

Gertraud Koch, Stefanie Everke Buchanan (eds.)

PATHWAYS TO EMPATHY

*New Studies on Commodification, Emotional Labor,
and Time Binds*

campus

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Edited by Irene Götz, Gertraud Koch, Klaus Schönberger and Manfred Seifert

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Pathways to Empathy

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This book is dedicated to

Arlie Russell Hochschild

In the 30 years since the publication of her ground-breaking *The Managed Heart*, she has passionately pursued the seismographic detection of subtle shifts and cumulative changes at the interface of our working and private lives, fuelled by the creeping commodification of our everyday relationships. Each of the contributors to this edited collection shares the common experience of being intellectually inspired by her perceptive, articulate commentaries, with their wealth of pioneering and innovative ideas.

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Introduction: Getting There: From Impediments to Pathways to Empathy¹

Gertraud Koch and Stefanie Everke Buchanan

Across Europe and the United States of America, over the last decades, we hear an ever louder call for an expansion of the market, reduced regulation, and shrinking of government services. Indeed, in the eyes of many, the market can do no wrong, and the government—outside of its military function—can do little right. Since the 1970s, we have witnessed the rise of global corporate giants, the reduced power of labor unions and increased co-optation of governments by business. To be sure, market forces have risen alongside other trends—the rise of science, technology and a rationalization of life reflected in all parts of life (Larsen 2011; Löfgren 2006 on meta-narrative). Taken as a whole, the free-market *zeitgeist* has produced a powerful—and as yet under-theorized—impact on our lives. As a *worker*, the pre-Fordist employee is now the post-Fordist “entre-ployee”. She assumes risks and lives with insecurity like an entrepreneur. But she works for a boss, like an employee. As a *consumer*, the individual who once turned to family, friends and church to meet personal needs now turns—in the absence of government services—to market services, i. e., to babysitters, eldercare workers, for pay dating services, life coaches. As *private individuals*, we draw from a market-colonized culture, ideas and images of the self. The individual is advised to develop a “personal brand”. The internet dater is advised to count his “R.O.I”, i. e., return on investment. All this takes place within a larger culture of “blur” between companies seeking to add emotional appeal to the goods and services they sell, and individuals who seek to draw useful tips for successful living from the market (Illouz 2007). Workers bring to work personal ideas, tastes, habits. And for its part, the workplace exercises great

¹ We would like to express our gratitude to a number of individuals for their help in the realization of this volume. Paul Brook was a constant source of advice and inspiration throughout the project. Anja Lesche was indispensable with her formidable organizational skills. Teresa Stumpf and Anne Kruse diligently and carefully checked the bibliographies and analyzed the manuscripts for the index. And Spring Gombé-Götz and Dr. Katrin Götz-Votteler proofread all articles with remarkable professional care and attention to detail.

influence over every aspect of the private individual (Moldaschl and Voss 2002; Hochschild 1983, 2003; Sieben and Wettergren 2010).

Arlie Hochschild has studied the impact of capitalist forces on intimate life in many ways and from many perspectives. Her work carves an important path between those who barely acknowledge capitalism at all, and those who acknowledge it but assume that its influence is always alienating. Especially in *The Outsourced Self* (2012), she describes a large and well-occupied space for resistance. Adapting Freud's notion of "mechanisms of defense" she describes the various semi-conscious means through which individuals work to *keep personal life personal*. A woman pays a love coach to guide her through the many small acts of looking for love on Match.com—picking a photo to post, a subject line, a self-description, for example. But when the coach says, "Shall I scan the replies you get on line" she says, "No, I'll do that, because when I find my true love I want to tell him that that *it was I* who found him." She purchases a whole service, but elevates one act to symbolize her un-outsourced self. Or a middle-aged daughter comes to love the caretaker she hires to care for her elderly, brain-injured father, and so loves the father *through* an empathic reach to a proxy caregiver. In these ways and more, people carve out ways to detach themselves from a culture of detachment so often connected to market life. They protect both their autonomy and sense of relatedness to others.

