

## ABSTRACT

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In this dissertation I place the trend of outsourcing what I refer to as “intimate affairs” - those activities necessary to reproduce both physically and emotionally what Habermas (1991 [1962]: 46-47) calls the “intimate sphere” (e.g. the preparation of food, housekeeping tasks, parenting, gift giving, etc.) – within a theoretical context by arguing that this type of outsourcing is best understood from the perspective of reflexive modernization theory. In particular, I argue that the outsourcing of intimate affairs is best seen as resulting from two processes that stand at the heart of reflexive modernization: the disembedding of the social world and the concomitant wave of individualization that has accompanied this development. But more than just reflecting these processes, I also argue that intimate outsourcing can be seen as promoting disembedding and individualization as well.

However, this dissertation also addresses a number of issues that, while being central to the debate over this topic, have largely been left unanswered. These include questions of what exactly is outsourcing and how it can be applied to

activities such as intimate affairs? It is also includes the question of what is new and/or historically unique about outsourcing in comparison to past practices where intimate affairs were outsourcing. As I show, answering these questions is important for placing this trend in a theoretical context.

In this dissertation I also critically evaluate a number of alternative theoretical accounts that have addressed to topic of outsourcing at the micro-level. As I show, while many of these theories have important insights in to this topic, they also have a number of significant limitations in accounting for the outsourcing of intimate affairs. In particular, I argue that most of these theories fail to place this type of outsourcing within a broad enough theoretical context. I show that such a context is offered by the theory of reflexive modernization theory and that many of the particular insights of these alternative theories can be integrated into the reflexive modernization perspective.

THE OUTSOURCING OF INTIMATE AFFAIRS

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## Dedication

To Ryan Lair who left us too soon.

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## Chapter 1: The Outsourcing of Intimate Affairs?

A husband was recently quoted in a *Star Tribune* column saying that “[he and his family are] outsourcing just about everything – cleaning, laundry, house maintenance and lawn care” (Palmer 2006). Sometime earlier a wife said something similar to *Regional Review*: “I outsource everything I possibly can”. She does this by hiring people to do her and her family’s housecleaning, yard work, grocery shopping, dry cleaning, film developing and other errands. Moreover, she often orders takeout or buys prepared meals to cut down on her time spent in the kitchen (Wasserman 1999). Maggie Jackson (2002: 69), a journalist for the Associated Press, has written on the increasing trend of “outsourcing domesticity” and wonders if “the outsourcing of just about every domestic activity” has led to “hotel living” at home while Sandholtz et al., (2004) in a discussion of “Outsourcing: Having it All, But Not Doing it All”, talk about a group that they call “outsourcers” who “achieve [a] work-life balance by off-loading responsibilities – usually in their personal lives – to free up time and energy for those areas they care most about”. These are “people who are so clear about their personal priorities that they hire out almost everything else” (ibid.). Barbara Ehrenreich (2002: 99-100) has noted how:

[t]he trend toward outsourcing the work of the home seems, at the moment, unstoppable. Two hundred years ago, women manufactured soap, candles, cloth, and clothing in their own homes... Not only have the skilled crafts, like sewing and cooking from scratch, left the home, but many of the “white-collar” tasks are on their way out too. For a fee, new firms like San Francisco-based Les Concierges and Cross It Off Your List in Manhattan will pick up your dry cleaning, baby-sit pets, buy groceries, deliver dinner, even do Christmas shopping. With other firms and individuals

offering to buy your clothes, organize your financial files, straighten your closets and drawers, and wait around in your home for the plumber to show up, why would anyone want to hold on to the toilet cleaning?

Specifically in terms of parenting, a recent edition of the *Wall Street Journal Online* begins “[i]t has come to this: It is now possible to outsource most aspects of parenting” (Stout 2005). A more recent story that ran on *CBS News* (2006) begins “[t]he term ‘outsourcing’ usually refers to U.S. companies sending work to other countries. But there’s a new form of outsourcing: parents hiring people to do things they are unwilling or unable to do for their kids” (e.g. teaching children how to ride their bike). The nightly news on the local *Fox* affiliate in New York and Connecticut ran a story entitled “Outsourcing Parenting?” exploring how parents are ‘outsourcing’ many parental functions. In a more satirical vein Zide et al. (2006) have explored, how, and at what cost, one could become the complete “Outsourced Parent” in their “hands-free, do-nothing, price-is-no-object guide to rearing a child from conception to college”. This article asks a basic question; “[h]ow much would it cost to replace yourself entirely for eighteen years until your child's driver drops him off at the dorm?”. The answer is that for a mere \$4,184,633 one could outsource virtually all aspects of parenting from basic care to “more-advanced child-rearing functions...such as shopping for clothing, going on college visits, and even initiating those awkward talks about, well, you know” (ibid).

But it has not just been media that has talked about how personal and family affairs are being, presumably in an increased fashion, outsourced. Academics and even government agencies have noted this trend as well. For example, the *Occupational Outlook Quarterly* (2000: 32) has noted that one of the central drivers of job growth in

the service sector of the American economy has “been a shift in work done in the home from family members to service workers. Like employers, families are either ‘contracting out’ or bypassing altogether some of the work they used to do themselves”. Esther de Ruijter, both alone and with a series of co-authors (de Ruijter 2001, de Ruijter 2004; de Ruijter et al. 2003; de Ruijter et al. 2005; van der Lippe et al. 2004), has explored outsourcing at the household level in a variety of contexts and has attempted to account for this development using a variety of rational choice and statistical models. Similarly, Bittman et al. (1999) have explored the “changing boundary between home and market” as domestic labor is outsourced in Australia.

These works connect with a broader, and generally older, literature that, while not always using the term “outsourcing” explicitly, or something similar (e.g. “subcontracting” or “contracting out” ), nevertheless, explore the increased use of the service sector by individuals and family members (Bellante and Foster 1984; Soberon-Ferrer and Dardis 1991; Yen 1993; Oropsea 1993; Zick and McCullough 1996). Cohen (1998) has explored how the use of such services varies by gender, class, and race-ethnicity.

Blair-Loy (2001, 2003) has explored how more recent cohorts of mothers entering time-intensive careers have had to engage in what she calls “distant mothering”- i.e. a strategy of mothering that involves “subcontracting” out many tasks because of their “recurrent physical absences from the home due to long workdays and frequent business trips” (Blair-Loy 2001: 701). Along similar lines, Arlie Hochschild has noted how mothers in two-income couples, in the absence of a helpful spouse, will employ a number of “commercial substitutes for jobs a mother once did at home” (Hochschild 2003b: 254;

cf. also Hochschild 1997). More generally, Hochschild has explored how a “culture of outsourcing” is seeping into our personal lives affecting “yesteryear’s family roles” and “our feelings about intimate life” (Hochschild 2005: 77; cf. also Hochschild 2003a).

Outsourcing has become an increasingly popular, albeit controversial, topic in the American cultural milieu. Originating in the 1970’s, outsourcing generally refers to how businesses, instead of making a good or performing a service for themselves, will purchase these goods and/or services from an external supplier. In other words, it is the giving over of goods and/or services once produced/performed in-house to an outside entity. However, the issue of outsourcing often takes on a significance beyond that of a simple transfer of economic activities as it is often associated with the idea of loss either on a personal scale (e.g. ‘I lost my job to outsourcing’) or a national one (‘American jobs are being lost as they are outsourced to foreign countries’) (cf. Dobbs 2004). Indeed, it is this fear of loss that has generated so much concern over the topic of outsourcing (Drezner 2004).

It is with similar concerns in mind that a growing number of persons are beginning to ask if our personal matters and family affairs are being “outsourced” as more and more persons and families are giving over aspects of their lives, many aspects being “traditionally”<sup>1</sup> associated with the home, to the market for their performance. Indeed, all of the works cited at the beginning of this chapter in one way or another make this argument – i.e. that aspects of life are, or are increasingly, being outsourced. But in making this charge, these works tend to raise more questions than they answer. For

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<sup>1</sup> As will be seen below, this “traditional” conception of family life overlooks the extent to which affairs of the home have historically been given over to others to perform. This is not to say that there is nothing new with outsourcing. Rather, it is to say that the only way to see what is truly unique about outsourcing is by placing it within its proper historical context.

example, what does it mean to “outsource” personal matters and is it even appropriate to speak of outsourcing, a business practice, in the context of personal and family life? If so, what is entailed in this process of outsourcing and, if intimate affairs can truly be outsourced, is this something that is really new or just simply a new label for an old practice? The upper-class, for example, has a long tradition of using maids and other hired help to support their lifestyle. Is this an example of outsourcing? If it is, did this type of outsourcing predate that being employed in the business world? These are just a few of the questions that are left largely unanswered<sup>2</sup> in the claim that, what I shall refer to as “intimate affairs”, are being outsourced.

So while there has been work that has brought the issue of the outsourcing of intimate affairs to the fore, both within sociology and outside of it, there is still a great need for a more comprehensive study of this issue. This is particularly the case in terms of placing this development within a theoretical perspective. While some of the works cited above do indeed account for this kind of outsourcing through various social-theoretical perspectives (e.g. rational choice theory [de Ruijter], commodification [Hochschild], econometrics [Soberon-Ferrer and Dardis 1991]), many others are only descriptive in nature noting the trend and/or trying to measure its extent.

In this dissertation I will place the development of this kind of outsourcing within a more comprehensive theoretical context that can account for how this type of outsourcing has come about on the scale at which it has (and also why this type of outsourcing is likely continue, if not increase, into the near future). I will do this by arguing that the outsourcing of intimate affairs is best understood from the perspective of

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<sup>2</sup> A number of works, while touching upon these issues, do so only in passing. This means that while they raise one or a number of these issues, they do not investigate these issues in an in-depth manner. One of the goals of this dissertation is to address these issues in a more systematic manner.

the theory of reflexive modernization. Reflexive modernization is a school of thought that argues that modernity in its “late”, “liquid”, or “reflexive” form has disembedded social actors and actions from their “traditional roles and constraints” found in earlier societies only to see them ‘re-embedded’ in other, more fluid, “forms of reintegration and control” such as the labor market, educational institutions, and systems of consumption (Beck in Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002: 202 and 203 respectively) . Seen in this light, outsourcing is an example of activities that were once rooted in intimate and family life being disembedded from this context and reincorporated into another social structure - the market. Standing at the heart of this theory is what has come to be known as the “individualization thesis” (Beck 1992), a theory that argues that accompanying the disembedding activities of modernity in its reflexive form is a wave of individualization that has given individuals a much wider scope of discretion in ordering aspects of their lives than was the case in the past. I argue that this kind of individualization is both a *reflection* and a *promoter* of the type of outsourcing discussed here.

The decision to use the reflexive modernization perspective as a lens to understand intimate outsourcing was made for a number of reasons. For one, this theory highlights a number of general social processes that I argue are operating in the particular case of outsourcing (e.g. the outsourcing of intimate affairs can be seen as a specific example of the more general process of disembedding highlighted by reflexive modernization theorists). A second reason is that elements of this theory help to explain some of the limitations that other theories have had when they have been applied to intimate outsourcing. To take one example, theories of commodification, while highlighting how companies are actively seeking to capitalize intimate affairs and make a



business of them, cannot explain how and why intimate affairs have come to be commodified now as opposed to the past or in the future. I argue that reflexive modernization theory can account for this situation, and that the commodification of intimate affairs is happening now as a result of individualization ‘opening up’ the intimate sphere to the forces of the market. The last reason I chose to use reflexive modernization to explore intimate outsourcing is that it provides a more comprehensive perspective from which to understand this issue than do other theories. That is, while other theories are often able to capture specific aspects of this development, I argue that a more complete picture of outsourcing comes from this perspective. For example, a number of works (e.g. Hochschild 1997; Jacobs and Gerson 2004) have noted how at least some families are increasingly time-starved and this is related to the fact that more women have entered the labor market. What these works miss is accounting for why women have increasingly chosen and/or been forced to work. Such an account is, I argue, offered by reflexive modernization theory and it relates to how individualization has created an overall dependency on the labor market for both men and women with its promise of “a life of one’s own”.

All that being said, I do not believe that reflexive modernization theory does, nor can it, explain the whole of intimate outsourcing. At the same time, other theories of outsourcing offer particular insights into this development that reflexive modernization either overlooks or only touches upon. As such, while demonstrating the overall utility of this theory for understanding intimate outsourcing and the unique insights that come from it, I will also integrate and synthesize aspects from theories where these better shed light on this issue.

Before doing this, however, it is first important to sketch a general outline of the reflexive modernization perspective and this will take place in the rest of this chapter. After this, it is then important to explore outsourcing and some of the basic questions associated with this subject. For example, the basic questions of what is outsourcing and how can this concept, originally derived from the business world, be applied to what I shall refer to as intimate affairs? The former is a particularly important question for even in the business literature outsourcing is defined in multiple, and sometimes contradictory, ways. This is equally true when this concept is extended from the business context to the more micro-level context of personal and family life with the result that there are, at times at least, confusions over what exactly constitutes outsourcing. Without a clear and consistent definition of outsourcing, placing this issue within a theoretical context has the potential to become muddled with confusion such that it becomes unclear what exactly people are referring to when they speak about outsourcing. This will be the subject of Chapter 2. In this same chapter, the contours and contexts of outsourcing will be explored to show which intimate affairs are being outsourced today, by whom, and for what reasons.

Outsourcing, as it is defined here, is a relatively new/historically unique phenomenon in reference to intimate affairs, and the goal of Chapter 3 is to show ways in which this is so. It should be noted that what is new about outsourcing is not that this is the first time that intimate affairs have been performed by others; in fact, the use of others in performing intimate affairs has not been uncommon in the past. What is new is both the *increased scope* of how many affairs are being transferred today (at least in relation to recent past) and *how* they are being transferred (i.e. with outsourcing these transfers are

being given over to different entities, in different ways, and in different contexts than was the case in the past).

In chapter 4 I will explore alternative accounts of outsourcing (i.e. those accounts of outsourcing other than from a reflexive modernization perspective). As was mentioned above, some work has been done in this area, particularly by Hochschild (2003a, 2003b, 2005) and those using a rational choice perspective (Becker 1993; de Ruijter 2001, de Ruijter 2004; de Ruijter et al. 2003; de Ruijter et al. 2005; van der Lippe et al. 2004). A number of other works (e.g. Parsons and Bales 1955; Coser 1973; Benston's 1969) can also be seen as offering a theory of outsourcing, however, while noting the possibility of outsourcing, these reject it for various reasons. Not surprisingly, many of these works were written before the current wave of outsourcing began. Nevertheless, they are instructive for offering ideas on why outsourcing will not, or, in some cases, should not, occur which can then be compared to the contemporary context to see if either the theory, or part, thereof, was somehow incorrect (e.g. a factor predicted to prevent outsourcing ended up not having this effect) or if the current circumstances have changed so that factors that would have prevented outsourcing in the past are no longer relevant. Other theories (e.g. Durkheim 1997 [1893]; Glazer 1993; Ritzer 2004; Weber 1964 [1947]; Inglehart 1977, 1987, 2000; Lesthaeghe 1983, Lesthaeghe and Neidert 2006), while not talking about outsourcing *per se*, still suggest themselves to this topic. In these cases, I will show how these theories can be applied to outsourcing and then assess how well they can account for this type of outsourcing. In all cases, I will both outline these theories as they pertain to this subject and critically evaluate them in

terms of what insights they can offer into outsourcing as well as their limitations in this regard.

In chapter 5 I return to the theory of reflexive modernization and argue that, the insights of the alternative theories notwithstanding, this perspective provides the most comprehensive theoretical base from which to understand how and why the outsourcing of intimate affairs has come to take place. In part, this comes from the unique insights that this perspective has to offer in regard to outsourcing. But this also relates to how many of the more particular insights offered by the alternative theories of outsourcing can be incorporated into the more general perspective of reflexive modernization.

In chapter 6 I review the findings of this dissertation and the insights that reflexive modernization theory offers into intimate outsourcing. I then ask in what ways does the issue of intimate outsourcing highlight ways in which the reflexive modernization perspective needs to be revised in light of this trend such as how living a life of one's own may require these types of outsourcing activities and other related issues.

### *A General Outline of Reflexive Modernization*

*“When modernization reaches a certain stage it radicalizes itself. It begins to transform, for a second time, not only the key institutions but also the very principles of society.”*

(Beck et al. 2003: 1)

The theory of reflexive modernization can be traced to the work of Ulrich Beck (1992, 1994), Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim (2002 [1998]), these two authors together (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995, 2002), Anthony Giddens (1990, 1991, 1994), Scott Lash

(1994, 1999), and Zygmunt Bauman (2000, 2001). In short, these thinkers argue that while modernity is distinct from more traditional orders, despite the fact that early modernity rested upon its own traditions, modernity itself has two distinct phases. For Beck (1992), this is the division between *first* and *second* modernity, or alternately the division between *simple* and *reflexive* modernity; for Giddens (1990, 1991), this is the division between the *modern* and *late modern* age; in Lash's (1994) terms, this is the distinction between (*simple*) *modernity* and *reflexive modernity* and is reflected in a change of social organization from (*simple*) *Gesellschaft* to one of *reflexive Gesellschaft*; while for Bauman (2000), this division falls along the lines of *heavy* or *solid modernity* versus an age now characterized as *liquid* or *light modernity*.

