN MEN: "SHE SHOULD GET USED TO IT" AND "SHE'S GETTING A LOT OUT OF IT"

The American men echoed their partners in carrying out framing work designed to normalize and legitimize their immersion in their working lives and their inattentiveness to their partners' desire for companionship and couple time. Like the American women, they represented their greedy working lives and robust work ethics as facts of life to which their partners had to adapt. Nick, the management consultant who rarely saw his partner, Cara, for more than a weekend at a time, complained that Cara had made "unwarranted" requests for him to reduce his work hours. He was particularly taken aback by these requests because she had worked in the same firm herself. It should have been obvious to her, he argued, that his success as a consultant was contingent on his ability to travel and work long hours without her interference. After a few "discussions," he had gotten her to realize that he was not about to "fuck up the work for the next day" by leaving the office before he had completed his work. A weekend-based relationship, he felt, "should be enough for her." Victor, another consultant, manifested the same kind of intransigence over his work hours. Explaining the "facts of life" to his wife with respect to his work responsibilities as a management consultant, he made it clear that he could not simply cut down his hours because "this [effort] is what the job calls for and this is what it takes to do the job."

The American men also expended a great deal of effort rationalizing their partners' acceptance of their work absorption and frequent absences. Imputing a pragmatic framing to their partners, these men explained that the women were invested in their careers, both for altruistic and selfish reasons. As a result, they claimed, the women wisely overlooked the deficiencies of their temporally downsized relationships and focused on the many advantages of a relationship the men likened to an exchange or deal.

These legitimizing frames concerned the women's purported interest in seeing their partners excel in their demanding, long-hours occupations, as well as the futility of trying to alter the men's relationships with their work. Stan, the management consultant who worked eighty-hour weeks and characterized himself as a "burner," knew that his partner, Sara, was uneasy with his work absorption and his open-ended commitment of time and energy to his work and career. In his view, however, Sara was a "pragmatic person" who had married him knowing full well that he would never relinquish his devotional attachment to work and career. Well acquainted with this facet of his personality, she had "come to terms" with her role as the "best other thing" in his life: "[In the beginning of our relationship] she quickly understood that, okay, I'm just that way. [Working really hard] is something I have to do. So, what she was thinking was, 'I'm not going to make him choose between me and the job. I'm just going to try my best to be the other thing in his life.'" Moreover, in Stan's eyes, Sara had a stake in his own high-flying business career. His rise in the business world gave them a level of financial security and affluence that "she enjoyed every bit as much" as he did. For Sara, he indicated, the scarcity of companionship was a relatively small price to pay in view of these tangible benefits.

For the American men, it was only "sensible" for their partners to swallow their discontent with the men's work hours and job commitment. One of the clearest examples of this normalizing framing surfaced in the comments of Carl, an American investment banker married to an accountant. His perspective was that Kathy, his wife, wanted to see him succeed in his remunerative line of work, both for his sake and for her own sake. Moreover, she knew "what she was getting into" when she married him several years into this demanding banking career.

In the case of Victor, a management consultant with a baby, it was the bargaining frame that took center stage in his commentary. In Victor's eyes, his wife was willing to trade companionship during the week for a higher standard of living for them and their child. She had a stake in his career and knew what the family "stood to lose" if he gave up his lucrative but demanding management consultant position. Characterizing his wife, Nancy, as a woman primarily concerned with the economic well-being of the family unit, he spoke of the economic exigencies they faced as a couple with a young child to support and the importance of a large paycheck: "We're at a point where she's great, she definitely understands the lifestyle and, you know, getting a good salary is very

important to the family. Now she realizes that if I take a more relaxed job I'll be taking a 30 percent pay cut. So, even if I can get home by sixty-thirty in the evening, we'll have less money. Now she's like, 'hah, maybe it's worth it for him to stay.'"

Chris, another American management consultant, framed his partner's interest in his career as a matter of her own desire for "more flexibility" in her life. By allowing him to work "whenever" the occasion demanded, he pointed out, his wife put herself in an economic position where she could afford to work less herself. Her acceptance of the "deal" between them was thus a matter of simple self-interest, as well as a recognition of his own devotional approach to work. As he put it: "My wife wanted to only work four or three days in a row, so part of the deal was, 'Okay, my husband will have the high-powered job, he'll get paid a lot and he'll have to work when he'll have to work. And I'll get to live a more flexible life that I want.'" Like the other American men, Chris rationalized his partner's accommodating stance toward his own work absorption, underscoring her pragmatism as well as her own self-interest.