In line with this new emphasis in Hochschild's perspective, the authors of these essays are interested in the contradictions, counter moves, resistances and the daily practices individuals use to cope with the promise and demands of the market. For indeed, there are limits to market influence, as Collin Williams shows (2005). To what degree does the individual draw a line between self and the myriad everyday manifestations of market culture? By what feeling rules does he or she say, I will be emotionally attached to this, but I will be detached from that? In addition to rules about *what* to feel—happy, anguished, sad—we encounter rules about *how much* to feel—or even whether to feel anything at all. Given these rules of attachment and detachment, what emotion work does an individual perform in an effort to abide by this rule? Sometimes at a certain point in an interaction, an individual will encounter a moment of anxiety—he is too detached, alienated—and he will counter it using various mechanisms of defense (Hochschild 2011, 2012). At other times, in the quest for efficiency, he finds himself too emotionally attached. ("I don't need to be best friends with the babysitter or have drinks with the dog-walker" one respondent told Hochschild.) It is

through our various personal rules of engagement, Hochschild argues, that we regulate capitalism from inside.

It is the purpose of this collection to explore the complex forces of commodification and the many ways we embrace it, resist it and “muddle through”. We aim to delineate the strategies by which the individual asserts the un-alienated self, and the public discourses available for trying to seem that way. We aim to theorize the collective strategies by which we might achieve a better balance of social spheres—market, governmental, civic, personal, and so articulate an alternate cultural world in which to assert a humane self.

This shift of perspective from impediments to pathways to empathy is the leading paradigm for the contributions in this volume. In their work, many of these authors have developed ideas about ways in which the individual counters commercialization and point to welcome and unexpected spaces of resistance. The contributions—literally in the sense of “paying tribute to”—demonstrate to how many areas the thoughts of Arlie Russell Hochschild have flowed over the past three decades, and show the wide variety of fields her work has influenced.

The Contributions

Leading into the topic, *Arlie Russell Hochschild* sketches *Empathy Maps* and develops a novel way of looking at ways in which we direct our empathy, zoning people in one area of life to receive much empathy, and those in another area of life, to receive little or any. While proposing a metaphor-driven idea we can apply to all spheres of life, it clearly applies to the division between commercial life (for which the cultural rule is emotional detachment) and personal life (for which the rule is attachment—care, empathy). She thus provides a connection with her detailed studies on the commodification of life in contemporary societies, and simultaneously assumes a changed perspective on them. Her mapping out of the borderlands between alienated and fulfilling lives calls forth the “credit” side of our lives—that which makes up for what commodification sometimes subtracts. Hochschild thus introduces us to a central antagonist who, in everyday life, can be against the depersonalizing effects of commodification.

Empathy is part of human nature, and we may feel it even in the heat of conflict. The feeling can be strong or mild, laced with ambivalence or pure. And there is a “sociology” to empathy. Some social categories of people feel it more than others—women more than men, for example. And we differ in aim—some social groups empathize with the poor, others empathize with the rich. Some cultures provide feeling rules that promote wide-spread, race-blind, empathy. Others don’t. Hochschild shows that the links to commodification are far more multi-faceted and contradictory than we might first assume. In her paper, she maps out a landscape full of pathways which individuals may take on their way to achieving a wide-zone marked for empathy with many others. Without ignoring or downplaying the constraints placed upon individuals by the rules of the post-Fordist world, she also points to a way forward and to strategies for achieving a more humane world.

The section “*Family and Work*” focuses on fields of tension between competing urgency systems of family and work. Competing demands lead to an almost unmanageable 24-hour day, as well as to an emotionally torn biography. The time in the age span between 30 and 45, which frequently sees the concurrent pursuit of career and family, is therefore often described as the rush hour of life. However, family life and work life are not always experienced as areas of tension. Depending on one’s own perspective, they can also be experienced as a mutually facilitating, harmonious unity, as demonstrated by two of the studies. The section thus draws a multifaceted image of time binds at home and at work, as well as of how these demands on our time are felt.