The distinction between the two phases of modernity rests on the notion that while the early stages of modernity were significantly more dynamic vis-à-vis traditional societies, and that modernity gave the individual a much greater level of control over his, and to a lesser extent, her, life, than was the case in feudal societies, in the later stages of modernity these dynamic and individualistic tendencies have been greatly increased. The result of this has been the formation of a more fluid social order where individuals in particular have a much greater space to negotiate, and indeed are forced to negotiate, more and more aspects of the social world freed from many traditional constraints and supports. Lash (2003: 49) characterizes this difference between the two phases of modernity by noting that while first modernity was dominated “predominately by a logic of structures”, second modernity involves more “a logic of flows”.<sup>3</sup> In other words,

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<sup>3</sup> Lash (1999, 2003) also sees an epistemological difference between first and second modernity. In the former, reflective judgment reigns; in the latter, reflexive judgment. See Lash (2003) for a more detailed discussion of this issue.

while early modernity was predominately linear in structure, reflexive modernity is decisively open and “non-linear” (ibid. 50).

An example of this tri-modal conception of history can be seen in the case of what has come to be known as Beck’s (1992) “individualization thesis”. Beck’s idea is that while with the emergence of modernity a great wave of individualization swept the social world, this wave was both truncated and incomplete. In other words, individualism was not applied as fully as it could have been, and indeed was later. Thus, not only were certain groups (e.g. women, minorities, members of the lower-class) not given access to the resources needed to live an individualized life, many were socially forbidden to do so in both formal (e.g. laws restricting certain groups from attending educational institutions) and informal (e.g. social roles that channeled women, for example, into the world of unpaid work in the home) manners. At the same time, there were areas in social life where this principle was excluded from operating (e.g. family roles).

Beck’s thesis is that many of these formal and informal restrictions have, since the 1960’s at least, been in the process of, if not dissolving, then at least easing. The result has been a surge of individualization into areas where it was formerly excluded both in terms of whom it is applied to and in terms of where this principle is applied. For Beck (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002: xxii), this means that “individualization is *becoming the social structure of second modern society itself*” (emphasis in original) where biography is increasingly becoming a self-steered, and thus reflexive, phenomenon.

However, a crucial point to note is that for Beck and the other theorists in this tradition the development of reflexivity, both in terms of biography and in modernity as a whole, represents not so much a break with the principles of modernity as, for example

postmodern theorists would argue, but instead the radicalization of them. (Beck et al. 2003; Illouz 1997: 51). In other words, it is the expansion of the principles upon which modernity was found beyond their original scope which, along with a number of unintended consequences of this situation (cf. Beck 1992 and Beck et al. 2003), that has made modernity a reflexive phenomenon. And though the specifics of how this came about are different for each theorist, the general picture of this process can be seen in the work of Beck. In the next section I will outline Beck's theory of reflexive modernization and, where relevant, compare and contrast it to others working in this tradition. As will be seen, in a number of instances the issue of outsourcing is suggested (Lash [2003: 52-3]; Beck et al. [2003]), but is not explored in any systematic manner. In a later chapter I will not just suggest, but indeed argue, that there are deep connections between the issues raised by this paradigm and the outsourcing of intimate affairs.

### *Beck's Theory of Reflexive Modernization*

For Beck (1992) modernity can be divided into two phases: *first* and *second*. First, or *simple*, modernity is the modernity of which Marx, Durkheim, Weber, Simmel, and even Parsons spoke. It was born in opposition to the feudal order and sought to “disembed” actors from that traditional structures in which they were embedded: traditions centered around the unquestionable “privileges of rank and religious world views” (ibid. 10). In this sense modernity was a liberatory force: it challenged tradition through science and rationality, and hierarchies of natural orders were replaced by the more dynamic and, for some at least, fluid orders of class. However, as Beck notes, first modernity did not only “disembed” individuals from traditional social structures, it also sought to “reembed” them into new structures (e.g. Durkheim's idea of reintegrating

individuals into occupational corporations or Marx's idea of social integration via class solidarities) while also engendering a number of traditions upon which this order was founded.

In other words, though first modernity wiped away or undermined many of the structures and traditions of feudal society, it did not do away with structures and traditions altogether. Rather, it created its own traditions and structures upon which industrial society, the social order corresponding to the principles of first modernity, was born. In Beck's words this means that "[i]ndustrial society *never* is and *never* was possible only as industrial society, but always as half industrial and half *feudal* society, whose feudal side is not a relic of tradition, but the *product* and *foundation* of industrial society" (ibid. 89 – emphasis in original). In this sense, "[f]irst modern society was set in a kind of counter-modern base that damped the dynamics of modernization. The nuclear family, the non-market roles of women, ascriptive modes of class assignment, and the nation-state all performed social integration functions in first modern society. All were originally beyond any need for justification" and thus more traditional than modern in nature (Beck et al. 2003: 15). In a sense, these were all 'fates' in that one's biography was ordered by them in ways that were not necessarily of one's choosing. As Bauman (2002: xvi) notes in terms of class and gender, these 'fates' "hung heavily over the individual range of choices; to escape their constraint was not much easier to contest one's place in the 'divine chain of being'".

This is particularly the case for women who, under first modernity, were excluded from many of the "subsidiary institutions" of modernity such as the educational system or the role as the primary provider for the family through working in the labor market.



These exclusions were made simply in terms gender so that while there was a great surge of individualization in first modernity, this surge was largely confined to the world of men and male institutions. The result was that “[a]t the beginning of our modern times individualization remained an exclusive privilege of the men” (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995: 57). In contrast, women were assigned a very different social and economic role: while men were to be self-providers for the family, women in contrast were to be dependent on their husbands and were confined to the home even if this was not something they wished to do. In this regard, modernity initially created a caste of (unpaid) workers to support those who were now going out in the labor market to make a living and thus carried with it more feudal elements than it cared to acknowledge: In Beck’s (1992: 89) words, “[i]ndustrial society *never* was nor can it ever be solely industrial; it is always half industrial and half feudal. This feudal side is not a relic but a *precondition* and *result* of splitting up work and home life” where “the principles of individual freedom and equality are withheld from one gender and ascribed to the other at birth” (emphasis in original). Thus, industrial society was built upon two separate divisions of labor - one industrial, the other domestic – where, in the former, principles of equality, freedom, and individuality reign, even if they were not fully applied in practice while, in the latter, these principles, even on an ideological level, were absent. In short, this meant that men could *achieve* their role in life while women were *assigned* to their’s and, in this sense, the wave of individualization that was ushered in by modernity was from the start a truncated phenomenon.

Similarly, the critical potential of modernity was itself initially truncated. This can be seen in how the critical elements of science and rationally, both modern products,

while finding seemingly easy targets in the remnants of feudal society and traditional/religious belief, excluded from its critical analysis its own presuppositions and assumptions of the world. Overall this means that “[t]he concept of industrial society rests upon a *contradiction* between the *universal* principles of modernity – civil rights, equality, functional differentiation, methods of argumentation and skepticism – and the exclusive structure of its institutions, in which these principles can only be realized on a *partial, sectoral* and *selective* basis” (Beck 1992: 14 – emphasis in original). It is through the resolution of this contradiction of first modernity that *second*, or *reflexive*, modernity begins to emerge.

For Beck, second modernity was born when the critical and emancipatory principles of modernity became fully applied to modernity (and its structures) itself. In other words, second modernity emerges as modernity becomes reflexive upon itself – hence Beck’s synonymous use of *second* and *reflexive* modernity to describe this age. For Beck (ibid.) this transition to the reflexive form of modernization means that “[p]eople are *set free* from the certainties and modes of living in the industrial epoch – just as they were ‘freed’ from the arms of the Church into society during the age of the Reformation” (emphasis in original). This means that one’s biography is increasingly dominated not by the remnants of fate, be these traditional fates or those of industrial society, but opened to individual choice and decision. In other words, biographies become reflexive as well, something that the individual must chart on his/her own. Bauman (2002: xv) puts this situation in these terms: “[m]odernity replaces [the] determination of social standing with compulsive and obligatory self-determination”

where human identity is transformed from a 'given' into a 'task'. And in this regard, for Beck (1992: 90), there is a monumental change in terms of the social order:

The place of hereditary estates is no longer taken by social classes, nor does the stable frame of reference of gender and the family take the place of social classes. *The individual himself or herself become the reproduction unity of the social in the lifeworld...* Or put another way, both within and outside the family...individuals become the agents of their educational and market-mediated subsistence and the related life planning and organization. Biography itself is acquiring a reflexive project (emphasis in original).

This proposition, i.e. that in Western nations "individualization is becoming *the social structure of second modernity itself*" (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002: xxii) is the central claim of Beck's (1992) "individualization thesis". However, an important point to note is that while Beck and the other reflexive modernization theorists claim that an increasing amount of individualization is occurring, they see this coming about through *social* transformations. That is, this kind of individualization is a social construction; a mode of being not possible without the support and structuring of social institutions. In Beck's words:

The individual is indeed removed from traditional commitments and support relationships, but exchanges them for the constraints of existence in the labor market and as a consumer, with the standardizations and controls they contain. The place of *traditional* ties and social forms (social class, nuclear family) is taken by *secondary* agencies and institutions, which stamp the biography of the individual and make that person dependent upon fashions, social policy, economic cycles and markets, contrary to the image of individual control which establishes itself in consciousness.

[] Thus it is precisely individualized private existence which becomes more and more obviously

and emphatically dependent on situations and conditions that completely escape its reach. (Beck 1992:131)

In other words, this is an institutionalized individualism, an individualism that is the result of social processes, and not the “natural” or ontological state of humanity as some theories would claim. For example, modern law is centered around the individual and not collectivities, while rights are “individual rights, rather than the rights of a class or status group” (Beck in Beck and Williams 2004: 64). Similarly, “[m]odern legitimacy” does not allow one group to be privileged over others and all, in principle at least, have access to the same civil rights (ibid.). There are also the many subsidiary institutions discussed above (e.g. the labor market, the educational system) that individuals in contemporary context are, unless they have special circumstances (e.g. independent wealth or care being provided by the state) dependent on in if one wishes to live an individualized life.

Nevertheless, the result of this institutionalized form of individuality is that there are now greater horizons of choice open to individuals out of which they can, and indeed must, construct their lives than was the case in than in the past. In part, this is because social roles, while not being absent, are more fluid than in first modernity and traditional societies so that there is no simple one-to-one relation between a specific social role and a particular social outcome. Rather, there is an array of options from which the individual is responsible for cobbling together his/her biography.

For Giddens (1990, 1991), whose work covers the same basic terrain as Beck’s, though with more attention being paid to the social psychological aspects of living under such conditions, as social life moves from a traditional to a post-traditional order, a whole world of choice is opened up to the individual. Indeed, in the era of late modernity, “[o]n

the level of the self, a fundamental component of day-to-day activity is simply that of *choice*” (Giddens 1991: 80 – emphasis in original). Thus, while tradition “orders life within relatively set channels”, “[m]odernity confronts the individual with a complex diversity of choices and, because it is non-foundational, at the same time [it] offers little help as to which options should be selected” (ibid.). The result of this is the emergence of a social category that is both trivial and fundamental at the same time in late modern society: lifestyle. “Lifestyle is not a term which has much applicability to traditional cultures, because it implies choice within a plurality of possible options, and is ‘adopted’ rather than ‘handed down’” (ibid. 81). However, as social life is detraditionalized, lifestyles as reflexive routines of living become the norm and greater horizons of choice are opened to the individual (e.g. what to dress, what to eat, where to live, to whom to marry, etc.).

In this sense, the individualization thesis argues that individualism is increasingly becoming the universalized *social* condition of second modernity. Of course, this does not mean that all will be able to live such a life, or will have equal access to the resources to be able to construct a life of one’s one as they wish. Rather, the individualism that Beck talks about, while being socially supported, is largely negative in nature. That is, what reflexive modernity offers is a *negative individualism* not a substantive or positive one. We can think of this in terms of the distinction between offering the potentiality for something and offering its actuality; negative systems merely allow something to happen but offer no promise that it will, while positive systems that actually guarantee an outcome. In second modernity, an individualized biography is offered but not guaranteed. The result of this is that the increasing individualization found in second

modernity does not necessarily mean that more equitable and equal life-outcomes will result, nor that everyone will have the same potential to live as an individualized existence as others. Rather, just as capitalism is a formally free and negative system where everyone, in principle, has the potential to earn as great of economic rewards as they wish, this potentiality does not necessarily translate into an actuality. As such, formally free and open (i.e. negative) systems are perfectly compatible with substantively unequal outcomes. Marx knew this about capitalism long ago: though capitalism was a more “free” and “open” system than feudalism (peasants had to be “freed” from the land in order to work in the factories) it still yielded highly unequal outcomes. Today much is the same in terms of individualization: the individualization that has occurred has only been formal and negative in nature.

However, individualism has also been accompanied by a shift in the risks of social life. That is, one’s life now becomes not only a reflexive project open to horizons of choice, but also “risky” in the sense that, freed from the old certainties of tradition and first modernity, *life is now uncertain to the extent that it is open*. And it is the individual, resting upon his/her own individual resources, who must face these risks. In this sense, reflexivity and risk are two sides of the same coin for biography in second modernity (this dynamic also being true for second modernity itself): when biography is seen as a self-steered endeavor, the risks and uncertainties that come with life become phenomena that the individual must face him/herself.

In more general terms, this represents a change in the social accountability structure where, though the individual is heavily dependent upon a number of social institutions that are outside of his/her control, individuals are, nevertheless, held

accountable as individuals in how they response to social conditions in general. Thus, if someone chooses not to intersect with the appropriate social institutions, this is not the failing of the institution but of the individual. For Beck this means that the “institutional conditions that determine individuals are not longer just events and conditions that happen to them [i.e. things outside of the individual that happen to him/her], but also consequences of the decision they themselves have made, which they must view and treat as such” (Beck 1992: 136). That is, one’s fate is seen as the outcome of one’s personal decisions even though social-structural factors play a role in shaping one’s life-course in manners that are not fully under control of the individual.

For example, while in the past it may have been normal (and indeed normative) for individuals from the lower class not to attend college because they were members of the lower class and could not afford to go school (i.e. their class position determined their decision to attend college or not), this situation is different today. Today, though the economics of the situation may be the same, it is more likely that someone in the lower class who does not attend college will be seen as being lower class precisely because they chose not to attend college (cf. Bauman 2002: xvi). Saying this is not meant to imply that individuals are able to fully control all of the social conditions that affect their lives. Rather, it signals a re-figuration of how social risks must be handled. As Bauman (2002: xvi) puts it, while “[r]isks and contradictions go on being socially produced” “the duty and the necessity to deal with them... [are] being individualized”. This means that it is the responsibility of the individual to address these situations even though they stand outside of the span of his/her control. Beck (1992: 137) sums up this point nicely when he says that “how one lives becomes the *biographical solution of systemic*

*contradictions*” (emphasis in original). For Beck, and indeed others working in this school of thought,<sup>4</sup> this need for individuals to address and resolve systemic conditions is a basic, yet central aspect, of living in a reflexively modern social order and one that, as we will see, has many ramifications for the outsourcing of intimate affairs.

These are the basic parameters of the theory of reflexive modernization and they have had an enormous influence in understanding developments in such diverse areas as work (Beck 2000a), politics (Beck 1994, 1997), the self and identity (Giddens 1991), and everyday life (Bauman 2005). However, one particular area of intense activity by these scholars has been in the realms of intimacy, relationships, love, and the family (Giddens 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995; Beck-Gernsheim 2002 [1998]; Bauman 2003). In general, these works explore the increasingly reflexive nature of intimate relationships and what this means not only for these relationships themselves, but society as a whole. Beck-Gernsheim (2002 [1998]: 7-8) has outlined many of the overarching issues explored in terms of intimate relationships:

The key question...is what happens when the old certainties (rooted in religion, tradition, biology, etc.) lose much of their force without actually disappearing and new options redraw the areas for personal choice, not in a free space outside of society but in one that involves new social regulations, pressures and controls. Or, in sociological terms, how does the individualization drive of the last few decades enter ever more strongly into the area of the family, marriage and parenthood, effecting a lasting change in relations between the sexes and the generations? How, under conditions of individualization, does a historically new tension arise which, though certainly not making relationships simpler, perhaps makes them more appealing.

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<sup>4</sup> For example, Giddens (1991: 43-55) explores the issue of the opening up of lifestyle to choice creates a number of “risks” in terms of one’s existential parameters where the possibility of making the ‘wrong’ choice in these matters can shatter one’s sense of ontological security.



A central claim in all of these works is that relationships are increasing contingent in all of their aspects from how they are formed, with whom and for what purposes, and in terms of how these relationships are sustained (or not). Bauman (2003) captures the flux and lack of solidity found in intimate relations with his idea of “liquid love”. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995) capture the same sentiment in speaking of the “normal chaos of love”. This theme is also central to Giddens’ conception of a “pure relationship” – i.e. intimate relationships that are both formed and sustained exclusively in terms of what each partner offers to the other, and not on the basis of any pre-existing or socially ordered conditions. These are relationships that are sustained only by the commitment of its participants and the rewards (emotional, physical, etc.) that they receive from one another (Giddens 1991: 87-98), 1992).