#### THE NORWEGIAN MEN: "I SHOULD BE SPENDING MORE TIME WITH HER"

In the narratives of the Norwegian men, the topics of work, career, and companionship were framed in dramatically different terms. Unlike their American counterparts, they upheld the legitimacy of their partners' complaints about their work habits and their pleas for more couple time. None of the Norwegian men defended the "weekend-only" relationship that figured prominently as a benchmark in the narratives of the American men, particularly those who had worked in management consulting. None of the Norwegian men attempted to legitimate their pursuit of big-time career success as an enterprise that merited their partners' full commitment and support. Further, the three Norwegian men who did work relatively long hours made little effort to rationalize these long hours as a fact of life to which the women should adapt.

Even when they worked in demanding jobs, the Norwegian men expressed a sensitivity to their partners' desire for companionship and couple time. Matthias, a Norwegian management consultant, found his long work hours "frustrating" because they did not allow him enough time with his partner. He appreciated her desire for more companionship in the relationship and respected her "legitimate" wish to feel "prioritized" and to "feel more important than my work." Stein, another management consultant, felt that his job, which required him to work until nine or ten in the evening, "robbed" his girlfriend of the daily couple time that she had every right to want: "I am living with a girl and she is sitting at home waiting for me a lot because she is finished at 4:00 P.M., so that takes a lot of energy from both of us and I do not feel like I can satisfy her on that dimension." His inability to provide sufficient companionship bothered him.<sup>5</sup>

Even Gunnar, perhaps the most work-centered of all the Norwegian men I interviewed, granted the legitimacy of Hilde's complaints about his very long working hours and his constant absorption in his work. He believed that she had "every right" to complain about his attentiveness to his clients and his neglect of her own companionship needs.

For those Norwegian men who had chosen to work at the most demanding jobs, there was an intense concern over the potential harm that their work schedules could inflict on the relationship. The fragility of relationships weakened by the man's unavailability was a common theme in the narratives of the Norwegian men. Stein, for example, worried that he was endangering his relationship because he could not afford to spend any time with his partner during weekday evenings. Matthias indicated that one of his consultant friends was having trouble in his relationship because of his job. His friend's work absorption and long hours had put his relationship under tremendous strain and the relationship "hung by a thread." Unlike the American men, several of the Norwegian men had struck "deals" concerning their work hours and travel patterns with their partners ensuring that they could enjoy several hours of couple time most workdays. Jørgen, for example, had made an agreement with his wife early on in the relationship never to work more than fifty hours per week on a regular basis and to come home by 5:30 in the evening unless there was a crisis at work. This agreement, he recounted, served as the "basis" of their relationship. After all, denying his wife the chance to see him for at least "an hour per day" simply wasn't "fair."

From these interviews we can see that the Norwegian men avoided the normalizing and legitimizing frames enlisted by their American counterparts. None of the Norwegian men sought to explain why their partners were right to overlook their work absorption and let them focus on building high-flying careers in demanding fields. Despite their own high-flying business careers, these men did not frame working life as a legitimately greedy institution or their career success as an overriding imperative trumping their partners' desire for companionship. Instead, they framed their partners' expectations about companionship and togetherness as deserving their consideration. Those men who had trouble fulfilling these expectations expressed considerable guilt over what appeared to them, upon reflection, as an unwarranted level of work absorption.

#### CONCLUSION

As evidenced by the contrasting framings used by both men and women in the two countries, work absorption, frequent absences, and downsized intimate relationships meant quite different things to the American men and women as compared with their Norwegian counterparts. Despite everything that the American and Norwegian couples shared in terms of their life circumstances, they attributed quite different meanings to a mode of life where work consumed

the bulk of the men's time, energy, and attention. When comparing the frames employed by the two groups of couples, what immediately stands out is the way in which, in each national case, the men's and women's interlocking framings of oversized work commitments complemented each other.