In her study on family and work life in the context of late-forming families in Spain, *Nancy Konvalinka* provides insight into the tight squeeze experienced in a societal setting in which traditional views on when to start a family compete with limits set by human biology and market realities. Using theoretical lenses derived from Bourdieu’s concepts such as *habitus* as well as the concept of the *life course*, she traces the interplay between emotion and economy and the strains that traditional expectations and new market realities pose and to which individuals feel they must respond on their own—either by arranging for a stay-at-home parent or hiring a caregiver. Either way, they spare the state the need to help out.

Using a highly unusual research strategy, *Jeremy Schulz* interviewed men who shared much in common—age, profession, marital status and devotion to their jobs. Only one thing differed: national culture. For one group were American and the other Norwegian, and each reflected a different “logic”

toward the deployment of time and energy. The Americans favored a logic of “use your time and energy until you get the job done”. They took little account of family and community and so used up their time and energy—revealing haunting parallels to the way in which America, as a nation, “uses up” such resources as oil. While equally motivated, the Norwegian men chose a more “sustainable” approach to their time and energy, mindful in the morning of their attachment to home and community in the evening.

In the study by *Caroline Ruiner*, family and work are experienced as positively related rather than contrary spheres of life by one of her survey groups. From their childhood in an entrepreneurial family, they derive the *cultural capital* to become self-employed and to experience the related temporal as well as risky aspects as positive. The other group of entrepreneurs who cannot draw on family experience in running a business, on the other hand, feels insecure about and overburdened with the demands placed upon them. She accounts for the emergence of both the fearless and fearful approaches to economic insecurity.

The contributions of the “*Labor Feelings*” section take their conceptual lead from emotional labor and feeling rules and develop suggestions how these could be expanded and rendered productive for empirical work. *Paul Brook* as a researcher who is particularly attuned to the spaces for independent action and the individual possibilities for resistance in connection with emotional labor presents the emotional capacity for labor as comparable to the capacity for physical and intellectual work. Like other forms of labor, Brook argues, emotional labor is characterized by indeterminacy and incomplete commodification. He develops a suggestion as to how Hochschild’s concept of emotional labor can be linked to the tradition of labor process analysis in a way that yields a unified framework for the conceptualization of and further research on the emotional, intellectual and physical capacity for work.

Wolfgang Dunkel and Margit Weibrich critique the idea of emotional labor, preferring to understand it as interactive service work. Here, too, the clients are involved in the work process and also perform emotional labor in the process of interaction. Dunkel and Weibrich thus sketch the emotion management described by Hochschild as progressive commodification in the service sector as a (new) mode of social relations which serves to provide exchange between people and does not exclusively or even primarily constitute burdensome or alienating moments of a work situation.

In her essay, *Gertraud Koch* takes up the concept of feeling rules for cultural anthropological research as it has so far received surprisingly little resonance in work culture research but has rather remained in the shadow of studies on emotional labor which were oriented at individual and socio-structural aspects. The text demonstrates and makes available the potential of the concept as a point of access for the cultural analysis of work contexts and demonstrates at which points it still requires further elaboration and development via empirically based theoretical work.

The section “*Emotion, Body Work and Autonomy*” gathers empirical case studies which open up their respective fields by use of Arlie Hochschild’s concepts from a variety of perspectives. *Sarah Braun* studies a hairdressing salon, and demonstrates through this research how the emotional labor includes a bodily dimension. The atmosphere at the salon, which is sketched as a part of the wellness arrangement in this service industry, also originates from the embodied work of the service providers, that is, the staff—for instance via the embodied moods of the service workers.

Emotional labor and body work also play a decisive role in the empirical field in which *Petra Schweiger* conducted her research on elder care work in a nursing home. In her thick description of the dilemma faced by carers as they encounter more demanding and rationalised conditions of work. She offers deep insight into how economization and rationalization undermine the workers ability to relate humanely with clients. It is in light of these conditions, she argues, that workers employ strategies in order to benefit patients.