All of these thinkers note that while relationships of this type are fragile in the sense that they can easily be undone, they are also potentially more rewarding exactly when such uncouplings do not occur and relationships are sustained over time despite the fact that they could have been dissolved. Moreover, and perhaps more importantly, what all of these works highlight is the fact that relationships in the context of second, late, or liquid modernity are increasingly defined by reflexivity and individualization.

Of course, one may wonder what all of this talk about shifts within modernity – from first to second modernity, or from early modernity to reflexive modernity - and individualization has to do with the issue of the outsourcing of intimate affairs. I argue that the social developments that this theory highlights (e.g. an increased dependency of individuals on the labor market, more fluid forms of family life, the need for biographical

solutions to systemic conditions, the individualization thesis, disembedding, etc.) can be seen as not only as allowing this type of outsourcing to occur, but in many fundamental respects as promoting it as well. Thus, I see the outsourcing of intimate affairs as not only being reflective of the tenets of this theory, but also acting, in some cases at least, to support and sustain the very conditions that this theory outlines (e.g. the outsourcing of intimate affairs is both a reflection and promoter of individualization).

To my knowledge no one has attempt to link the theory of reflexive modernization to the outsourcing of intimate affairs despite hints of this topic coming up at various times in this area. For example, Lash (2003: 52) notes that

[w]hat happens [under conditions of reflexive modernity] more generally is, to a certain extent, *a generalized outsourcing...* [T]here is a generalized outsourcing of functions, of operations. The hierarchical economic organization begins regularly to make decisions, not to 'make' but to 'buy'. A whole host of functions of the firm are outsourced in this age of vertical disintegration. The welfare state beginning to outsource functions to private and charitable sector organizations. *There is, it seems, also an outsourcing of the family.* This is not just a disorganization and destruction of the family. It is, on the one hand, *a distantiation*: hence the increasing gift of mobile phones from parents to pre-teen and teenage children. This is so parents can keep track of children at a distance... [There is also] the fragmentation of the family through divorce or separation, or even long distance couples connecting London and Los Angeles, Paris and New York. Here divorce and separation can mean that children have, not no family but two or three families, to whom they are connected by long-distance telephony, transport and the Internet. *Thus there is, not so much the destruction, as an outsourcing of the family* (emphasis added).

Lash is right to say that under the conditions of reflexive modernity one can see a state of generalized outsourcing occurring (e.g. Ritzer and Lair, forthcoming) and that

outsourcing is occurring at the level of the family as well. However, it is not exactly clear what Lash means by outsourcing and, in fact, he seems to define it in three different ways in this text. One definition (and the one that is closest to how I will define outsourcing in the next chapter) is when businesses decide to buy something instead of making it for themselves. A second definition appears where the state ‘outsources’ or divests itself of functions it once performed onto private and charitable organizations. Lastly, when speaking of the ‘outsourcing’ of the family, Lash seems to define outsourcing as distantiation in a loose sense of the term - i.e. that things are outsourced when they are moved apart. These are three very different definitions of the term outsourcing and while each of the dynamics involved – buying vs. making, dumping, and distancing – may be important phenomena to explore, they are not the same should not be conflated with one another.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, Lash does at least raise the issue of the outsourcing of these types of affairs within the context of this theory.

Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002: 107, 111-2) also raise the issue of outsourcing, though without using this term explicitly. Framed in terms of conflict resolution, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (ibid. 107) have outlined a number of strategies for dealing with the potential conflict resulting from “different conceptions of housework, job and gender roles” found in family life. These strategies act to prevent this type of conflict from either developing in the first place, or by relieving what is an already existing (in their words, “acute”) situation. Such strategies can also be either subjective or objective in nature. One objective strategy for relieving an acute conflict “is to displace or delegate

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<sup>5</sup> In short, the reason not to conflate these terms is that in doing so one creates a concept of outsourcing that is so broad that any transfer of intimate affairs (or any other activity for that matter) becomes an instance of outsourcing. This, however, overlooks what is unique about how intimate affairs have come to be transferred through the process of outsourcing.

the [housework] to other (mostly female) persons, such as a child minder, a granny or an au pair” (ibid. 112). Indeed, as we will see, the outsourcing of intimate affairs is basically the displacement or delegation of work to others. However, not all displacements like this are instances of outsourcing so that while the use of child minders and au pairs would be considered instances of outsourcing as I define it, the use of a relative such as a ‘granny’ does not.

Beck et al. (2003) also raise this issue, though in a very indirect manner. In this work, Beck et al. outline the major dimensions of reflexive modernization theory and point to a number of implications that this theory has. They note that many of these implications could then be used to ‘test’ the theory and its propositions. In this regard, the authors note that “[o]ne key question that remains to be taken up is whether the distinction between gainful employment and other forms of activity is beginning to blur in favour of an extension and pluralization of what counts as work” (ibid. 18). The type of outsourcing discussed here has only been able to develop by transforming what was once unpaid work performed in the home<sup>6</sup> into a business. And this has only been possible by commercializing and commodifying work that once was not seen as being such (cf. Hochschild 2005). In this sense, outsourcing represents ‘an extension and pluralization of what counts as work’ thereby blurring what is commonly seen as the distinction between gainful employment and ‘other’ forms of activity. This is another instance where the issue of outsourcing is raised in this literature, though here it is done in a very indirect manner.

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<sup>6</sup> This is not to imply that this work has always been performed in the home or in an unpaid manner. As will be seen, many of the activities that are today being outsourced were transferred to others in the past for money. However, in the 1950’s many of these functions came to be performed within the home and it has only been within the recent past that businesses have been able to develop to take on these affairs.

These hints notwithstanding, a systematic attempt to account for the outsourcing of intimate affairs through the lens of reflexive modernization has yet to be made. The goal of this dissertation is to make such a connection and to show the insights that this theory offers in understanding how and why intimate affairs are increasingly being outsourced.

## Chapter 2: The Contours of Intimate Outsourcing

### *What is Outsourcing and how does it Apply to Intimate Affairs*

As it is used in a business context, outsourcing generally refers to instances where a company decides to buy goods or services, once performed in-house, from a supplier outside of the firm: “[o]utsourcing happens when a company decides to purchase a product or service from a source outside of the company” (Hira and Hira 2005: 199). For example, if a car company was to decide to purchase engines from an outside supplier instead of building them themselves, this would be an example of outsourcing. The term outsourcing began to be used by business executives as early as the 1970’s (Corbett 2004: xiii), although it was not until the late 1980’s and early 1990’s as businesses, in an effort to cut costs, began to outsource more and more jobs that this term came to prominence on the American cultural landscape. At first, it was manufacturing jobs that were targets of this practice but, over time, and given recent advances in information technologies (IT), white-collar and other “high-skilled” jobs are increasingly being, and are increasingly liable to be, outsourced (Bardhan and Kroll 2003; Farrell et al. 2005). Indeed, more and more people feel that their jobs are being haunted by the “Outsourcing Boogeyman” (Drezner 2004; see also Levine 2004).

As a business strategy, outsourcing seeks to take advantage of cost differentials - mostly, but not exclusively, in terms of labor - between having specific goods and/or services performed in-house versus at an outside location. Normally this entails moving

the work to a location where labor and other costs are significantly lower than those in the current location of the business. This is why countries such as India, where labor costs can be as little as one-tenth of the costs of the U.S., are such attractive locations for American companies looking to outsource (though sometimes significant cost differentials can be found within the U.S. as, for example, car manufactures move their operations from the higher-cost regions of the Northeast and Midwest to the lower-cost regions of the South).

The decision to buy goods and services from external suppliers (both foreign and domestic) instead of supplying them in-house may seem like a simple shift in business operations. However, it actually represents a significant departure from what was the historically prevailing corporate norm – i.e. a vision of a self-sufficient, vertically integrated business model where companies would own and operate virtually everything needed for business operations (e.g. the means for procuring raw materials, transporting goods, the performance of payroll and accounting, the operations of pension funds, research and development, etc.). Rooted in the Fordist regime of accumulation (Aglietta 2000; Harvey 1990), the trend toward vertical integration “had been going on since the dawn of the Industrial Revolution...but greatly accelerated in the last quarter of the nineteenth century as industrialists sought economies of scale as well as of speed to cut costs” (Steele Gordon 2004: 247). For example,

The vertical integration at Ford [Motor Company] eventually reached all the way to Brazil, where the company bought rubber plantations in the 1930s. Ford ships brought iron ore from the company’s mines in Michigan and Minnesota, across the Great Lakes, up the Detroit and Rouge rivers, and right to the docks at the Rouge complex. Lumber came from Ford forests in Michigan.

Coal miners in Kentucky and West Virginia were Ford employees, as were glassworkers in Pennsylvania and Minnesota, and woodworkers in Michigan lumber areas. The company even owned rail lines, including the 90 miles of track that criss-crossed the Rouge site and connected its various structures (Gordon and Malone 1997: 336).

However, beginning with the economic stagnation of the 1970's and increased global competition this business model began to be attacked as being unwieldy, inefficient, and not viable in an increasingly global market. In this new, hypercompetitive market, speed and expertise are seen as the two main factors delivering economic success (Corbett 2004: 5) and any business operations that are not seen as directly contributing value to these areas are increasingly being viewed as a drag on an organization. And in situations where companies are performing so many activities for themselves, there is a lot of potential, if not actual, sources of 'drag' in this type of business structure.

Thus, it was not that long ago that business theorists began to preach that organizations should concentrate on their "core competencies" (i.e. what they do better than anyone else and what adds the most value to their product) and to shift all other "peripheral" activities to others to perform (Prahalad and Hamel 1990). This is a new vision of "lean and mean" organizations specializing in one or a few key areas and letting others handle everything else (Womack et al. 1991). An oft-cited quotation by the management consultant Tom Peters summarizes this new business model nicely: "Do what you do best and outsource the rest" (Peters cited in Corbett 2004: 9). Thus the Ford Motor Corporation, once the paragon of vertical integration (Robinson and Kalakota 2004: 16), now outsources many of its operations across the globe (e.g. the



manufacturing of cold-forged engine parts has been outsourced to a company owned and operated in India) (*Outsourcing Times* 2006).

Saving costs on labor, concentrating on core competencies in corporations, and shifting peripheral activities to external suppliers may make perfect economic sense for businesses and organizations, but what, if anything, does this corporate strategy have to do with intimate life? Can this idea that emerged as a new business model designed to save on labor costs be applied to intimate matters? Many works seem to suggest that there is a natural extension of outsourcing in the business world to outsourcing in intimate life. For example, Sandholtz et al. (2004) talk of how “[o]utsourcing has worked its way into business lingo as corporations have slashed costs and focused on their core competencies – the things they’re best at and that make them distinctive. Everything else is turned over to vendors. *Individuals have taken the same approach* as they try to control their overstuffed lives. They farm out certain tasks and obligations to focus more attention on the activities, relationships, and causes they care most about” (emphasis added). For Sheth and Sisodia (1999), “[o]utsourcing is a logical extension of David Ricardo’s 1817 theory of ‘competitive advantage.’ Individuals, no less than companies, do best when they focus on activities in which they can add the most value, and outsource other activities to specialists.” These authors go on to note that “[s]pecialist vendors are emerging that deliver better price-performance value than customers can create in-house. In other words, the ‘make vs. buy’ question will increasingly be answered by ‘buy’”. Indeed, Hira and Hira (2005: 199), after defining outsourcing as when a *company* decides to get goods or services from an external supplier, note that “[w]e do outsourcing in our everyday lives, such as dining out, whereby we purchase our prepared food from an

external source – a restaurant – instead of making it ourselves”. But what is it exactly that makes these activities instances of outsourcing?

I argue that there are three criteria that are essential in order for an instance to qualify as a case of outsourcing in the context of intimate affairs, all of which equally applicable when businesses outsource. First, there must be a *transfer* of activities that were, in part at least, once performed in the family by family members, or those seen as being members of the family, to entities outside of it. This is what businesses do when they outsource: i.e. they transfer work once done in-house to suppliers who are outside of the business. However, in the case of intimate affairs, it should be noted that ‘outside’ is used here to refer to entities that are *outside of the membership of the family*, and does not necessarily refer to these activities being physically removed from the home. As will be seen, a number of intimate affairs are transferred to external suppliers though the actual performance of these affairs still take place within the home (e.g. the hiring of housekeeping services to clean one’s home). This situation is not uncommon in the business world: just as families can hire outside businesses to come into their homes to provide a variety of services, so too can businesses (e.g. businesses can hire cleaning services as well). And while there might be different dynamics involved when intimate affairs are transferred to sources outside of the home as opposed to those performed within it, and this is certainly something to keep in mind when looking at this phenomenon, *the crucial factor for something to be considered as an instance of outsourcing is that a transfer takes place in terms of who performs these activities*, not necessarily where these activities are performed.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. the discussion of Lash’s (2003: 52) definition of outsourcing in terms of the family as distantiation in Chapter 1.

The second criteria is that these are transfers that *take place along commercial lines*. That is, these involve the transfer of intimate affairs from individuals and families to others in exchange for money. In short, these are commercial transactions and, as such, a grandmother watching her grandchild out of a sense of love or obligation would not be considered an instance of outsourcing as this transaction does not take place along commercialized lines. If businesses gave out work to their relatives to perform for free we may consider this a form of dumping work on them as a means of saving money, but this would not be considered an instance of outsourcing. But what if, for example, a babysitter was hired? Would this be an instance of outsourcing?

This situation brings to us the third criteria necessary for outsourcing: the entity that these intimate affairs are outsourced to must be a *formal organization* such as a business. When businesses outsource, they outsource to other businesses. And so while families may sometimes rely on informal economic exchange for the performance of their intimate affairs as, for example, when a neighborhood teen is hired to baby-sit for an evening, this would not constitute an instance of outsourcing as no formal business is involved. Indeed, part of what is interesting in the development of outsourcing is the increasing reliance of individuals and families on formal organizations and businesses in the performance of their intimate affairs as opposed to the use of more informal sources (e.g. relatives, neighbors, friends, etc.).

Taking these three criteria together we can define outsourcing in the context of the intimate sphere *as the transfer of intimate tasks historically or normatively seen as being performed within the family and by family members<sup>8</sup> to formal commercial*

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<sup>8</sup> Just like the activities that families perform, so too has the idea of membership in the family (i.e. who is included as being a member of the family and who is not) changed over time. Thus, in the past it was

*establishments located outside of the family.*<sup>9</sup> Hochschild's (2003b), de Ruijter et al.'s (2005: 305), van der Lippe et al.'s (2004: 217), and Bittman et al.'s (1999: 250) phrase of "commercial" or "market substitutes" are good shorthand versions of this definition where we can say that outsourcing in the intimate sphere involves the use of commercial/market substitutes in the performance of intimate affairs. However, the three criteria outlined above must be kept in mind when using this shorthand definition since not all commercial or market substitutes are examples of outsourcing.

This can be seen in the work of van der Lippe et al. (2004: 217) and Bittman et al. (1999: 250) who define "domestic outsourcing" in a very similar manner. For van der Lippe et al. (2004: 217) domestic outsourcing can be defined as the "replacing [of] unpaid household production with market substitutes" and note that this kind of outsourcing can take many forms. One form is where "market goods or services substitute for domestic activity by replacing it entirely, such as child care and domestic cleaning" (ibid.). In this case, the use of such goods and services fits perfectly with the definition of outsourcing offered here.

But van der Lippe et al. also note that another form that domestic outsourcing can take is when "[h]ouseholds... purchase domestic appliances and aids that raise productivity and increase convenience. Examples here include the dishwasher and washing machine, which potentially substitute for some of the labor inputs in domestic

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common to have non-biologically related persons considered as being members of a family. This issue is dealt with in greater detail in Chapter 3.

<sup>9</sup> To a certain extent, some forms of outsourcing have been occurring since that advent of industrialization since consumers could now buy goods from commercial enterprises that they once made themselves (e.g. soap and candles). My focus, however, is on a more current wave of outsourcing which is seeking not so much the transfer of material goods to the consumer market as it is the transfer of services. This distinction can be seen in the case of food: while some might argue that the outsourcing of food production began when families stopped producing their own food sources and instead bought them from the store, what I am interested in is in the next step of outsourcing – i.e. when what is transferred to commercial sources is not particular items of food that go into a meal, but the entire meal itself, including the cooking of it.

production” (ibid.).<sup>10</sup> The use of such appliances, while certainly convenient, represent more instances of the *automation* of domestic activities than a case of outsourcing simply because of the fact that, while there is a transfer of work, the transfer is not given over to a commercial enterprise but rather to a machine. If all transfers of labor to machines were instances of outsourcing, then *ipso facto* all forms of automation would represent cases of outsourcing. If this were the case then the assembly line would be the most prolific form of ‘outsourcing’ in history given its production capacity vis-à-vis the manufacturing of goods by hand. This, it seems to me, is too wide of a definition of outsourcing and defining it in this manner poses the potential for this term to lose all analytical utility as seemingly almost anything becomes a case of outsourcing. So while there are important similarities between automation/the use of time-saving devices and outsourcing as a strategy for reducing some of the burdens of domestic work and increasing convenience, they are not the same.