Both the American men and the American women shared the same understanding of work as legitimately demanding in terms of the man's time, energy, and attention. According to the tacit contract between the American men and women, the man's work and career took precedence over the woman's need for companionship. Among the Americans, both women and men framed the man's career as a legitimately greedy enterprise deserving a large amount of time and energy. At the same time, they viewed the couple's joint leisure time as more of a luxury than a necessity. The American men consistently defended work's virtual monopoly over their time and energy while downplaying the effects of their work absorption on their relationship. In making sense of this situation from their partners' perspective, the men repeatedly underscored their partners' interest in seeing them succeed in the lucrative corporate world. The same legitimizing framing of work as an intrinsically greedy institution also predominated among the American women. The American women underlined the legitimacy of their partners' extreme investment in his work and career, justifying the amount of time and energy the men expended in pursuit of this success as necessary while minimizing the drawbacks of their partners' long hours and frequent absences and shrugging off the lack of companionship as an acceptable price to pay.

The tacit contract that bound together the Norwegian men and women did not give the same precedence to the man's desire for career success versus the woman's need for companionship. Both the Norwegian men and the Norwegian women upheld the common presumption that certain parts of the day and week should be off-limits to work. When the Norwegian men did work long hours or travel frequently, they conceded that their partners were being cheated of time and companionship to which the women were entitled. With a vigor unmatched by their American counterparts, the Norwegian women defended their right to couple time in the evenings and weekends, defining their partners' evenings and weekends as their own time. For them, something was very wrong with the relationship and with their partners' priorities if the parameters of their companionship became defined by the man's work absorption.

In conclusion, the responses of women and men to the near-monopoly of work on the man's time and energy are necessarily framed against the backdrop of culturally specific expectations about work and couplehood. Whatever tensions the couple experiences between the man's work absorption and the woman's desire for companionship, these tensions **reflect not only the structure of the work-family situation, but also the cultural frameworks employed to make sense of this situation.** Both women and men rely on these cultural frameworks in interpreting the man's investment in his work and the relationship.



By showing how these frameworks vary across two different nations and societies, this chapter calls attention to their role in the shaping of the work/family nexus.

## NOTES

1. Hewlett defines an "extreme" job as one in which the person must work under considerable pressure to meet demanding deadlines. Most extreme jobs require over sixty hours of work on a regular basis, as well as extensive and frequent travel. However, the extreme jobs to which Hewlett refers also pay much higher salaries than typical jobs and are concentrated in the lucrative business services and technology sectors. See Hewlett et al. (2007) for a more extensive discussion.

2. This study relies on the method of the controlled comparison, a kind of multisite case study in which groups of "matched" respondents are contrasted with one another. Such research designs have been used to great effect to identify individual-level differences attributable to national-societal context (Crompton and Birkelund 2000; Maxwell 1996; Lamont 1992).

3. Half of the six Norwegian men did work substantially fewer hours than their American counterparts, a disparity that makes the gap in frames all the more striking. Of the three Norwegian men who worked substantially over fifty hours per week, two men (Stein and Matthias) worked for international firms that did not observe the Norwegian work hours law (*Arbeidsmiljøloven*) particularly closely. The Norwegian firms, by contrast, took care to observe the work-hours restrictions mandated by the Norwegian Work Environment Act [*Arbeidsmiljøloven*]. This law defines "normal working hours" as no more than forty hours per seven-day period. This ceiling may be raised to forty-eight hours during a seven-day period, but only if both the employer and employee consent in writing to this arrangement. Overtime work beyond this limit is only legal in cases where the employer specifies an "exceptional and time-limited need for it." Overtime work hours are also capped at ten hours per week, and any overtime hours must be compensated at a higher than normal rate. Gunnar, the Norwegian man who worked the longest hours, worked as a principal at his own firm, so he was entirely exempt from these regulations.

4. Unlike her American peers, Hilde had not shied away from confrontation with Gunnar over his work habits and work absorption. She had gotten the message across to him that it was "not particularly wise" of him to cut their evening conversations and meals short in order to resume his work. She was confident that the message had gotten across to him thanks to her frankness on the subject.

5. Stein took this grievance to heart quite quickly and gave up his demanding consulting job for a more relaxed position at a large Norwegian company. He was happy that his new job gave him more time for his family and enabled him to honor his wife's desire for more companionship.

