

Key Pedagogic Thinkers

Arlie Russell Hochschild

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Professor Emerita of Sociology at the University of California, Berkeley, Arlie Russell Hochschild is the author of *The Time Bind, So How's the Family?*, *The Second Shift* and *The Commercialization of Intimate Life*, among many other writing achievements, and the co-editor of *Global Woman: Nannies, Maids and Sex Workers in the New Economy*. Her area of expertise is what might be called the sociology of emotion, and her influential work has been translated into sixteen languages. Having written at length about 'emotion work' and how it affects the crossover points between professional engagement and family life, the author was recognized critically in 2011 with a collection entitled *At the Heart of Work and Family: Engaging the Ideas of Arlie Hochschild* – a volume that explores the conceptual frameworks that Hochschild has developed since her groundbreaking work, *The Managed Heart* (1983). A second festschrift – *Pathways to Empathy: new studies on commodification, emotional labor and time binds* – appeared in 2013.

Because *The Managed Heart* was my own first introduction because this book invites the reader to think about his own emotions, I began my interview with the author (conducted by email in the last quarter of 2014) by asking her about her feelings when she reflects on the volume now.

'Emotion and emotion management felt like such an un-seeable thing to theorize. And yet, when I put it out there, the people I interviewed instantly recognized it. So we have areas of our mind, I learned, in which we know what we know, but also areas in which we sense we *could* know – and we shouldn't be afraid to go there. I'm still thinking about it. *The Outsourced Self* is like a tour through different forms of it, and different ways in which it's received, and an essay in *So How's the Family?* explores whether emotional labor can be fun.

Are the issues described in the book every bit as relevant in today's workplace?

'Oh, I actually think it's become more relevant—given the continuing growth of the service sector. In 2012, Alicia Grandey and her co-authors, in their book on emotional labor¹, report finding 10,000 mentions in academic articles, of emotional labor or labour and its unpaid form, 'emotion work.' Half of these appeared since 2006 and 506 with the term in the title.

The Managed Heart explores the emotional labour of airline hostesses. I asked the author to consider a situation in which she was about to start writing the book today. Would she choose the same or different industries to concentrate on?

'I would start with the airline industry,' was the response, 'but I'd add to it interviews with workers who do ever more specialized kinds of emotional labor (hospice workers, job transition coaches, high school vice principals who specialize in discipline) and I'd take it global.'

Is the concept of emotional labour fundamentally the same or fundamentally different when we take modern advances in technology into account?

¹ *Emotional Labor in the 21st Century: Diverse Perspectives on Emotion Regulation at Work* (Routledge)

‘It’s both the same and different. Advanced technology makes possible the job of a commercial surrogate. Like an airline flight attendant, she’s working on her feelings. But the nature of those feelings is very different, and more central is the theme of emotional detachment. How does such a worker deal with her attachment to her body, her baby, the intended parent – technology has put all that into question. So I would explore the feeling rules governing emotive attachment and detachment. I think a lot of young people learn to feel attached in states of apparent detachment. They project—a form of deep acting. So I would explore the entire structure of feeling rules, and the emotion work they call us to do.’

Hochschild’s talk of projection was serendipitous: I had planned to ask the author about her views on contemporary psychoanalysis. I wrote: ‘You mention Freud explicitly in *The Managed Heart* and you allude to other concepts in psychoanalysis. Was Freud and/or psychoanalysis a big influence on the development of your thought? How do you feel about the psychoanalytic field nowadays?’

‘Many of Freud’s foundational ideas have seeped into everyday 20th and 21st Century thinking, and into my own. Indeed, I’ve been strongly influenced by his work both indirectly – through what other writers incorporate from him – and directly, through my early close study of his works, and through my personal encounter with psychiatry. Certain ideas I find invaluable – his ideas about the unconscious, the normality of ambivalence, the importance of fantasy, his theory of the formation of character, the ego’s mechanisms of defence. The core ideas transferable to social scientists are well described by Neil Smelser in the *Social Edges of Psychoanalysis*². Even when Freud seemed to me wrong – in his views of the death wish, the instinct-sapping effect of civilization itself, his misunderstanding of women, for example – I am still inspired by the sheer range of his curiosity and daring. Like Marx, Freud was a big thinker, and a welcome antidote to a sadly blinkered behaviourism and rational choice theory of our day. They tacitly express detachment; Freud helps us analyze detachment.

‘My own work focuses on the interplay between semi-conscious feeling rules and feelings (ego and superego—to use his language). I also believe that we’re often unaware of the conventions we live by and how managed our feelings are, all in the service of maintaining larger structural logics. I’m also very interested in myth and denial – ways in which we don’t really dare to know what’s really going on. You could say that I’m interested in uncovering the sociological unconscious. So yes, we need to build on Freud, not dismiss him.’

In addition to her work with airline staff, Hochschild has conducted work all over the world and her work on nannies and surrogates is fascinating. I wondered if there were any findings that could be generalised as specifically those found in mainly English-speaking countries. Would the results be similar to those in *The Managed Heart* if the work forces in question were Australian or British, for example?