Bittman et al. (1999: 250) also offer “partial substitutes for domestic labour” (e.g. the use of “pre-filled pasta or bottled pasta sauces”) as instances of outsourcing. Again, while the motivation to use such goods may be the same in cases of outsourcing (e.g. convenience and the ability to save time through the use of these products), the use of such goods does not fit the definition of outsourcing offered here. Is it really an instance of outsourcing if I go to a store and buy frozen pizza instead of all of the ingredients need to make one on my own? The use of less labor intensive goods, while perhaps sharing a similar motivational base to outsourcing, should not be seen as being identical with it.

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<sup>10</sup> Bittman et al. (1999: 250) note that the use of appliances in this manner might better be called an instance of “insourcing” since “[t]hese can be used to replace entirely goods and services available on the market with home production...”. As will be discussed below, and for the same reasons, I would argue that the use of these appliances can better be thought of as instances of the automation of domestic tasks as opposed to their insourcing.

Of course, defining outsourcing in a manner that can take account of the outsourcing of intimate affairs does represent an extension of this term beyond its sometimes business-centric conception. However, the situation of individuals and families outsourcing their intimate affairs is not so different as when other non-business entities outsource their activities. The state, for example, is not a business but can, and does, outsource many of its operations. That is, it transfers the performance of many of its activities once done in-house to formal businesses that are paid by the state to perform these activities. For example, many states outsource food services such as those that supply breakfasts and lunches to schools (O’Looney 1998: 203-9). Also, many military affairs are outsourced (Ferris and Keithly 2001; Cardinali 2001).

This being said, outsourcing in the context of the intimate sphere does have a number of unique facets vis-à-vis outsourcing that occurs in the business context. For example, businesses often outsource to cut costs and it is used as a money-saving strategy. Say that a product that is produced in-house by a company costs \$1000. Another firm, perhaps in a different country, may be able to manufacture the same product for \$500 or less. All else being equal, if this company decides to outsource the production of this product, it can potentially save \$500 (or more) in costs per item.

States will also outsource in order to save money. For example, the Internal Revenue Service has recently contracted out the collection of back taxes to a number of private firms (Johnston 2006) while the state of Florida outsources parts of its corrections and child welfare departments (Kallestad 2006), all of which are justified on the grounds

that outsourcing these services will save tax payers money, particularly by reducing the number of government employees.<sup>11</sup>

In contrast, the outsourcing of intimate affairs involves a cost to the outsourcer since they must pay someone else to perform the activities that are being outsourced. For example, hiring a personal chefs can cost anywhere between \$350 and \$500 for 5 to 10 meals, while daycare can cost anywhere between \$3,000 to over \$8,000 per year depending on where one lives and the quality of care offered.<sup>12</sup> Given this, the motivation for outsourcing is seemingly different for businesses and states on the one hand (they outsource to cut costs), and individuals and families on the other (it costs them to outsource). Why individuals and families are willing to pay to have their intimate affairs outsourced is a topic that is addressed in more detail below.

Another difference between outsourcing in a businesses context and in terms of intimate affairs has to deal with the issue of job creation and loss: while outsourcing in the business context is often associated with the loss of jobs as they are moved to other companies, often in different countries, the outsourcing of personal matters may actually be an engine of job growth (Ruthven 1994, 1997). This is because the necessarily close geographical proximity between the outsourcer and the outsourcee involved in many (but not all) of these types of affairs limits the movement of these activities to far away lands, and thus their loss to other countries. For example, though the cleaning of a house is something that can easily be outsourced as, for example, when someone hires a cleaning or maid service, it is not something that can easily be outsourced to businesses located in

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<sup>11</sup> This is the theory at least though both Johnston (2006) Kallestad (2006) raise evidence that outsourcing these services may not be as economically efficient as if they were left in-house.

<sup>12</sup> These figures correspond to the average annual cost of pre-school care for a four year old and is taken the National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies' (2006) report, "Breaking the Piggy Bank: Parents and the High Price of Child Care" (see in particular Detailed Table 2, pp. 20-1).

other countries. Thus, when intimate affairs are outsourced on a local scale, this does not involve the loss of any jobs. Rather, it often represents their creation in the sense that there is now work that is paid for where none existed before. This is because the activities involved in the intimate sphere have traditionally been conceived of as operating on an “economy of gratitude” where they are performed out of love or devotion and not for recompense. As such, when they are transferred to the market for their performance these formerly unpaid for activities are commodified and commercialized via outsourcing and can be seen as fueling the economy, not the draining it of jobs.

However, there may also be a deeper relationship between outsourcing in the business context and the outsourcing of intimate affairs. As a cultural conception, the normative influence of the idea of the intimate sphere has varied historically, often in response to changes in economic conditions (Coontz 1992). Indeed, this conception of the family and its associated functions was born with the emergence of the capitalistic market (Habermas 1991 [1962], while the normative hold of this familial vision was able to flourish on a large scale when the economic conditions in America were the most secure – the 1950’s (ibid.). As Coontz (1997: 43) notes of the 1950’s family and its secure economic base:

If most married people stayed in long-term relationships during the 1950s, so did most corporations, sticking with the communities they grew up in and the employees they originally hired. Corporations were not constantly relocating in search of cheap labor during the 1950s; unlike today, increases in worker productivity usually led to increases in wages. The number of workers covered by corporate pension plans and health benefits increased steadily. So did limits on the work week. There is good reason that people look back to the 1950s as a less hurried age:



The average American was working a shorter workday in the 1950s than his or her counterpart today, when a quarter of the workforce puts in 49 or more hours a week.

Similarly, breadwinners “didn’t have to worry about downsizing” (ibid.). Today, we can also say that they didn’t have to worry about outsourcing. The more general point is that the family, both as ideology and practice, responds to changes in their economic environments. This is not to say that there is a one-to-one causal relation between the family and the economy. Rather, it is to say that former is not unaffected by the latter, and as the political economic base of the 1950’s family began to destabilize in response to global economic pressures, “the” family as it was “traditionally” conceived was forced to make changes. Businesses responded to these pressures by reducing wages, cutting benefits, downsizing, and, more recently, outsourcing. Families responded to this by sending more mothers with small children into the workforce thereby engendering at least some of the pressures that are claimed to have resulted in the need and/or desire to outsource intimate affairs (e.g. situations of time-scarcity where dual-income couples simply do not have enough time and/or energy to work and take care of the home and any children they might have). Economics is not the whole of the story of the outsourcing of intimate affairs, though it is certainly a factor. The point to note here is that outsourcing in the business world may play at least a partial role in outsourcing in the intimate sphere.

### *Intimate Affairs and the Intimate Sphere*

I use the term “intimate affairs” to refer to those activities that are necessary to reproduce what Habermas (1991 [1962]: 46-47) calls the “intimate sphere”, i.e. the

cultural conception of family life that emerged out of the eighteenth century bourgeoisie in Europe which later spread to America and was carried forward largely by the middle-class. It is a conception of the family as a private institution maintained by a “community of love” where autonomous individuals produce and reproduce sentimental bonds between one another which are maintained by affection, not coercion. It is also a space of life that allows for the non-instrumental cultivation of both spouses and children.

This conception of the family is both historical and class-specific in origin. That is, it has never been the universal form of the family and it was born in a very specific class location (Gottlieb 1993; Gillis 1996). However, this image has been democratized in Western nations over time, and while some are more emotionally committed to this image of family life than others, and some are better able to achieve this type of family life than others, the idea of the family as being defined by intimacy and affect, as opposed to interest, obligation, or other factors outside of the family’s emotional economy, has become the cultural norm (Coontz 2005; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995; Giddens 1992). My use of the term “intimate affairs” is locational in the sense that it refers to a set of activities seen to take place in, and support, a specific social space rather than a set of tasks necessarily defined by a high degree of intimacy. For example, cleaning one’s home or cooking do not necessarily involve a great deal of intimacy but yet are necessary to physically maintain this sphere of life. Of course, many tasks involved in the intimate sphere are indeed defined by a great deal of intimacy, such as those involving the relations between parents and children or those involving the giving of gifts. These can be seen as activities involved in the emotional reproduction of family. *Thus, by intimate affairs I mean a set of activities that involve both the physical and emotional*

*reproduction of the family and this sphere of life.* Conceiving of intimate affairs in this locational sense also highlights what many fear in this type of outsourcing: i.e. that the transfer of these affairs through outsourcing may upset the culture's cartographical order of the family and family life (Hochschild 2005; Jackson 2002). This may or may not be the case. However, it is certainly the case that many aspects of the intimate sphere, ranging from very the mundane all the way to the very emotional, are being outsourced.

### *An Overview of Intimate Outsourcing*

Unfortunately, no single dataset provides an exhaustive list of the intimate affairs that are being outsourced and/or the extent to which they are being so. As such, in this section I try and triangulate this type of outsourcing through multiple measures. In some cases, I do this by tracking changes in consumer spending patterns – i.e. in looking at how consumer's increasingly buy 'finished' products instead of the 'raw materials' needed to produce certain goods or services (e.g. spending money on food sources away from the home as opposed to those going to the home). In other cases, I do this by tracking how occupations and industries that take on intimate affairs (e.g. personal concierges, personal chefs, professional organizers, housekeeping services, etc.) have developed and grown over time. This is done largely through membership figures in professional organizations. In still other cases, I do this by charting how the markets for certain outsourced activities have changed over time (e.g. the growth of the market for a particular outsourcing service). Though I do not want to claim that outsourcing is a universal phenomenon with all aspects of intimate life being outsourced (some things are not being outsourced, while others are being 'insourced' – i.e. things that people once

paid others to do they now do for themselves [Gershuny 1978]), what these multiple measures show is that in the realm of the intimate sphere there is a general trend in the direction of outsourcing.

Previous works exploring this issue have similarly noted this trend of individuals and families using the service sector to perform activities that families once performed for themselves, though they have tended to use different sources of data. For example, many works have used Consumer Expenditure Survey (CEX) data to track the use or determinates of at least some of the services that I explore (e.g. food away from home, housekeeping services, and child care)(Boyle Gray 1992; Cohen 1998; de Ruijter 2005; Bellante and Foster 1984; Soberon-Ferrer and Dardis 1991; Jacobs et al. 1989; Yen 1993). Others have used different types of consumer surveys to track this trend (Oropesa 1993; Zick et al. 1996; Jacobs and Shipp 1990). While such sources of data are insightful for a number of specific types of intimate outsourcing, principally spending patterns on food away from home, housekeeping services, and childcare, these measures miss many of the different types of outsourcing that are not captured on their surveys (e.g. the use of personal chefs, personal concierges, wedding and birthday party planners, professional organizers, remembrance services, etc.).

Also, in the case of spending on “Food at home” versus “Food away from home”, though the CEX has good data on this type of outsourcing, I have tended to use similar measures furnished by the Department of Agriculture’s Economic Research Service division because the data is more historically comprehensive, though at times I do use the data of CEX. For similar reasons I have tended to track the use of childcare services

through data furnished by the U.S. Census that tracks number of daycare providers and the number of children in daycare.

Another potential source of data on this trend is the U.S. Economic Census. However, as Moreno (2005) notes, “[t]he small businesses [consumers] call upon [to take on their intimate affairs] are scattered across a number of categories in the U.S. Economic Census, so it is difficult to come up with one figure that represents them all”. Also, the U.S. Economic Census classifies many of these services under more general categories (e.g. “All Other Personal Services” [NAICS 812990]) that, while including many of the services that would be considered as involving the reproduction of the intimate sphere (e.g. Concierge services, House sitting services, Party planning service, Wedding planning services) also includes many that have no direct relationship to what is being studied here (e.g. Phrenology services). As such, Census data of this sort is of limited help in determining what, and to what extent, intimate affairs are being outsourced (if the number of businesses classified as “All Other Personal Services” is increasing, is this because intimate affairs are being outsourced or has there been a run on phrenological services?).

In the absence of reliable measures of consumer spending on particular types of outsourcing activities, or government data on the number of firms doing this type of work, I have relied on industry statistics such as membership figures in professional organizations and/or reports noting the size and history of a particular market engaged in this type of outsourcing, as well as the forecasts for these types of markets into the future. Though perhaps not as comprehensive as government data would be on the subject, these figures and reports tend to show that the number of businesses designed to take on

intimate affairs, or the market for doing so, is going in one direction – they are growing. And if membership figures in particular under-represent the actual number of firms engaging in this type of activity as many businesses may choose not to spend the money or go through the requirements to join, this just means that outsourcing is more prevalent than is presented here. Below are just some of the activities needed to reproduce the intimate sphere that are being outsourced today.

### Food

Though food is often sentimentalized and is seen as a central part of any culture (Weinstein 2005), the preparation of it as well as its cleanup is, or at least can be, a very time-consuming and laborious task. In short, even if the outcome of this work is a lovingly crafted meal that a family can sit down and enjoy together, it can be a chore. However, it is a chore that more and more Americans are choosing to offload by transferring it to various commercial substitutes. This can be seen in a number of different developments and trends in the food industry.

One aspect of this trend can be seen in the changing consumption patterns of Americans when it comes to their expenditures on food. The U.S. government<sup>13</sup> has tracked food expenditures for over 75 years providing a wealth of historical data on the spending patterns of consumers when it comes to food. In particular, it has tracked food

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<sup>13</sup> Most of the data presented in this section comes from reports furnished by the Department of Agriculture's Economic Research Service. These are available at: <http://www.ers.usda.gov/Briefing/CPIFoodAndExpenditures/Data/>

expenditures along two lines - food at home<sup>14</sup> and food away from home<sup>15</sup>. Looking at food expenditures along these lines allows for a comparison of the relative amount of money spent on food at home versus food away from home over time. As can be seen in Table 1, the amount of money going to food sources away from home has increased relative to those going to food sources in the home.

<b>Table 1: Food Expenditures by Families and Individuals At Home and Away from Home*</b>			
Expenditures for food			
Year	At home <sup>1</sup>	Away from home <sup>2</sup>	% of away vs. at home <sup>3</sup>
	<i>Billion dollars</i>	<i>Billion dollars</i>	<i>Percent</i>
1929	16.9	2.6	15%
1939	13.0	2.3	18%
1949	34.3	7.8	23%
1959	50.1	12.1	24%
1969	69.0	23.4	34%
1979	164.0	76.9	47%
1989	274.8	166.0	60%
1999	409.7	272.5	67%
2000	415.0	290.6	70%
2001	430.4	301.6	70%
2002	429.3	312.4	73%
2003	442.9	328.7	74%
2004	464.7	354.5	76%

<sup>3</sup>Calculations made by author

\* The data for this table comes from “Table 7: Food expenditures by families and individuals as a share of disposable personal income” published by the United States Department of Agriculture’s Economic Research Service, for further details.

<sup>14</sup> The types of outlets considered to provide consumers with food at home include: Supermarkets; Convenience stores; Other grocery; Specialty food stores; Warehouse clubs and super centers; Mass merchandisers; Other stores; Home delivered, mail order; and Farmers, processors, wholesalers, and other. Supermarkets, Warehouse clubs and super centers, and Other stores represent that vast majority of sales for food at home. See “Table 16: Sales of food at home by type of outlet”, published by the United States Department of Agriculture’s Economic Research Service, for further details.

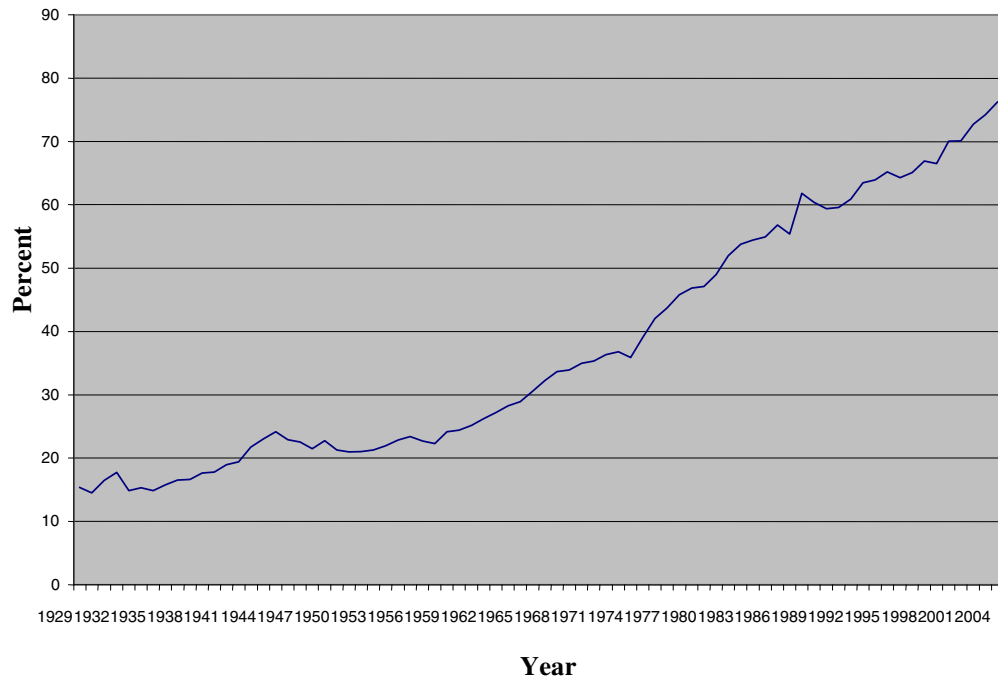
<sup>15</sup> The types of outlets considered to provide consumers with food away from home include: Full-service restaurants; Limited-service eating places; Hotels & motels; Schools and colleges; Stores, bars, and vending machines; Recreational places; and Others, including military outlets. Full- and Limited-service constitute the majority of sales for food away from home. See “Table 17: Sales of meals and snacks away from home by type of outlet”, published by the United States Department of Agriculture’s Economic Research Service, for further details.