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## Love and Gratitude

### SINGLE MOTHERS TALK ABOUT MEN'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE SECOND SHIFT

Margaret K. Nelson

In a classic piece reconsidering material taken from *The Second Shift*, Arlie Russell Hochschild (2003, 116) analyzes the economies of gratitude that emerge within the marital relationship. In doing so she traces gratitude to three sources: to current ideas about honor that derive from a *moral* frame of reference (when we ask, "How lucky am I compared to what the cultural code leads me to expect?");<sup>1</sup> to ideas about current realities that derive from a *pragmatic* frame of reference (when we ask, "How lucky am I compared to what is available to me?"); and to precedents that derive from a *historical* frame of reference (when we ask, "How lucky am I compared to people of my kind in the past?"). Following in a long tradition of anthropology and sociology (e.g., Mauss 1954), Hochschild reminds us that a gift is not a gift is not a gift, but rather it is a "profoundly social affair" whose evaluation depends on the particular social frames of reference applied to it.

Over the past ten years or so, as I have thought about a variety of different issues having to do with the livelihood strategies of single mothers, I have been particularly intrigued by notions similar to these— notions surrounding gift-giving (and gift-receiving), gratitude, and reciprocity. The lives of single mothers are almost invariably characterized by enormous constraint; they thus seem to be an especially appropriate setting in which to see how individuals balance their very real needs for help (of all kinds) from others with attempts to maintain a culturally appropriate response to the world.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, many single mothers are in transition—leaving one relationship with a partner and looking for a new relationship with another. Although some single mothers might prefer to remain single (or find another woman as their partner), recent research suggests that "a majority of unmarried women, including disadvantaged single and cohabiting

mothers, value marriage as a personal goal" (Lichter, Batson, and Brown 2004, 2). Single motherhood thus is an appropriate site in which to veer off from the direction Hochschild took of exploring different economies of exchange within the marital relationship over time to that of investigating how a broader trajectory of (romantic) relationships shapes the construction of gifts.

In this chapter, then, I'm going to put on new shoes to retread some ground I've walked before (Nelson 2004) in order to locate issues of relationships of single mothers with the men in their lives within the framework of gifts, gratitude, and exchange. At the broadest level, I ask this question: In what contexts and in what kind of exchanges is gratitude toward men evoked? More specifically, I ask: How does the frame of reference applied to men's actions shift as a relationship passes through different stages? Ideally, to answer these questions I would have longitudinal data, following individual women through the various stages of their relationships with men. Instead, I consider the comments that a number of different women each make at one point in time about men with whom they have been—or are currently—involved. Some women compare and contrast several different men in their lives; some focus only on a current or former partner. In analyzing the trajectory of relationships I piece together these different accounts of women's attitudes—toward the men with whom they lived (however briefly) prior to spending some time as a single mother, toward men they are dating, and toward men with whom they are cohabiting. At the end of the chapter, I speculate on what might happen in the future if they marry these men. Throughout the discussion I focus (albeit not exclusively) on issues of child care and housework.

A note about gratitude. Gratitude has many synonyms: gratefulness, appreciation, thankfulness, thanks, acknowledgment, recognition, obligation, beholdenness, giving thanks, and thanksgiving. Its antonyms include ingratitude, ungratefulness, thanklessness, and unthankfulness. Somewhere between the two—or perhaps off to the side—lies a stance that we could call "taking for granted." That is, the absence of "gratitude" might not always mean that one is "ungrateful," but rather that one assumes the "gesture" as being appropriate but not creating thankfulness or an attitude of being beholden. As Hochschild (2003, 105) reminds us, "we appreciate many acts and objects that we take for granted. But we feel grateful for what seems to us extra. . . . Gratitude involves warmth, thankfulness, and a desire to return the favor." Thus, "gratitude adds to 'thanks' the feeling of an 'intense positive relationship with another person.'"

Conflicts in relationships arise when the two parties to an exchange have different stances toward an action: what one party believes is a gift is not acknowledged as such by another, is dismissed as a routine gesture and taken for granted, or is even rejected as being inappropriate or insufficient. As we all know from our personal lives—as well as from our scholarly ones—interpersonal exchange is a minefield of competing interpretations and misunderstandings.

In what follows, I explore different stages of the relationships single women have with the men in their lives. I focus on how actions are perceived by only one

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