In her study of freelancers in the media, *Birgit Huber* argues that the media sector is part of the service sector. But as a part of the creativity industry, it also plays by different rules than those that operate in the trade, care or the wellness sectors. Self-employed web designers can delimit work and private life as they chose, Huber finds, enabling them to actively design life according to their own preferences. Here, clients become friends, and friends turn into customers. The dissolution of boundaries in work and life forms in a self-employed, creative occupation is presented as one opportunity to gain autonomy and lead a largely self-determined life.

Finally in the section “*Scientific Reception*”, *Irene Götz* completes the arc from the introductory sketches of Hochschild’s empathy maps by sketching the reception of Hochschild’s work in work culture research as a fruitful intellectual exchange. With her infallible sense for empirical fields, in which cultural changes can be “captured” empirically, Hochschild has instigated

cultural anthropological research over many years. The contribution reads as an homage to Arlie Russell Hochschild, her ingenious, imaginative, holistic perspective on work, her remarkable contentual power for inspiration, as well as to the exemplary methodological approaches, particularly for cultural anthropological work research, which she has found.

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Empathy Maps¹

Arlie Russell Hochschild

The world is in a race, Jeremy Rifkin argues in his book *The Empathic Civilization*. On the “good” team are all the forces pressing each of us to feel empathy for all other people—and indeed all living creatures—on earth.² On the “bad” team are forces which accelerate global warming, destabilize the eco-system on which earthly life depends, causing strife, fear, and a search for enemies. Which team gets to the goal line first, he notes, is up to those alive today.

The market economy is a player in this race—on both teams. On one hand, by setting up networks of cooperating parties, market growth encourages the development of a thin layer of empathy—at least enough to assure peace—in order to conduct business and increase wealth.³ In this way, the market is on the “good” empathy-enhancing team. On the other hand,

1 This essay is happily reprinted with the permission of the author. It was originally published in Arlie Hochschild (2013): *So How's the Family? and Other Essays*. Berkeley: UC Press.

2 In *The Empathic Civilization: the Race to Global Consciousness in a World Crisis*, Jeremy Rifkin (2009) argues that through the broad swath of human history, we have increased—indeed, begun to globalize—our empathy for other people. Some evidence for this comes from the Harvard psychologist, Steven Pinker who argues in his book, *The Better Angels of Our Nature*, that over the centuries, violence has decreased—including tribal warfare, homicide, cruel punishments, child abuse, animal cruelty, domestic violence, lynching, pogroms, and international and civil wars. This Pinker attributes to a growing exercise of self control, reason and empathy. Still, in 2011, we should note no fewer than 37 armed conflicts in the world, in each one of which 25 or more died as a cause of battle during the year. In 2011, thousands died. But eons ago, the proportion of people killed in the armed conflict of tribal societies was ten times greater, Pinker argues. War-related deaths as a proportion of modern populations are about a tenth as high as they once were when the world's people lived in tribes (Uppsala, University Sweden, Department of Peace and Conflict Research, <http://www.pcr.uu.se/research/ucdp/definitions>; Themner and Wallerstein 2012; Azar 2012).

3 As Adam Smith observed in *The Wealth of Nations*, “Little else is requisite to carry a state to the highest degree of opulence from the lowest barbarism, but peace, easy taxes, and a tolerable administration of justice.” Smith famously argued that self-interest was glue

economic over-development—with its gas-belching industrial smoke stacks, toxic wastes, and accumulation of discarded goods—proceeds headlong and heedless of the welfare of future generations.⁴ The market also creates gross inequalities both within nations and between them, causing a sense of injustice, envy and conflict.⁵ In these ways, the market is also on the “bad” team.

How could we win this race? By extending lines of empathy between the Midwestern industrialist and the worried resident of a sinking Maldivian island in the rising tide of global warming. By drawing links between the prosperous London businessman and the impoverished Soweto street vendor. By encouraging mothers to stand in the shoes of their children in the upper east side of Manhattan, of course, but also in the shoes of the children left back in Mexico by the Mexican nannies such mothers hire to care for their children. Empathy would have to go global. Harder still, perhaps, it would have to go local—three zip codes down the street, up or down the class ladder. It would have to cross barriers of class, race, and gender.