Table 1 lists the total amount of expenditures on food at home versus the total amount of expenditures on food away from home for every 10 years between 1929 and 1999, and every year between 2000 and 2004 at the national level. It also includes a measure of the percentage of money spent on food away from relative to money spent on food at home. As can be seen from this last measure, at the national level the percent of expenditures on food going to sources away from home has dramatically increased since 1929, the first year of available data. In 1929, 15 percent of food expenditures went to sources away from home; by 2004, this same number was 76 percent, or a more than a five-fold increase in a 75 year period.

However, most of this growth has come from the 1960's onward: between 1929 and 1959, the relative percentage spent on food away from home only increased by 9 percentage points, from 15 percent in 1929 to 24 percent in 1959. Since 1959 this same number has nearly tripled from 24 percent in 1959 to 76 percent in 2004. Thus, while there has been a steady increase in the percentage of consumers' money going toward food sources outside of the home since 1929, this trend really began to accelerate in the 1960's and has, with minor variations, continued to increase to today. This can be seen in Figure 1 which maps the expenditure of food away from home as a percent of food at home for every year from 1929 through 2004.



**Figure 1: Percent of Food Expenditures Away vs. Home, 1929 to 2004\***

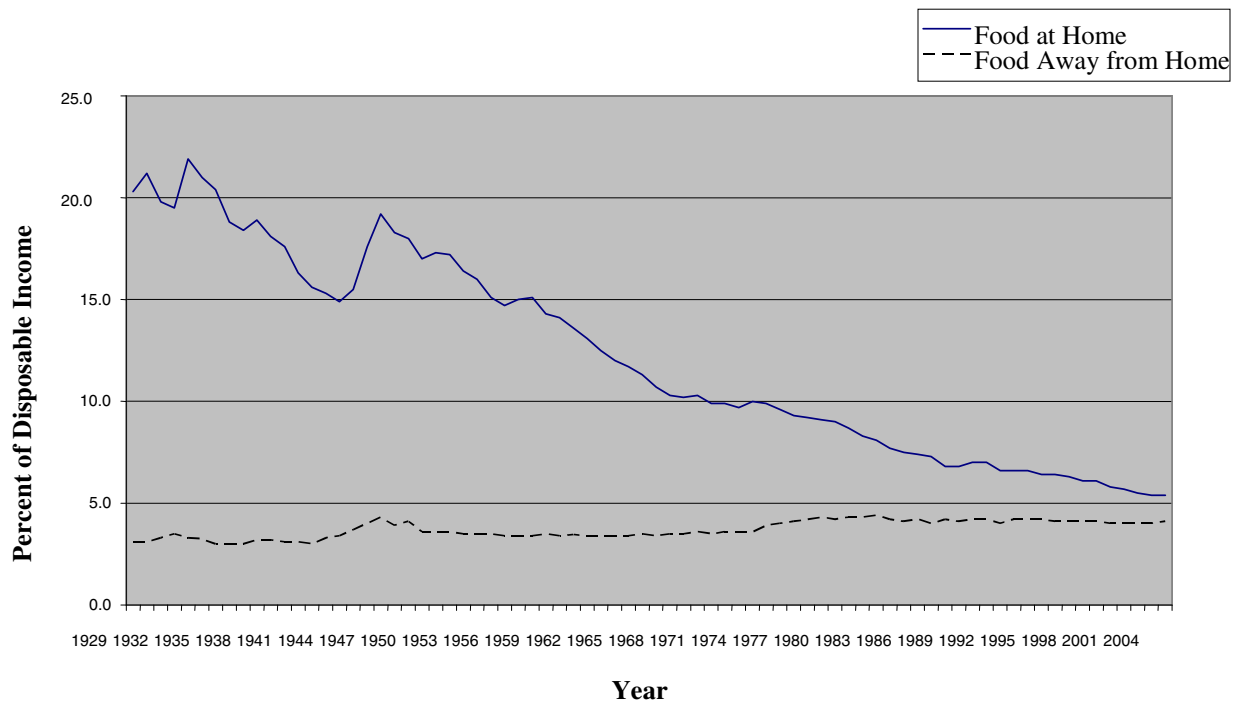


\* The data for this figure comes from “Table 7: Food expenditures by families and individuals as a share of disposable personal income” published by the United States Department of Agriculture’s Economic Research Service, for further details.

In Figure 1, three stages in the transfer of food to sources outside of the home can be seen. The first is the period between 1929 and the immediate post-war years of 1946 and 1947. In this period, there is a slow but steady increase in the relative percentage of expenditures going to food sources away from the home. Between 1946/1947 and 1962/1963, however, this same measure is relatively flat, if not declining slightly, and consistently hovers in the lower 20 percent range. This situation begins to change dramatically beginning in the early 1960’s, and continues through today, as there has been a steady and fairly steep increase in the amount of money going to food sources away from the home.

If one looks at these same food expenditures in terms of their share of average disposable income, one sees an interesting trend: while the share of disposable income spent on food at home has consistently declined since 1929, the share spent on food away from home has actually increased slightly over this same period of time. This can be seen Figure 2.

**Figure 2: Food Expenditures as Share of Disposable Income, 1929-2004\***



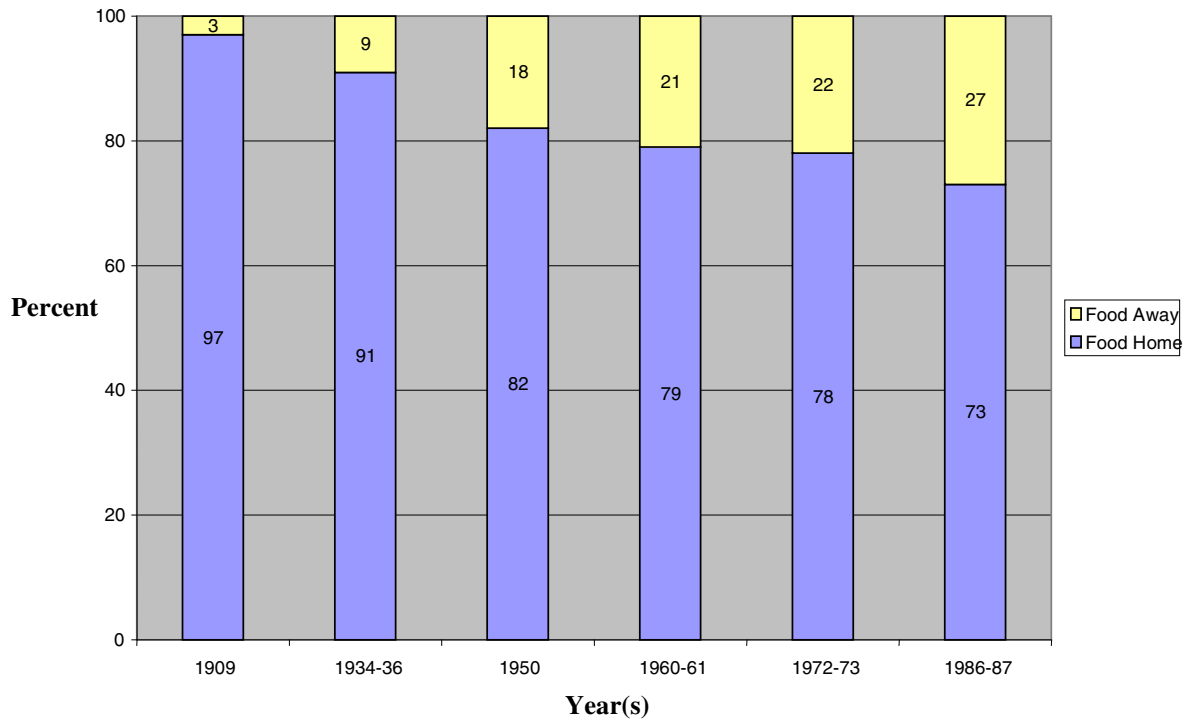
\* The data for this figure comes from “Table 7: Food expenditures by families and individuals as a share of disposable personal income” published by the United States Department of Agriculture’s Economic Research Service, for further details.

What this chart shows is that while expenditures of food at home relative to disposable income have fallen considerably from over 20 percent in 1929, to near 5 percent in 2004,

the share for food away from home has increased by about a percentage point over this same period, from just over 3 percent in 1929 to just over 4 percent in 2004. What this means is that the relative amount of disposable income being spent on food away from home has increased dramatically relative to the proportion of disposable income being spent on food at home so that in 2004, while 5.4 percent of personal disposable income was spend on food at home, 4.1 percent was spent on food away from home. The numbers suggest that if this trend continues, at some point in the near future these numbers will reach parity. It is even possible that more money could be spent on food away from home than is spent on food at home. At this point, however, these are only forecasts and only time will tell whether or not this actually happens.

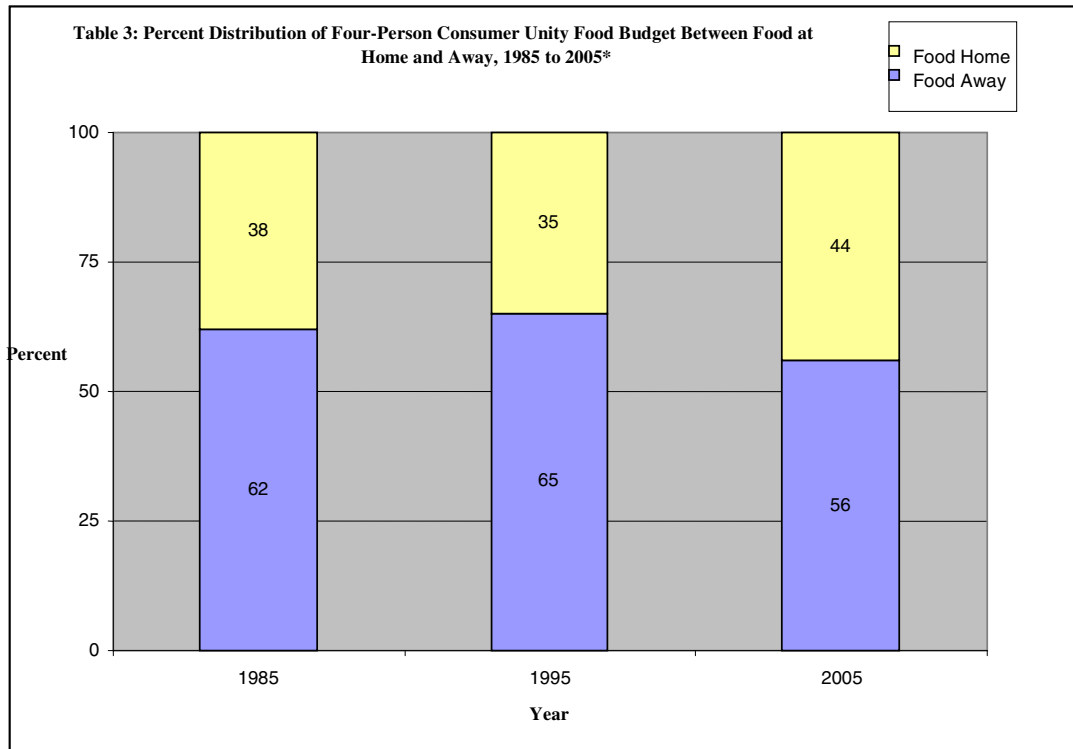
The above numbers show that at the national level there has been a shift in spending toward food sources outside of the home. A similar trend can be seen in the micro-economics of personal spending. Take for instance the following table reproduced from Jacobs and Sipp (1990: 23).

**Table 2: Percent Distribution of the Family Food Budget Between Food at Home and Away, 1909 to 1986-87**



As can be seen from this chart, the percent of spending by families devoted to food outside of the home has increased significantly since the early years of the previous century. In fact, between 1909 and 1986-87, it increased 9 fold. However, it should be noted that in order to make consistent comparisons over time and between different formulations of consumer expenditure surveys, these data are restricted to urban workers who are wage earners and clerical or sales employees (ibid. 21). In 1901, this type of worker accounted for 82 percent of the population, while in 1986-7 it accounted for less than one-third of the population. Nevertheless, as these authors note, “a review of expenditure survey data for the total population from 1960-61 to 1987 shows that the trends discussed here are applicable to the total population” (ibid.). If we change the

reference group to a four-person consumer unit<sup>16</sup>, we see that this trend has continued since the 1980's and has carried through until today. That can be seen in Table 3.



\* This data comes from the Consumer Expenditure Survey and measures the percent distribution of a four-person consumer unit's food budget between the categories of "food at home" and "food away from home"

As can be seen in this table, though more of a percentage of a four-person consumer unit's budget is devoted to food away from home than is the case for the families listed in Table 2, between 1985 and 2005 a four-person family increased the percent of their food

<sup>16</sup> Consumer units are defined as "either (1) all members of a particular household who are related by blood, marriage, adoption, or other legal arrangements; (2) a person living alone or sharing a household with others or living as a roomer in a private home or lodging house or in permanent living quarters in a hotel or motel, but who is financially independent; or (3) two or more persons living together who pool their income to make joint expenditure decisions. Financial independence is determined by the three major expense categories: housing, food, and other living expenses. To be considered financially independent, a respondent must provide at least two of the three major expense categories" (<http://www.bls.gov/bls/glossary.htm#C>). So, although these are not necessarily family units, these are economically interdependent groups, many of whom are families.

budget spent on food away from home by 8 percentage points in this time frame, though there was a slight decrease in this spending between 1985 and 1995. In 2005 this meant that this type of family was spending nearly 45 percent of its total food budget on food sources outside of the home.

Overall, this means that both nationally and in terms of personal spending more and more of consumers' money is being directed to food sources outside of the home.<sup>17</sup> This would seem to indicate that Americans are relying more and more on food sources outside of the home and thus outsourcing their food preparation as they are choosing to “buy” instead of “make” their food.

However, increased spending on food from sources outside the home is only one measure of this trend. Another, and perhaps more direct, measure is though the frequency of meals eaten out by Americans. And while the statistics regarding the number or percentages of meals eaten away from the home are not as available on a consistent basis as those dealing with food expenditures, those that are available point in the same direction as do food expenditures: Americans are eating out more than they did in the past.

According to government statistics (Lin and Frazao 1999: 4), in 1977-1978, the average American ate about 16 percent of their meals away from home. Ten years latter between 1987 and 1988, this same number had increased to 24 percent. By 1995, this number had further increased to 29 percent, or nearly one-third of all meals. In this same time frame, the number of snacks consumed away from home increased from 17 percent

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<sup>17</sup> This is consistent with Chao and Utgoff (2006: 66-8) who, in a review of consumer spending between 1900 and the present, found a similar pattern in how consumers allocated their food budgets. In this study, Chao and Utgoff found that there was a shift in spending toward food sources away from the home beginning in the 1970's for Boston, New York City, and the nation as a whole.

in 1977-1978 to 22 percent in 1995. Moreover, this trend has been accompanied by an increased use of private establishments (i.e. sit-down and/or fast food restaurants), as opposed to public institutions (e.g. schools), for the provisioning of food outside of the home. In 1977-1978, sit-down and/or fast food restaurants provided roughly 31 percent of all meals eaten away from home, or roughly 5 percent of the total meals and/or snacks for the average American. At the same time, public institutions provided close to 38 percent of meals and/or snacks purchased away from home which accounts for roughly 6 percent of all meals/snacks. In contrast, in 1995 public institutions provided only about 15 percent of meals and/or snacks away from home, or roughly 4 percent of all meals. In contrast, sit-down and fast food restaurants provided just above 52 percent of the meals and/or snacks purchased away from home, which accounts for 14 percent of all total meals. In all, this means that the average American in 1995 ate a little less than one meal a day from a source away from home, about half of which are from a private food establishment of some sort. Assuming that the average American eats 21 meals a week, this means that 6 of these meals are eaten outside of the home with nearly 3 of these being restaurants and fast food establishments.

More recent reports indicate that this trend is continuing. According to NPD Foodworld (2002), in 1991 the annual number of meals prepared and eaten at home was 702; in 2002 it decreased to 651. At the same time, the number of meals purchased away from home was 184 in 1991 and increased to 209 in 2002. In other words, in 1991 about 26 percent of all meals were eaten away from the home while in 2002 this same number was roughly 32 percent, or nearly a third of all meals. Simontacchi (2001: 18) reports similar statistics noting that “[a]t the birth of a new century and a new millennium, more

than one-third of all meals are eaten away from home, with the vast majority of these meals taken at fast-food restaurants”.