‘There are cultural variations in emotional labor to be sure: Australian or British workers probably don’t cram their psyches under the ‘friendliness norm’ quite as much as American workers do. And Indian, Sri Lankan, Mexican and Filipina nannies surely experience different feeling rules—I talk about that in my essay ‘Love and Gold’³ – but I think we know far too little about those variations; I’d love to see us do more work on such cultural variations.’

Not that geographical considerations are the only ones to take into account, as Hochschild is keen to explain.

² University of California Press, 1999.

³ Available at: http://sfoonline.barnard.edu/work/hochschild_01.htm

‘With the growing gap between the rich and poor in the U.S and other nations, I believe we are witnessing an increasing split between emotional labor for the rich and emotional labor for the poor. For the rich we are seeing more services offering great deference, and sensitivity to the wishes of the client – this is in the attitudes of maids, nannies, doormen, life coaches, birthday and wedding planners. Meanwhile, in the wake of tax cuts and service cut backs, the service providers for the poor are able to offer less and less emotional labor. In government-funded schools in the US, class sizes are going up, and the emotional labor of teachers is stretched farther. With staff cuts in welfare offices, and the unemployment benefit office, waits are longer, tempers sometimes shorter. So with the growing inequality in the US, there is a parallel inequality in the provision of emotional labor. Some see this inequality as ‘natural’ and unproblematic – they feel no indignation, anguish or guilt – and others respond to this inequity with great distress. I’m currently working on emotion management and political world views. Stay tuned.’

The mention of political world views and a reference to TV made me wonder if Arlie Hochschild would have anything to say in response to immediate current affairs. ‘It will probably come as no surprise,’ I wrote, ‘that the recent shootings of a black male youth and then a black boy are big news on British TV and radio channels at the moment. Are you able to view these occurrences (and those like them) through the academic lens that you have developed? Or to put it another way, what is your take on what you have seen recently? Do you have a theory? And why do you imagine that we (in the UK) are so fascinated by your gun crimes? I would love to read your thoughts on this. We have violent parts of the UK and most of the time the stories go unreported.’

‘The policeman that shot Michael Brown said Brown was ‘like Hulk Hogan (a fictional figure of terror).’ In other words, he’s describing his personal sense of being threatened and afraid. And as the first witness up, he drew the Grand Jury into the story of his fear. That policeman is a frontline worker *vis a vis* a suppressed minority, even as the flight attendant is a frontline worker *vis a vis* an affluent air traveller. But an officer’s job – as it should be – is to *manage* fear, and to de-escalate the fear/anger of the so-called perpetrator. The policeman’s job is emotion management. The jury in the Brown case had an initial limited ‘sympathy margin’ for thieves, and Michael Brown had stolen a small item (Candace Clark’s concept of a sympathy margin).⁴

‘In addition to this, there was a structural set up that inspires among blacks and white liberals a deep distrust of the police. In light of that distrust, certain practices stand out. The policeman should have been the last witness up, not the first. The District Attorney should not have handled the case, since he had a long history of cooperation with the police department. The police department itself should not have been all white! And not so heavily militarized. Why did the officer go for his gun first? Where was the Tazer? This distrust is a result of a long, sad, terrible history of racial incidents that laminate that distrust. So it’s not just the structural setup, but the lamination of injustices, the pile-up of instances over time that have created a predisposition to distrust. And the incident throws sudden light on that.

‘If the police have constructed one emotional regime (‘There is danger. We keep society safe. Blacks are the threat’), the community constructs a counter-emotional regime (‘The police are the criminals. They are racist. They target us’). It is built of collective feeling by an entire black community. Alice Goffman has written about how young black men live a life of hiding – in response to this emotional regime. And people see ‘truth’ through their emotional regime. So we live now with two truths about what happened.’

⁴ Cf. Candace Clark’s *Misery and Company: Sympathy in Everyday Life*, University of Chicago Press, 1998.

More and more industries in which communication is crucial are leaning towards movement in the online environment, rather than the face-to-face. Does Hochschild predict changes in how emotional labour will be displayed and deployed in years to come?

‘This is a wonderful observation,’ she replies. ‘Yes, many formerly face-to-face encounters are moving online. I think this shift is calling on users’ capacity to stretch – enlarge, extend, enhance – their emotive reactivity by projecting ideas onto their interlocutor. So we learn to personalize impersonal means of communications. (That ‘lol’ means he loves me.) At the same time, as internet communication becomes commonplace, it may have the effect of intensifying the effect of face-to-face interaction, making it ‘really something’ that we actually see each other.’

As we were approaching the end of our online time together, I was keen to ask the author to reflect on her work as a whole. I asked her to name important influences on her career to date.