Hidden Evidence of Empathy

To ground such sweeping talk of empathy, we need to ask what empathy is, to wonder at its complexity, and to explore the hidden patterns it sometimes fits. We need to look at maps. But how can we understand these? Clues can be surprisingly indirect. For decades, researchers had been finding that more women than men said they were depressed, and two researchers, Ronald Kessler and Jane McLeod, wondered why (see Weissman and Klerman 1977; Kessler and McLeod 1984; Nolen-Hoeksema 1987; Piccinelli and Wilkinson 2000). The prevailing theory in the 1980s was that women were more “vulnerable to life-event effects” because of their poor “coping strategies” (Kessler and McLeod 1984: 621). But if this were the case, why would women cope better than men—as they do—with financial bad news, a spouse’s death, and

strong enough to bind buyer to seller, but some small measure of trust and empathy is surely also required (Smith 2003: 776).

4 See Chapter 2, “From Consumer Book to Ecological Bust” in Juliet Schor’s *Plenitude: the New Economics of True Wealth*, New York: Penguin Press, 2010.

5 In addition, the expansion of the market has greatly widened the gap between rich and poor in the world, creating envy and hardship. As Adam Smith noted, “An industrious and upon that account a wealthy nation, is of all nations the most likely to be attacked” (Smith 2003: 887).

after an initial period, with separation and divorce (see Kessler and McLeod 1984: 620; Gove 1972; Barnett et al. 1987):⁶

Then the researchers found that when exposed to the same disturbing events in the lives of immediate family and friends—death, accident, illness, divorce or separation, losses in love—women more than men talked about and responded strongly to them. Men knew as much about these events as women did, the researchers surmised, but they didn't discuss them as often or respond as strongly.

Women also participated in wider circles of support. More unhappy, lost, ill people came to them than to men, and the women invited them to do so. When respondents were asked to describe “who helped them during the last period in their life when they needed help with a serious problem [...] women [were] between 30 and 50 percent more likely than men to be mentioned as helpers” (Kessler and McLeod 1984: 628). And more than men, women reached out to others for support—often to other women. So as friends and family sought out women more than men as confidants, especially in times of crisis, women came to hold—to remain mindful of—more stories of distress (see Kessler and McLeod 1984: 629). To some people, it seems to me, holding a story of distress signaled a readiness to help. For others, it was the holding onto painful knowledge alongside another person that *was* the help.

Men were as upset as women by serious life crises that occurred to their *spouses* and *children*. Yet beyond that group, men didn't report getting as distressed as women did (see Kessler and McLeod 1984: 629; Fischer 1982; Gove et al. 1983). So women in this study of Americans of the 1980s were not just feeling down about their *own* bad news, or even their own husband's and children's bad news, but about the bad news of *others* in their larger circle of family and friends. There, they were the designated empathizers—the ones others relied on to stay tuned in.⁷ They held in mind the sad news of these others. They charted larger empathy maps.

6 Married women also reported higher rates of depression than single or divorced women and the question was, again, why? Did married women cope less well with life than unmarried ones, the researchers wondered? Others speculated that women had been dealt a more depressing role in marriage than men had been, or even that depression-prone women were more drawn to marriage than their counterparts.

7 In her forthcoming book on rich and poor families living in Silicon Valley, Marianne Cooper (2013) compares the way rich and poor define and handle economic insecurities. In the working class, women in poor families become the family's “designated worriers”—the ones who wake up at night with nightmares about paying the bills—while, in the upper-class, it is mainly men who take on this kind of worry.

But why did the news of others depress women? Maybe because people have a greater need to share bad news than good, and bad news is harder to hold, so women get more of it, and feel more blue because of it. Or maybe women's depression had nothing to do with their wider circle of concern but with other matters—like the fact that everyone needs to feel mothered, and that many women feel less mothered by men than men feel by women. Whatever is going on with depression, the key discovery here is something else—the different shapes of men's and women's empathy maps.