This appears to be true for a younger demographic as well. *Good Housekeeping* (2002) has published survey results showing that children are getting more and more of their food from sources outside of the home: compared to 1980 when the average child ate 17 percent of their meals away from home, in 2000 this number was 30 percent. Moreover, much of this eating out is taking place in fast food restaurants: in 1980, 1 in 10 meals of American children came from fast food establishments, in 2000 this same proportion is 1 in 3.<sup>18</sup> Simontacchi (2001: 141) reports even higher proportions for teenagers with about one-half of their meals being eaten away from home and the majority of these coming from fast-food restaurants.

However, a growing number of consumers are taking a more personalized, if not even more direct, approach to outsourcing their food preparation. They are doing this by employing a personal chef. A personal chef is someone an individual or family hires to prepare their meals for them that their clients select according to their likes, preferences, and/or needs. For a flat fee, normally between \$350 to \$500 for somewhere between 5 and 10 meals, including side dishes, a personal chef will buy the needed ingredients for the selected menu items, come to his/her client’s house, prepare the meals, put them in individual containers, and then store them in the refrigerator or freezer so all that all the client needs to do eat these meals is reheat them when they are hungry (this food often being the caliber of that found in high-quality restaurants). And, as an added bonus, the chef will also clean up after him/herself relieving the client of his/her “after-dinner

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<sup>18</sup> This can be found at:  
[http://magazines.ivillage.com/goodhousekeeping/myhome/parenting/articles/0,,287162\\_533666-2,00.html](http://magazines.ivillage.com/goodhousekeeping/myhome/parenting/articles/0,,287162_533666-2,00.html)



drudgery” ([www.uspca.com](http://www.uspca.com)). As one client of a personal chef describes their after dinner clean up with this service: “We put two plates in the dishwasher and it’s done” (cited in Fischler 2006).

This service is different from what one would find with a private chef. While a private chef works exclusively for one client preparing all his/her food and may even live in the client’s house, a personal chef normally works for many clients at once periodically making multiple meals at a time for a client that are then stored for later use. Moreover, given that private chefs are employed directly by individuals or families on a full-time basis, they have tended to be employed almost exclusively by the wealthy. Personal chefs, in contrast, by working for multiple clients at once are a more affordable option for those wishing to outsource their food preparation (though these services are far from being universally affordable). And while the number of private chefs in the U.S. has remained fairly constant at around 5,000 since 1992, the personal chef industry has been rapidly growing since the industry was founded in the late 1980’s (ibid).

This can be seen along a number of different lines. The first is in terms of the membership numbers for the United States Personal Chef Association (USPCA), the first, and today the largest, personal chef association in America. Founded in 1991, the USPCA had 485 member businesses by 1994; 1,800 by 1998; 4,100 in 2000 (with an additional 200 operating internationally); and currently has over 5,000 members. Similarly, the number of people using these services has increased 48 percent in the last 5 years (Fischler 2006). Moreover, while currently a \$290 million per year industry, the market for personal chefs is expected to grow to \$500 million over the next 5 years (Roussell 2006). On a longer time horizon, with “the ever-demanding work and home

schedules and commitments, the need for a Personal Chef Service is expected to increase ten-fold in the next twenty years”(www.uspca.com). In other words, with a greater number of Americans feeling a time-crunch as work eats up more of their time, the outsourcing of food preparation in this manner becomes an attractive option. Moreover, the food can be of better quality than that found in many restaurants (fast-food and otherwise) and can be personalized to one’s tastes. As will be seen, the issues of time deprivation and personalization are recurring themes in the motivation to outsource one’s intimate affairs.

The overall picture painted by the above is that food is increasingly something that is acquired from sources outside of the home. Many are quick to link this development to the rise of two-income families who not only tend to have higher levels of disposable income to spend on food but also have time pressures that make the giving of food preparation over to others desirable (Mermilliod 1997; Frozen Food Digest 1999). This is not to say that the home is now totally devoid of food preparation; in fact, the average American still eats about three times the number of meals at home than he/she does away. Nevertheless, the primacy of the home as a source of food preparation can no longer be taken for granted and the trend of more and more Americans acquiring their food from sources outside of the home shows no signs of abating anytime soon. As such, when Dennis Lombardi, Executive Vice President of Technmic Inc., a Chicago-based restaurant consulting firm, says that “[c]ooking has become a hobby” he might have been overstating the case a bit (cited in Bennett 1997). However, his comment does tap into the fact that more and more Americans are willing to outsource their food

preparation activities to others. As will be seen in the next section, much is the same for keeping house.

### Housekeeping

Historically, the use of others outside of the family to clean one's home has been quite common (Romero 1992; Katzman 1978). For example, in Colonial times a variety of outsiders were used to help maintain what Tilly and Scott (1978: 12) call the "family economy", or the "[t]he interdependence of work and residence, of household labor needs, subsistence requirements, and family relationships" all of which are "inseparably intertwined" with one another at this time. But the name "family economy" is a bit of a misnomer in the sense that, during this time, the boundaries of who was included as a "member" of the family were much looser than they are today. In other words, it was not uncommon for households at this time to include a number of persons not related by blood but who were, nevertheless, integrated into the family system physically (they lived in their master's home), in terms of the household's authority structure (e.g. they were expected to obey the head of the household and other social superiors),<sup>19</sup> and even in some cases emotionally (e.g. being loved and cared for by their masters as they would their own children).

In Victorian times outside help was commonly used as well, though in this case it came in form of domestic service and was in many ways different from the use of

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<sup>19</sup> The position in the authority structure of an apprentice or servant at this time was very close to that of a child. That is, they were expected to obey the head of the household and do the work he wished him/her to do. However, as O'Day (1994: 181-188) points out, this does not mean that servants and children had the same emotional position within a family; while servants were sometimes treated in the same manner children (e.g. in terms of care expressed for the well-being of the person), this was not always the case.

outsiders common in Colonial times. Schlereth (1991: 72) highlights some of these differences:

By the 1890's, "domestics" had replaced "help" or "hired girls" in name and in fact, reflecting transformations that recast work roles and family life. The hired girl, much like the hired man, worked in a society of small producers. In addition to household chores, she often helped out with the home production of homespun textiles or cheese, eggs, and milk... The hired girl, sitting and eating at the family's table, shared their food and their family. Usually, she had been recruited through a network of kin, neighbors, or friends.

In contrast, the employers of domestics "recruited their household workers in institutional contexts" such as newspaper ads or "intelligence offices", employment agencies that specialized in the placement of domestic workers (ibid.) because "the sheer scale of city life made it more difficult for employers to find a servant whose family they already know or to hire through informal personal networks" (Dudden 1983: 46). Not surprisingly, the result of this was that worker and employer were less familiar with one another and this had consequences for the social relations involved between these two parties. One of these was "the fact that servants, while integral parts of a household, were usually excluded from the family circle. Servants became... 'strangers within the gates'. They slept in attics or back bedrooms, relaxed in the kitchen, entered the house through rear entrances, and spent most of their time secluded in work areas. Families too often regarded servants as 'aliens' and 'sphinxes', unknown and unknowable" (Sutherland 1989: 164).

However, the increased anonymity of employment relations between servants and their employers also allowed the former room to calculate what was in her own best interest when considering employment opportunities as “[n]o ties to a locale or family acquaintances precluded or muted such calculations” (Dudden 1983: 51). In this sense, employment relationship between a servant and her employer was defined in more purely economic terms than was the case in the past where social elements were heavily mixed into this relationship (e.g. in how servants in Colonial times were absorbed into the family system and not treated just as an employee).

But at the same time a number of factors militated against domestic service becoming a purely commercial relationship. For example, servants worked in their employer’s home and this tended to make work relations less formal than other occupations at this time, and this lack of formality meant that employer-employee relations were more personalized than more modern work settings (e.g. in impersonal bureaucracies or factories) (Coser 1973). But these personalized relations tended to be oppressive because of the lack of formal hours and the fact that the work process took place in the home did little to protect the demands of a family from encroaching upon what was nominally a servant’s free time. The result of this was that live-in servants were always on call, their work days often stretched from dawn to past dark, and they often worked seven days a week (Katzman 1978: 110 – 114; Rollins 1985).

At the same time, while many jobs were moving toward specialization and were being mechanized, housework remained a general series of tasks that were highly labor-intensive. Thus, even by the middle of the nineteenth century

most work was done with only minimal mechanical assistance, and many of the items consumed or used by the family were produced at home. Meals had to be prepared from scratch; few commercially prepared items were available to shorten the process..... Vegetables and fruit had to be canned or made into preserves for the winter months. Candles and soap and other laundry aids were made in the kitchen. A small amount of hot water was available in the water back – a water reserve attached to the stove – but water for bathing, cleaning, and washing had to be heated on the stove (Coontz 1988: 124).

The result of this was a series of often grueling daily, weekly, and seasonal tasks that needed to be performed by domestic servants in order to keep house. In homes with one general purpose maid

[d]aily chores...included lighting fires (in stoves, for hot water, in winter fire places or furnaces), preparing and serving meals and cleaning up, making beds. Doing light dusting, sweeping or scrubbing front steps and porch, answering the doorbell, and running errands. The weekly cycle, dominated by washing, ironing, and heavy cleaning, was more physically demanding. A typical week would begin with washing on Monday, ironing on Tuesday, and mending on Wednesday. On Thursday the dining room would be thoroughly cleaned, including the polishing of silver and glass. On Friday the house would be swept and the windows cleaned. Saturday would entail major housecleaning – the kitchen, cellar, and rooms not cleaned thoroughly on other days – and then perhaps breadbaking. (ibid. 122).

But the employment domestic servants was not limited to the Victorian era. In fact, in terms of absolute numbers, the number of private household workers (i.e. domestic servants) peaked in 1940 at 2.2 million (Martin and Segrave 1985: vi). Since then, however, “the number of domestics has been declining steadily since 1940” (ibid.).

This can be seen in the declining percentage of employed women working in this occupation: in 1870, it was 52 percent, in 1920 28 percent, and in 1940, the peak year, 18 percent. “After World War II, the percentage declined rapidly to 5.1 percent in 1970 and 2.5 percent in 1980” (Palmer nd.). Today, the *Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2006-07 Edition* notes that there are 1.4 million persons working as maids or housekeepers, though only about 28 percent, approximately 392,000, are employed by private households (the others are employed by hotels, motels, hospitals, nursing homes, etc.).<sup>20</sup>

The overall decline in use of servants is the result of many things. However, it seems that the biggest factor is the availability of other means of employment: when given the chance to work in other situations, women have historically chosen to do so despite the fact that at certain times they could have made more money as a domestic, and especially as a live-in domestic (Katzman 1978). For example, as industrialization proceeded through the 1800’s and into the early 1900’s and created many new jobs for women, though ones that tended to pay less than domestic work, women by and large took the lower wages and avoided domestic service (Romero 1992: 61-2; Katzman 1978: 273).<sup>21</sup> This factor also explains why a historical change in the composition of the domestic worker labor force took place around 1920 from being a mostly white occupation prior to then, to being one comprised mostly of black and immigrant workers after this date: white women had greater economic opportunities open to them than did their black and immigrant counterparts at this time and, when given the chance, left this

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<sup>20</sup> <http://www.bls.gov/oco/ocos174.htm> (visited February 19, 2007)

<sup>21</sup> This can be seen in the fact that, while the number of domestic servants increased in absolute numbers over this time period, the relative percentage of women working in this occupation fell: in 1870 there were 960,000 private household workers in the U.S., representing 52 percent of all employed women; by 1940, their peak year, there were 2.2 million private household workers, though this represented only 20.4 percent of employed women (Martin and Segrave 1985: vi).

line of work (Martin and Segrave 1985: vi). Thus, by and large the historically limiting factor in the use of domestic service has been more the lack of supply of workers than the demand for this type of work.<sup>22</sup>

Nevertheless, it appears that the use of outside sources to clean one's home is becoming popular again, though getting an exact picture of how many people are using these services is somewhat difficult. In part, this is because so much of this work takes place informally (Dortch 1996) or is performed by undocumented immigrants whose work is missed by normal government accounting methods (Romero 1992: 10 and 68). However, it does appear that there has been an increased use in these types of services in the recent past. For example, in 1999 only between 14 and 18 percent of homes employed others to do their cleaning, though this is a number that is on the upswing. According to Mediamark Research (cited in Ehrenreich 2003: 90), there was a 53 percent increase in the use of a hired cleaner or service at least once a month between 1995 and 1999. Moreover, according to the Hecker (2005: 77), the occupational category of "Maids and housekeeping cleaners" is expected to be one of the top 30 occupations in terms of job growth between 2004 and 2014 increasing by an estimated 165,000 jobs within this timeframe. This growth, in part at least, is attributed to the fact that "[a]s families become more pressed for time, they increasingly are hiring cleaning and handyman services to perform a variety of tasks in their homes" (*Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2006-07 Edition*).<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> One measure of this has been the repeated cries of a "servant shortage" that have been heard throughout American history (Katzman 1978: 223-265).

<sup>23</sup> This quotation comes from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, *Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2006-07 Edition*, Building Cleaning Workers, on the Internet at <http://www.bls.gov/oco/ocos174.htm> (visited April 26, 2006).



Another development accompanying this increasing trend of using others to clean one's home as been the formation, and subsequently, growth of professional, often franchised, cleaning companies such as Merry Maids, Molly Maids, and Maid Pro. Merry Maids, founded in 1979, is the world's largest home cleaning franchise network in the world according to its website (<http://www.merrymaids.com/company/>), servicing over 300,000 homes per year through its more than 600 locations in the U.S. It also employs over 8,000 workers around the world (ibid.). Merry Maids, while being the largest of the professional cleaning service companies, is only one of the many that have sprung up in the recent past. As Ganzi Licata (2004) describes this trend, "[h]ousecleaning, once the province of freelancers whose advertising budgets were measured in thumbtacks and whose business spread mostly by word of mouth, has gone corporate". The theoretical importance of this growth in professional cleaning organization will be discussed in the next chapter. For now, it is important to note that the use of housekeeping services, formal or otherwise, appears to be on the rise. But it is not just the cleaning of the home that is being outsourced today. So too is its organization. This can be seen in the rise of the professional organization industry.

A professional organizer is someone who, as the name implies, will come into one's home and organize it by eliminating clutter (e.g. by donating or throwing away unused and/or unwanted things), utilizing space more efficiently (e.g. by using and/or installing cabinets or shelving units), and finding a (clearly labeled) home for all the things in a person's life (e.g. creating a space for one's paperwork or one's miscellaneous things). This is an industry that is both relatively new and growing.

According to Barr Izsak, President of the National Association of Professional Organizers (NAPO), “[t]he industry is exploding” (cited in Gardner 2006). The NAPO was founded in 1985 and has seen its membership grow from 16 members in that year to 1,000 in 1998 (Reino 2005). Between 2003 and 2005 the NAPO saw its membership nearly double from 2,000 to 3,700 (Gardner 2006) while the NAPO’s website now claims that its membership is close to 4,000 ([http://www.napo.net/press\\_room/facts.html](http://www.napo.net/press_room/facts.html)).

Izsak cites consumerism and marketing as being responsible, in part at least, for the increased disorganization in people’s lives and the concomitant need for outside help: “People are running out and buying all of this stuff without thinking where they’re going to store it or how they’re going to use it” (cited in Gardner 2006). Others cite, much like the case of food and housekeeping, “the matter of time” (ibid.). “Closets, kitchen cabinets, garages, offices – they’re often subjected to cramming and jamming by their busy, multi-tasking owners” (Reino 2005). According to Ann Hupert, owner of Place to Place, a Missouri-based professional organization business, “[c]lutter can be spirit-crushing” while “[d]ecluttering can be liberating...especially in a culture where people are pressed for time. So pressed that they can’t keep up with it all” (cited in Kee 2005). However, part the increased demand for these services is that people also seem to increasingly want their lives to be simpler: “‘It’s part of the simplifying movement,’ [says] Popply Cantrell, owner of Positively Organized in Tucker [Georgia] ‘It’s well worth the time because it gives us peace of mind. Our calendars are packed and our energy is spent. We’re living at too fast a pace’” (cited in Wagstaff 2001).

These three factors together – the accumulation of things, a lack of time, and the desire for a simpler life - seem to be at odds with one another and suggest an ironic circle

is at play here: people work more so that they can have more things; however, by working so much they do not have the time to manage the things that they do have; the result is that their lives become disorganized and this disorganization eats up more of their already limited time; thus, they hire (i.e. spend more) someone else to liberate them from the very things they are working so hard to accumulate in the first place.

A similar, but partial, version of this cycle can be seen in the works of Schor (1991, 1998): both Schor (1991) and others (e.g. Jacobs and Gerson 2004) have noted that, for at least the segment of the population that is likely to employ services such as a professional organizer, Americans are working longer hours. This is a situation which leads to both a decline in leisure time and time spent performing domestic labor (i.e. time one could spend, among other things, organizing one's home). At the same time, for those who can afford it, consumerism has increased significantly since the 1980's. The result of this is the accumulation of more things that must be managed by the very people who are likely, since they are working so much, not to have the time needed to manage all of these goods. Schor (1998) offers "downshifting" (i.e. working less and having less) as well as a variety of other means to escape the new consumerism that she sees as being so dominant in our society. And while these might be effective strategies for some, the use of personal organizers and other services that outsource intimate affairs suggests that many are taking another path. That is, instead of escaping consumerism by rejecting it in whole or in part, they are instead trying to escape through it by buying their way out of the problems of consumerism. In this regard, professional organizers are an elegant case of the market providing solutions to the very problems that it creates<sup>24</sup>.