‘I’d say it was a combination of my effort to stay attuned to my mother (a loving mother who also felt unfulfilled), listening to my psychoanalyst brother talk of how he analyzed patients (but also feeling locked out of it because I sensed he felt he owned it) and seeing poverty at close hand at age 12. When I was 12, my father was stationed as a diplomat in Israel and my parents and I drove to the ‘Old City’ of Jerusalem, the Arab section. I remember getting out of the car and seeing around the parking lot in front of the Kasbah, the walled market place, a series of beggars, a blind man with a stick, a child with no legs on a wooden board with wheels, malnourished children with little hair... Foreigner shoppers parked in this lot, so beggars gathered there. An older man who tended the cars took me aside and asked, ‘Your father is a diplomat in Israel, yes?’ I said ‘Yes.’ ‘Do you see how poor we are here? The US gives millions of dollars to Israel, and that is fine, but why doesn’t it give to us too?’ Well, my parents and I went into the Kasbah to buy a load of stuff for Christmas gifts, and came back to the car and drove off, but that question stuck with me. How do needs, compassion and politics line up? On the way home, from the back of the car, I remember asking my dad, ‘Why aren’t we also helping them?’ It’s astonishing how a five minute encounter can last a lifetime, and turn a life in a certain direction.’

I attempted to sum up Hochschild’s work myself. ‘One reading of your work might be that your books touch on themes of inner conflict and the resolution of inner conflict through states of falseness that we convince ourselves must be true because other people (in our family, in our job) behave in the same fashion. People teach themselves (or are taught) how to deal with their inner fears (or their perceptions of the same) more easily than when they are not in a physical state but are safe in the bliss of lies and self-delusion. (Others might use vodka, for example: self-delusion as a drug, sort of, but also as a means of protection. John Steiner’s work on *Psychic Retreats* (1993) springs to mind; perhaps you know it.)’

‘John Steiner’s work carries forward in a marvellous depth-psychological way, the kinds of moments I explore in my field work. In his kind and gentle way, he’s curious why a relationship with a patient has become mechanical, where there has been some turning away. A snail has gone back in its shell. I guess the moments that haunt me are ones in which the snail is out of its original shell but has formed another strange shell to prevent it from seeing what the world is really like. (Donald Winnicott spoke of how children develop a ‘false self’ when the adults in his or her world don’t accept the real self: poignantly, the false self becomes the only self that ‘works’ i.e. gets recognized.)

‘Reality-testing is a very fragile process, and we need to protect it with understanding and kindness... Marx spoke of ‘false consciousness’ (as if we’re absolutely sure what ‘real’ consciousness is, and of course we need to hold that more open). But he opens an important

door. Heading in the same direction from another starting point, Freud and Steiner speak of our psychic defences against painful truths. Marx is looking at the economic and social realities — and our ‘interests’ given those realities — and how we fail to see or act according to them. Steiner is looking at painful empathic ruptures caused by trauma of various sorts that force us back into ourselves defensively, and lead us not to look or take in what we see.

‘Then again, we have Sartre and De Beauvoir’s notion of *‘mauvaise foi,’* or bad faith, as an embrace of values that suppress authenticity. The place where all these ideas — false consciousness, psychic retreats, *mauvaise foi* — converge is hugely important. It’s a place to ask what’s going on. You could say that a lot of my work has focused on that point of convergence.

It’s important because we are all the time constructing stories about what’s true. These are not thin, flat ‘rational’ stories, though we always imagine they are. These are truths that we want to believe, or resist believing or force ourselves to believe. We have feelings about our stories, and our stories partly result from our feelings. *The Second Shift* focuses on family myths. *The Time Bind* talks about the hypothetical or potential self (the self ‘I would be’ if only I had time). *The Outsourced Self* describes a woman who writes out a family ‘mission statement’ and sees herself essentially as an enterprise. An essay in *So How’s the Family?* analyzes why people would be drawn to ‘brand’ themselves — that isn’t the explanation they give themselves for why they do that. So yes, you might say, I’m always circling around the psychic astigmatism and their social sources. Maybe I’m trying to be society’s optometrist.

Finally, I asked Arlie Russell Hochschild what she liked to read.

‘Fiction. I’ve just finished George Elliott’s *Middlemarch* and marvel at the last passages... concerning the heroine, Dorothea... a principled woman — whose altruism got in the way of seeing the emotional truth of her suitor — lost to history, and here’s how Elliott says goodbye to her:

‘...Her full nature, like that river of which Cyrus broke the strength, spent itself in channels which had no great name on the earth. But the effect of her being on those around her was incalculably diffusive; for the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs.’

We need to see life more as novelists do, through a rich, nuanced ‘emotions lens,’ and apply that lens high and low. Presidents, Generals, and CEOs; we need to read their empathy maps, infer their feeling rules, analyze their emotional regimes. And we need to do the same for the Dorotheas of modern life — migrant nannies, eldercare workers, nurse’s aides, grocery clerks and flight attendants. What sociology *adds* to fiction is concepts which help us correct for the psychic astigmatism of our culture and add empathy. Hopefully, we can then be wiser as we try to build a better world.

For more information on Arlie Russell Hochschild, please visit:
<http://sociology.berkeley.edu/professor-emeritus/arlie-r-hochschild>