A 2002 study of over 1,000 people—part of the General Social Survey, a large, nationally-representative U.S. survey—casts a broader light on such maps. Compared to men, women more often described themselves as “soft-hearted”, reported themselves feeling touched by events that they saw happen, and found themselves feeling “tender concerned feelings” for people less fortunate than they.⁸ They also held more altruistic values than men, agreeing more strongly, for example, that “people should be willing to help others who are less fortunate”. Studies show that in close personal situations, women are much more likely to focus on emotion, to offer and seek emotional support and to use “highly person-centered comforting messages” to help people feel better (Smith, Tom 2003: 647 quoting Burleson and Kunkel 2006). The same was found in studies of young girls and boys (see Smith, Tom 2003: 648). Women make up some three-quarters of caregivers for older relatives and friends, and two-thirds of those caring for grandchildren. Women are somewhat more likely to donate their kidneys (58 percent versus men's 42 percent). And the Yad Vashem archive of data on non-Jews honored for rescuing Jews shows that while men and women helped in equal numbers, among non-married people, more women helped than men (see Smith, Tom 2003: 649; Taylor 2003; Leyens et al. 2007). At work, women predominate in the caring professions—they make up 98 percent of kindergarten teachers, 79 percent of social workers, and 92 percent of registered

8 The National Altruism Study, based on data collected from 1,366 people in the 2002 General Social Survey, is one of the few nationally-representative studies we have of empathy (Smith 2003). The report found empathy, altruistic values and helping behaviors all fairly common among Americans. According to the study, three-quarters of Americans said they were “often touched by things that happen,” and are “pretty soft-hearted” (p. 3). Forty-three percent “feel selfless caring for others on most days or more often,” and 33 percent feel it “once in a while or less often” (p. 3). The study distinguished between altruistic values (agreeing, for example, that it is personally important to assist those in trouble) and altruistic behavior (giving directions, letting someone cut in line, talking to a depressed person, loaning items). Women tended to hold more altruistic values, but they didn't perform more altruistic acts, than men (p. 12). Also see Bernard 1981.

nurses (see Eagley 2009: 649). Maybe because women have babies, evolution gives them an empathy advantage, or maybe it's because the culture encourages empathy more in girls than boys, or maybe both.

But that doesn't mean men don't help other people. In fact, many other studies concluded that, without being asked, men perform more public altruistic *acts* than women (see Eagley 2009: 646–647). They offer directions to the lost. They give up their seats in the bus. They let people cut into line. They gave money to a stranger for the subway. Men received 91 percent of the Carnegie Hero Fund Commission awards given between 1904 and 2008 and 87 percent of the Medal of Bravery awards given out by the Canadian government (see Eagley 2009: 647). So while men aren't the biggest empathizers, they sometimes save the day.

Words, Meanings, Causes of Empathy

We say we “stand in another's shoes.” But what exactly are we *doing*, *feeling* and *thinking* when we stand this way? We see through the other's eyes. We feel as they do. We say to ourselves, “What has happened to you *could* happen to me.” And as we imagine this, we are often doing such things as looking a person in the eye, listening closely. We feel curious. Or we come to feel empathy for certain categories of stranger we learn about from others through word of mouth, newspaper, television, a film, a play, or a book.

Empathy differs from feeling—or being held as—responsible for another (see Fischer 1982; 2011; Wellman and Berkowitz 1988; Wellman and Wortley 1990). A nephew might pay a dutiful visit to a grumpy uncle but lack empathy for him. In *All Our Kin*, Carol Stack describes “*kinscription*”, whereby some members of poor black families were delegated to care for others (see Stack 1974). The child of an ill parent is sent to live with a childless aunt. A neighborhood orphan is taken in by his grandmother's friend from church. A family looks after a lonely neighbor. One accepts the possibility of a kin assignment. A responsibility is assigned, and empathy is expected to follow.

But empathy doesn't always lead to caring action. A 27-year-old single photographer I interviewed described his feelings upon learning that his dear friend had been diagnosed with cancer. He was grief-stricken but didn't feel it was his role to help. “I wasn't the first person Steven called”, the photographer remembered. “That was his sister, and then a female friend of his and