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<sup>24</sup> A similar dynamic seems to be in play for at least some children as well. According to Lanna Nakone, founder of Organized World, a California-based professional organization company and the author of

In 2005, NAPO members served over 90,000 clients (<http://www.napo.net/>) while the industry as a whole was estimated at \$3 billion in sales in that year. As was much the case above, in all likelihood these numbers will increase as time goes on.

However, as we will see, organizers are not the only professionals who are coming into our lives to help us manage our daily affairs and to whom more and more Americans are looking to offload some of their domestic responsibilities.

#### Personal Concierges

Another industry that takes on the domestic chores of individuals and families, and which is the industry that may in fact represent the trend outsourcing intimate affairs *par excellence*, is the formation and growth of the personal concierge. Like their counterparts in hotels, personal concierges are persons who will, for a fee, perform a multitude of tasks that individuals and families are willing to hand over, though this normally excludes performing routine domestic chores such as cleaning, cooking, or childcare. For example, a personal concierge can be hired to perform such activities as bill paying, house/pet sitting, waiting for a delivery person, organizing one's closet, party planning and coordinating, returning calls, purchasing airline/concert tickets, personal shopping, and running errands to name but a few of the services offered. Thus, while many concierges cannot be hired to perform childcare, many can be hired to pickup children and transport them from one activity to another.

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several books on the subject, “[n]owadays, when we have a lot more money than time, kids are neglected...Parents buy things form them instead of spending time with them. They’re overloaded” (cited in Gardner 2006).

As can be seen from this list, personal concierges are a more generalist type of outsourcer with the concierges being a ‘Jack’, or more commonly a ‘Jill’, of many trades.<sup>25</sup> An example of this can be seen in the range of services offered by Potomac Concierge, a Rockville, Maryland-based company. As it says on its website: “We can assist you in managing your life by being problem solvers, doing errands, waiting for deliveries and trades people, organizing your home or office, acting as a personal shopper, party planning, doing research, making appointments, and vendor liaison. The possibilities are endless - *if it is ethical and legal we will do our best to help*” (<http://potomacconcierge.com/> - emphasis added).<sup>26</sup> These are fairly wide boundaries and as generalists in the outsourcing of intimate affairs, their work often overlaps with more specialized industries that similarly take on the outsourced tasks of individuals and families. Thus, personal concierges may sometimes do the work of a professional organizer by organizing one’s closet or office. Similarly, as will be discussed below, they may work as party planners. These areas of overlap, notwithstanding, this is a distinct occupation and its distinctiveness comes from its generalist nature in taking on a variety of intimate affairs for its customers which stands in contrast to the specificity of other types of outsourcers (e.g. businesses that specialize in one area of outsourcing such as party planning or organizing). As such, they will be treated as a separate occupation here.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> There is in fact a “Jill of all Trades” company located in Hoboken, New Jersey that will take on many intimate affairs, though, unlike many concierge companies, this company will perform such services as cooking, cleaning apartments, and laundry.

<sup>26</sup> This message of doing anything that is legal is echoed by other personal concierge firms as well.

<sup>27</sup> It should also be noted that some personal concierges are employed by businesses to perform the personal affairs of their employees while their employees are at work. These are not instances of outsourcing in the proper sense as these are not services that are hired directly by individuals or families. However, as will be seen, many individuals are outsourcing their intimate affairs by directly hiring a personal concierge.

According to the International Concierge and Errand Association (ICEA), this industry dates back roughly twenty years in the U.S.<sup>28</sup> Katharine Giovanni, Chairman of the Board and Interim President of the ICEA, who is also the founder of Triangles Concierge, a personal concierge training company, notes “[i]t’s an industry that is seriously taking off like the proverbial brush fire”.<sup>29</sup> For example, Giovanni estimates that two dozen personal concierge businesses have popped up in the Washington DC metropolitan area in the last 5 years (cited in Kang 2006).<sup>30</sup> Sara-Ann Kasner, founder and president of the National Concierge Association (NCA), also believes this is a growing industry: “[t]he concierge business is exploding right now. There has been tremendous growth” (cited in Tiffany 2001). For example, the ICEA has seen its membership double from 250 to 500 members between 2005 and 2006, with most of its clients being located in the U.S. (Kang 2006), while the NCA has seen its membership swell from 6 to 600 in the past eight years (Krischer Goodman 2006).

So what factors have led to such growth in this industry? There is a surprising convergence between the organizations that represent these businesses, the business themselves, how these businesses advertise themselves, and the reasons customers give for employing these services in the first place: a lack of time on the part of busy professionals, especially those in two-income families. In other words, these services are an outgrowth of the growing conflict between work and home where the number of roles outstrips the number of people to fill them. These services offer to step in and fill this

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<sup>28</sup> <http://www.iceaweb.org/mc/page.do?sitePageId=21507>

<sup>29</sup> [http://www.triangleconcierge.com/industry\\_news.htm](http://www.triangleconcierge.com/industry_news.htm)

<sup>30</sup> Kang (2006) also cites census data reporting that the number of businesses in this area with 5 or fewer employees grew approximately 6 percent between 1999 and 2004. As most personal concierge firms are likely to be small businesses with typically only one or two employees, part of this growth reported by the census data is likely to be due to the growth of these concierge services.

deficit by taking on some of the tasks individuals and families do not have the time, energy, or desire to perform. For example, Potomac Concierge offers to “help busy people obtain more balance in their life. Let us take care of your growing ‘to do list’, so you can focus on family, work, friends and what you enjoy. Consider us ‘*outsourcing specialists*’ upon whom you can trust and rely” (ibid. – emphasis added). And, by employing these services, “Potomac Concierge will give you one of the greatest commodities you need – time” (ibid.). The relieving of time-starved individuals and couples and the concomitant message that by using a personal concierge one can better concentrate on one’s wants, needs, and/or interests are common themes throughout this industry. For example, Triangles Concierge’s website uses this theme to help promote the benefits of this industry by listing statistics showing just how time-starved two-career families, and especially the wives, are.<sup>31</sup>

However, there is another aspect of two-income families that has helped to fuel this industry: “the rise in time-starved two-income families has [also] pushed the use of such services down the income chain, to folks who hire a restaurant to cook food and drop it off, or a company to hang lights on the roof” (Fetterman 2005). That is, dual-income families generate both the need for, and the economic resources to, hire such services. As such, “[t]he popularity of concierge services has grown from the image of a privilege for the wealthy to the everyday needs of moms and dads in the workplace” (Kasner cited in ibid.). Of course, these services are still far from being universal but they are spreading and as the time-demands of work come to pressure more and more families and individuals, it is likely this industry will continue to grow.

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<sup>31</sup> For example, the webpage cites Heymann’s (2000) research showing that 8 of 10 women report doing far more housework than their spouses/partners (<http://www.triangleconcierge.com/statistics.htm>).

Another growing industry, though one that is far more specialized than personal concierges, is that of the home delivery of groceries. This industry is discussed in the next section.

#### On-line Groceries and Home Delivery

The home delivery of groceries was once something that was the norm in the grocery industry as part of its full-service model. However, as Glazer (1993) notes, the grocery industry has since changed its model from that of full-service to one of self-service. This means that the industry as a whole went from providing a wide range of services at no additional charge, including home delivery, to a model that has customers perform these same tasks for free. The result of this change was that customers were expected to transport themselves to the store's location, select his/her own groceries, and then transport these newly acquired groceries back to his/her own home with little to no formal assistance being provided by the store to facilitate this transportation. Today, however, this situation is beginning to change as the home delivery of groceries is making a resurgence in American life not only with the development of online grocers such as Peapod, Simon Delivers, and Fresh Direct to name but a few, but also the adoption of online services by more traditional grocery stores such as Albertsons and Safeway. Amazon.com has also gotten into the online grocery game, offering this service on its website.

Acting like a virtual marketplace, with online grocers one can go on the web, select the goods one would like to buy, and then have them delivered to his/her home,



often in a window of time selected by the customer. In this case, however, what one selects are groceries ranging the whole gamut from produce, to dry goods, to meats, dairy, and even seafood. But unlike the older full-service grocery model where home delivery came at no extra-cost to the customer, with the home delivery offered by online grocers there is a fee associated with this service. For example, Peapod charges \$6.95 for orders over \$100 and \$9.95 for orders under \$100 with a minimum order of \$50; Fresh Direct charges between \$4.95 and \$9.95 depending on the size of the order and the location of the delivery; and Simon Delivers charges a fee of \$7.00 for orders over \$80 and \$9.95 for orders under \$80 with a minimum order of \$40. Nevertheless, despite these fees business is booming: online grocery sales are expected to reach \$4.2 billion in 2006, an increase of 27 percent from 2005 and a six-fold increase from 2000 (Green 2006). And though online grocery sales account for less than one percent the supermarket industry's total revenue, this is expected to double by 2010 (Jupiter Research cited in *ibid.*). Moreover, as was mentioned above, traditional 'brick and mortar' grocery stores such as Safeway and Albertsons are getting into the online game by offering online shopping and home delivery.<sup>32</sup>

Peapod is currently the biggest online grocer. According to its corporate fact sheet<sup>33</sup>, as of 2006 Peapod served 240,000 customers and has delivered more than 8 million orders. The "typical" customers of Peapod, like most of the people who employ the home delivery service of online grocers, are "are dual income couples and dual income families" (Peapod Corporate Fact Sheet 2006), though, the company claims to cater to a large range of people. Nevertheless, Peapod's slogan and self-promotion

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<sup>32</sup> Albertsons also allows for customers to order their groceries online and then pick them up in the store for a fee of \$5.95. See [www.albertsons.com](http://www.albertsons.com) for more details.

<sup>33</sup> This is available at [www.peapod.com](http://www.peapod.com).

revolves around how this service is beneficial to time-starved individuals: its corporate slogan is: “Peapod is Smart Shopping for Busy People.” As Druehl and Porteus (2006: 3) describe it, “Peapod’s advantages in the customer’s mind are time savings and delivery”. In other words, they offer convenience. However, some firms are upping the ante in this regard: Simon Delivers now allows customers to shop online using wireless technologies such as a Blackberry making it possible to shop almost anywhere (e.g. while one is fishing or at their child’s soccer game) (McKinney 2006). In all, this means that new businesses models and technologies are allowing grocery shopping and delivery to be removed from the store thereby allowing the customer to buy what he/she wants from wherever, whenever.

Meal preparation, including buying and acquiring the needed groceries; housekeeping and organizing; and the variety of tasks performed by personal concierges are activities that tend to be performed in and/or for the interior of the home. But it is not just inside of the home that the outsourcing of domestic chores is taking place as can be seen in the next section.

#### Lawn Care and Pet-Waste Management Companies

Like many of the tasks that are performed in the interior of the home, an increasing number of Americans are also outsourcing the chores related to its exterior. One prominent example of this is the case of lawn care. Despite the fact that the average size of the American lawn is decreasing, the number of persons contracting out their lawn care service is on the rise (Kahlenberg 2005). In 1988, an estimated 6 million homes

used a lawn care or lawn maintenance company (Andersen Lindberg and Vaughn, nd.: 4). A decade later, this number had more than doubled to 13.7 million, or 13 percent of, households in America. By 2003, this number had further increased to 19.4 million, or 17 percent of, homes. Moreover, the total spending on these services increased from \$7.9 billion in 1998 to \$11.2 billion in 2003 (ibid). Not surprisingly, there has been a concomitant increase in the number of businesses providing these services: in 1990, there were approximately 5,500 professional lawn care companies operating in the U.S. (Bormann et al. 2001: 64); currently there are an estimated 10,000 such businesses (Figure Sandlin 2003: 4).

Bormann et al (2001: 52) trace the history of this industry to a \$17,000 grant by Congress to study the best grasses for turfing lawns and other areas. The industry picked up momentum in the 1920's when the United States Golf Association won the support of the Department of Agriculture to study the best grasses for courses and fairways. However, it was not until the post-war years that the rising expectations of what a lawn should be (i.e. green and free of weeds similar to how golf courses look) would bring together the conditions necessary for the need of professional lawn care services at one's home (Steinberg 2006: 14). For example, by the 1970's new species of grasses were greener and more resistant to disease than the common Kentucky variety but these varieties also required more care such as greater amounts of water and more fertilizer (ibid. 70-1). Thus, while lawns could and did look better than in the past, a great deal of work was needed to create and maintain this look. "It was not too long, then, before the lawn became a monumental chore, thus creating an opportunity for those seeking to make turf care into a profession" (ibid. 71)

Two companies who seized this opportunity were TruGreen, established under this name and with a corporate headquarters in 1972 (<http://www.trugreen.com/tg/about/about.dsp>), and Chemlawn which was established in 1965 (Rumbler 1992). These two companies merged in 1992 at a time when the former had 450,000 customers in 23 states, the latter slightly more than one million customers in 45 states and Canada (ibid). The result was the creation of TruGreen Chemlawn which, at that time, controlled 20 percent of the national market. Today TruGreen Chemlawn is the world's largest landscaping and lawn care company and has over 3.4 million residential and commercial customers (<http://www.trugreen.com/tg/about/about.dsp>).

But it is not just the desire for greener grass that spurred the recent growth of the lawn care industry. Another factor cited is the rise of two-income households and how hard people are working: according to Bruce Butterfield, research director at the National Gardening Association, “[p]eople work hard all week and want some private time... The last thing they want to do is push a lawn mower around the yard on Saturday mornings” (cited in Kahlenberg 2005; see also Kelley 1996). But even many of those who do want to work on their yards on Saturday are outsourcing at least some of their yard work. As Butterfield explains, “many homeowners are employing others to do the drudgery of lawn cutting and leaf blowing, freeing time to indulge in the horticultural pursuits that they want to do” (cited in Higgins 2003). This helps explain why spending on *both* “do-it-for-me”<sup>34</sup> lawn care services and do-it-yourself gardening supplies increased between 1997 and 2002. However, “[c]onsumer spending on do-it-yourself lawn and garden products peaked in 2002 at \$39.6 billion and has fallen annually since then... What has

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<sup>34</sup> “Do-it-for-me” services is a phrase used by Steinberg (2006: 71)

grown over this same period of time is the amount spent on hired services...that is now about the same as the total spent on DIY [gardening]" (Butterfield cited in Hair 2006).

Another factor in the growth of this industry, and one that is expected to increase in the future, is the aging of the baby-boom generation who at some point may become physically unable to perform this work (Higgins 2003). The result will be an increased need for services that can perform some or all of the yard work for this demographic.

Nevertheless, even now it seems that more and more consumers are choosing others to take care of at least some of the chores that normally take place outside of the home. Another example of this trend, and one that takes the outsourcing of lawn maintenance to another level, can be seen in the rise of a company called Doody Calls. Doody Calls is a pet waste management company based in Virginia, but which now has franchises in four states. As the name implies, this is a company that can be hired to remove your pet's waste from your yard. Ironically, the founder of the company, Jacob D'Aniello, told *ABC News Now, Money Matters* (2006) in an interview that part of the motivation for starting Doody Calls in 2000 was that this was a job that could not be outsourced, a persistent fear in his previous work in the IT industry.

Doody Calls is just one of the estimated 300 pet waste removal companies that compete in a \$20 million per year market (Johnson 2006). And while the pet waste management industry is about 30 years old (Boykin 2006), its real growth and formalization has only taken place within the recent past. For example, the Association of Professional Animal Waste Specialists (aPaws), an association of "pooper scoopers", was founded in 2002 with 10 members (Dransfeldt 2006). It currently has close to 100 (Boykin 2006). Even Pet Butler, "[t]he world's largest, *oldest*, most respected and first

coast-to-coast scooping service” is less than a decade old, founded in 1998 (www.petbutler.com – emphasis added).<sup>35</sup>

Like other services described above, two factors that are driving the growth of this industry are a lack of time and/or desire on the part of clients to do this task themselves. According to David Litwak, editor-in-chief of *Pet Business*, an industry magazine, “[p]eople don't have time to take care of their animals...[t]hat's why businesses that take care of the chores for you are growing" (cited in Stefanini 2006). Not surprisingly, most of the clients of Pet Butler "are middle and upper-middle income" (Boswell cited in Boykin 2006) while Doody Calls notes on its website that it “helps busy professionals spend less time picking up” ([http://www.doodycalls.com/au\\_media.asp](http://www.doodycalls.com/au_media.asp)). Similarly, in speaking of the potential market for this service, Doody Call’s founder John D’Aniello notes that “[a]nytime you have 40 percent of the population doing something they don't want to do [i.e. 40 percent of the nation’s population who are dog owners picking up their dog’s waste], there should be someone to take care of it” (cited in Kantor 2006). Of course, this comes at a cost: Doody Calls and similar pet waste removal companies charge between \$10 and \$20 per visit, and can be hired to come on a weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly schedule to free one’s yard of pet waste.

The above examples deal with the outsourcing of what are essentially different aspects housework. The next section talks about a topic that has garnered a lot of attention, especially in the media (Stout 2005; *CBS News* 2006; Zide et al. 2006): the outsourcing of parenting.

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<sup>35</sup> Today Pet Butler serves nearly 7,000 clients per week (www.petbutler.com.).

## The Outsourcing of Parenting: Daycare and Kiddie Cabs

The outsourcing of parenting in the sense of transferring the care of children for some period of time to formal businesses is a relatively new phenomenon. And so while in the next chapter it will be shown how others outside of the nuclear family unit have often been recruited to help in the raising of children in the history of the American family (e.g. in the form of domestic servants or nannies), the widespread use of formal establishments outside of the home is something that has developed quite recently. The history and contemporary state of this industry are presented in this section, along with an overview of an even more recent, though more mobile, type of parental outsourcing: kiddie cabs.

The daycare industry can be dated to the 1960's and emerged when women with small children began to enter the paid labor force in historically unprecedented numbers. And while it is true that women have always worked, often in the paid labor market (Kessler-Harris 2003), they have tended to do so either before or after their children were small and therefore required a great deal of care, or in a manner that was compatible with staying home and raising them (e.g. doing paid work in the house). Post-1960, however, more and more women with small children began entering the labor force which necessarily pulled them away from the home during their working hours. And as men at this time did not leave the paid work force in equal numbers to women entering it to care for their children, forms of care outside of the nuclear family unit were needed. The result was, if not the creation, then at least the dramatic expansion, of the daycare

industry. Table 4 shows the rise in women's labor force participation rate from 1950 to 2004 both for women as a whole and specifically for women with small children.

<b>Table 4: Female Labor Force Participation for Select Years Between 1950 and 2004</b>				
<b>Female Labor Force Participation by Marital Status</b>				
Year	All Women	Married Women (Husband Present)	Single, Never Married Women	Women widowed, divorced, or separated
1950	33	23.8	NA	NA
1960	36	30.5	44.1	40
1970	42	40.8	53	39.1
1980	51.6	50.1	61.5	44
1990	58.3	58.2	66.4	46.8
2000	59.9	62	68.6	50.2
2004	59.2	60.9	64.5	50.3

<b>Female Labor Force Participation of Women w/ Small Children by Marital Status</b>			
Year	Married Women w/ Children under 6 yrs old.	Single, Never Married Women w/ Children under 6 yrs old.	Women widowed, divorced, or separated w/ children under 6 years old
1950	11.9	NA	NA
1960	18.6	NA	40.5
1970	30.3	NA	52.2
1980	45.1	44.1	60.3
1990	58.9	48.7	63.6
2000	62.8	70.5	77.9
2004	59.3	68.4	74.4

As can be seen from Table 4, the labor force participation rate for virtually all categories of women has increased significantly since 1950. However, this increase has been particularly dramatic for married women with small children: between 1950 and 2004 their participation rate has increased almost six-fold. Indeed, as Coontz (1997: 57) notes,



“[a]fter 1970 mothers - especially mothers of young children - became the fastest-growing group of female workers”. In part, this is a reflection of the fact that other groups of women (e.g. those who are single, divorced, or widowed) had initially rates of labor force participation primarily out of the need to support themselves. Nevertheless, as more mothers, and more mothers with small children, entered the labor market there has been dramatic increase in the need for, and use of, daycare facilities.

For example, in 1965, only about 8 percent of mothers with children ages 5 and under who worked full-time used daycare or a preschool for the provisioning of childcare. By 1977, this number had increased to 15 percent. This number further increased to 31 percent in 1988 and to 34 percent in 1993 (Child Trends, Inc. 1997: 90). The same general situation was true of part-time working mothers with children under the age of 5: in 1965, the percentage of these mothers using a daycare facility or preschool was 3 percent while in 1993 it was 23 percent (ibid). If one looks at employed mothers as a whole, in 1985 just over 23 percent of them used daycare centers or preschools as their primary means of childcare provisioning. By 1990, this number had increased to 27.5 percent, though by 1997 this number had decreased to 21.7 percent.

However, as Smith (2002: 7) notes, changes in survey design make the comparisons between the recent years and previous years difficult for a number of reasons: first in 1995 the number of response categories was increased possibly diluting responses in certain categories; second, in 1997 the survey was switched from being a paper questionnaire to a computer-based instrument; lastly, in 1997 the survey was conducted in the springtime as opposed to in the fall when the other surveys were

conducted which may have an affect on the numbers because of the different work schedules/availability of care at this time of the year as opposed to others.

Similar statistical issues are found when trying to compare the total number of daycare establishments in the U.S. over time. This is particularly the case because data on small, one or two person daycare centers, referred to by the Census Bureau as “nonemployer businesses”, were not made available until 1987 (O’Neil and O’Connell 2001). Prior to this, data was only collected on centers that had a payroll which was divided between taxable (i.e. for profit) and tax exempt (i.e. non-profit) businesses. After this time, the third category of nonemployer businesses was added as a separate category. The growth of the daycare industry along these three lines can be seen in Table 5.

Year	Number of Establishments With Payroll			Number of Nonemployer Daycare Establishments	Total Payroll and Nonemployer
	Total with Payroll	Taxable with Payroll	Tax Exempt with Payroll		
1977*	24,813	--	--	na	na
1982*	30,762	--	--	na	na
1987**	40,631	26,809	13,822	221,880	262,511
1992**	51,297	35,327	15,970	489,054	540,351
1997**	62,054	43,955	18,099	488,734	550,788
2002***	69,127	44,896	24,231	618,947	688,074

\* Data taken from U.S. Census Bureau (1999)

\*\* Data taken from O’Neil and O’Connell (2001)

\*\*\* Data taken from 2002 U.S. Economic Census

Looking only at the total number of establishments with a payroll, we can see that since 1977 the number of daycare centers has increased by over 250 percent from approximately 25,000 centers in 1977 to nearly 70,000 in 2002. Moreover, this growth has been fairly evenly distributed between taxable and tax exempt businesses since 1987.

Data on nonemployer businesses has only been collected since 1987, however, since this time these types of firms have also increased by over 250 percent as well: in 1987, there were 221,880 nonemployer centers; by 2002 this number had increased to nearly 620,000 establishments, though the number of these establishments did decrease between 1992 and 1997. In all, this means that the total number of daycare centers (i.e. both those with payroll and those that are nonemployer) have increased over two and one-half times in the fifteen year span ranging between 1987 and 2002.

Not surprisingly, the number of people working in daycare centers has also increased during this same time period, though, the employment statistics are confined to those firms that have a payroll. Employment figures can be seen in the table below.

Table 6: Number of Employees in Daycare Establishments (Includes only businesses that have payrolls)			
Year	Number of Paid Employees		
	Total	Taxable	Tax Exempt
1987*	355,068	199,666	155,402
1992*	467,928	282,675	185,253
1997*	628,712	388,731	239,981
2002**	751,733	437,297	314,436

\* Data taken from U.S. Census Bureau (1999)

\*\* Data taken from 2002 U.S. Economic Census

Between 1987 and 2002, the total employment of daycare centers that have a payroll has more than doubled, and while there has been slightly more growth in taxable (i.e. for profit) firms, both taxable and tax exempt businesses saw their employment increase at least two-fold during this time. Similarly, the number of children age 5 and below in organized daycare facilities (i.e. either daycare centers, or nurseries and/or preschools) has increased in the recent past. This can be seen in Table 7.

Type of Facility	Number of Children Per Year (numbers in thousands)			
	1977*	1987*	1997**	2002***
Organized child care facilities	568	2,226	3,381	3,473
Day/group care center	(NA)	1,469	2,273	2,335
Nursery school/preschool	(NA)	757	1,108	1,138

\* Data taken from U.S. Census Bureau (1988)

\*\* Data taken from Smith (2002: 3) Table 1.

\*\*\* Data taken from Overturf Johnson (2005: 2) Table 1.

Between 1977 and 1997, the number of children in organized daycare facilities has increased nearly six-fold, from 568,000 in 1977, to 3,381,000 in 1997. And, from 1997 to 2002, the number of children in organized daycare facilities has increased by approximately another 92,000 children. However, this growth in the number of children in organized child care facilities has occurred despite a decrease in the total number of children in regular child care arrangements suggesting that an increasing proportion of childcare outside of the home is being given to these organized centers.

Overall, the picture painted by these statistics is that at least since the 1960's, the rearing of children is something that is increasingly being performed by sources outside of the home for at least some portion of the day. Moreover, many of the places in which this outsourced childcare takes place are organized/institutional settings – i.e. business operations or nurseries/preschools, though the vast majority of childcare establishments are small-scale, often home-based businesses. In these cases, though care is being transferred to sources outside of the child's home, it is in all likelihood being transferred to setting in someone else's home. Nevertheless, a transfer of care is still taking place and this is still a time in which the child is outside of the direct care of his/her parent.

Daycare, as the name implies, is care for children during the day for those too young to attend school and/or when school is out of session during the hours when their parents work. However, as work eats up more and more of parents' time, there has been an increase in the number of commercially available substitutes who can take on parental functions earlier and/or later in the day. For example, in 2002 13 percent of grade school aged children were in some sort of before or after-school care arrangement that did not involve a relative while 5 percent of grade school aged children were in the care of organized facilities. Similarly, another 16 percent of all school aged children were in some sort of enrichment program before or after school, again presumably because their parents were working. However, another 15 percent of grade school aged children were in "self-care" arrangements – i.e. left to care for themselves before their parents came home from work (*The Living Arrangements of Children in 2003*, 2003). Care arrangements such as these, with the exception perhaps of self-care, work if the child has nowhere else to go. However, what if the child has soccer practice or a piano lesson and their parents cannot take them?

An industry has developed to help tackle such problems. It is the rise of so-called "kiddie cabs". Kiddie cabs are essentially transportation services that take children to and from the locations that they need to be when their parents cannot do so. As one article describes them, kiddie cabs are "[a] parent's fantasy service – door-to-door rides to school to soccer practice and back... For about \$200 a month for daily transport, scores of kiddie cab companies dispatch vans to shuttle children around" (Lieber 2002).

The owner of a kiddie cab company, Precious Cargo, describes its regular operations: "In the mornings we do the regular school routes... and in the afternoons we

do a lot of preschool, nursery, and child care” (cited in Holmstrom 2000). However, in the afternoons “[k]ids [also] go to doctors, dentists, therapists, tutors, dance, karate; the list is endless” (ibid.). However, these services are even popular in the summer when school is out: according to Miriam White, founder of the Little Red Rider kiddie shuttle service in Northern Virginia, in the summer “[p]arents are really juggling the schedules to keep them away from the television... We take [kids] from camp to camp or from the babysitter’s to sewing class. Parents don’t want them just sitting at the babysitter’s all day” (Shaver 2002).

Lieber (2002) notes that these “services are popular in the bustling suburbs of California and Colorado, but they’ve also succeeded in places like Gainesville, Fla., and Columbus, Neb”. On the one hand, this kind of service sounds like a “sure-fire business” as working parents are faced with either cutting back on their hours or taking extended breaks to transport their children, an option that is not available in certain occupations, or parents can choose not to involve their children in after-school activities. On the other hand, “kiddie cab companies frequently flame out after underestimating the logistics of route-planning. Or the wear and tear of demanding parents” (ibid.). Indeed, Newbart (2000) notes that while many of these companies sprung up both nationally and in the affluent Chicago-land suburbs during the 1990’s, many have also gone out of business. In addition to a number of now defunct local companies, Newbart notes: “Nationwide, there once were at least 300 such services. But two national franchises – Kids Kab International in Michigan and Kangakab in New Jersey – went out of business. And the big industry group, the National Child Transportation Association, disbanded two years ago, blaming dwindling membership” (ibid).

However, this might have been more the result of market-overexpansion as opposed to there not being a market for such services. Indeed, as Newbart notes “[i]t’s not that there aren’t still plenty of kids rushing around from one activity to another” and that “[f]or some parents, the kiddie cab services still fill a need” (ibid.). In fact, for some companies business is booming: “Kidshuttle, based in California’s Orange County, has 20 vans, 400 families as clients and another 500 families on the waiting list. Other services don’t even bother counting the number they turn away” (Lieber 2002). Indeed, in some areas demand for such services far outstrips the supply leaving “many families...scrambling to jerry-rig other commuting solutions, including hiring private drivers and pleading for help on local Web sites” (ibid.).

For many parents, the lost opportunity costs involved in driving their kids to school is involved in the calculus that went into outsourcing this task. For one Chicago-land mother driving her daughter to and from school was eating up 8 hours of her week. “Then she figured she was losing more money missing work than she would spend for a car service, though it would cost more than \$3,000 a school year” (ibid.). The result, this mother hired a black stretch limousine to pick her daughter up every day from school.

Other parents are making similar calculations. As another parent noted, “[w]hen you start to add up all the lost (work) time, the miles on your vehicle, the gas and all that other stuff – not to mention the intangible hassle that you can’t really put a price on – [i.e. hiring a kiddie cab service is] definitely worth it” (cited in Pollack 2005). Thus, in some cases it is not that parents cannot perform the function of picking up their children and transporting them to their various destinations. Rather, in a strict economic sense, it makes “sense” to hire out this activity: the time lost at work costs more than does paying

for someone else to do this work. Of course, one parent noted that “[i]t was a tough decision to trust your children to just anybody, especially with driving. You don’t know who is on the road, and anything can happen” one parent noted (cited in Pollack 2005). But as this same parent recalled, “we looked at it the same as we did with day care...and now I’ve recommended [the kiddie cab service] to several different people” (ibid.).

Today there are no reliable numbers on the number of such services in operation. However, it does appear that this service is in high demand at least in some areas. And so while the kiddie cab market might have over expanded in the 1990’s, this did not mean there is not a market for this type of service. Kiddie cabs and daycare represent the outsourcing of parental activities that occur on a day-to-day basis. However, other types of parental outsourcing relate to more special occasions. This can be seen in the next section.

#### Party Planners and the Outsourcing of Birthdays

Though there are no hard statistics on the number of birthday party planners in the U.S., either currently or historically, the party planning industry, and particularly the market for children’s birthday parties, appears to be growing as these occasions become more extravagant and lavish (sometimes comparable to a wedding)<sup>36</sup> while, at the same time, parents have less time to devote to orchestrating the event themselves. The result has been that “the kiddie birthday party has been inflated to carnival proportions –

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<sup>36</sup> As Kevin Mendell, founder of Oogles N Googles, a company that specializes in producing themed birthday parties for children, notes, given the involvement of some parents in these occasions “you would think [these parties] are weddings” (cited in Olson 2005).



literally, complete with moon bounces and costumed characters” (Barker 2006). Laskas (2006) describes some of the features of these more elaborate affairs that she has visited: “one [was] in a professionally designed haunted house, and another featuring professional ballerinas, and one that had many games and craft projects going on all at once beneath a wide-screen TV showing cartoons that some company had somehow digitally remastered to include the birthday girl in the cartoon”. For Barker (2006), parties such as these, along with other “coming-of-age” ceremonies such as bar/bat mitzvahs and quinceañeras, represent “a significant social shift because for the past 20 years or so, teens didn’t see sweet-16 celebrations as glamorous or even quaint, but hokey.” Today, the expectations are, in some social spaces at least, much higher for what a party should entail and are being taken much more seriously by all parties involved. This true even for younger children; as Lelchuk (2006) notes, “[p]arty planning for the under-10 set is another growing niche business”.

Overall, as Knight (2006) notes, “[t]he kids' party planning industry is a growing, multimillion-dollar concern. It's included in the away-from-home entertainment category, one that in the past 15 years has seen spending increase 20 percent for married couples with children, according to White Hutchinson Leisure & Learning Group.” It is also an industry that is becoming increasingly formalized: in 2002 Lisa Burkhalter who is also the owner of the party planning business Fancy That located in Jackson, Mississippi, formed Party Pixies, an association of independent children’s party planners. When Party Pixies was founded it had 20 members; four years later its membership had increased to 75 (Batog 2006).

And what has been fueling both the growth and formalization of this industry? Part of the reason, or at least the reason businesses are using to advertise their services, is that this relieves parents of the work and/or stress involved in planning such a party. This, in turn, allows for parents to better enjoy the party instead of running around and trying to do everything themselves. For example, Oogles N Googles, a company that specializes in producing themed birthday parties for children with 25 locations throughout the U.S.<sup>37</sup>, advertises on its website ([www.ooglesngoogles.com](http://www.ooglesngoogles.com)) that “[f]rom set-up to clean up, we do the work so you don't have to. Our birthday parties are activity-based and totally engaging for the children. Our kids parties will razzle and dazzle your guests and at the same time provide your child with an unbelievably memorable birthday party experience.” Similarly, Fancy That (<http://www.fancythatparties.com/>) notes that if one chooses their “Complete Hosted option” that “we'll take care of the details while you enjoy the party with your child.” However, you can also choose the “You Host It option”, essentially a ‘take out’ version of a themed party, “for a fabulous DIY party”. In either case, Fancy That takes “the stress out of planning your perfect party!” (ibid.).

This need, however, seems to be particularly felt by a specific group of people. As Knight (2006) notes in relation to Oogles N Googles, though it seems equally applicable to other party planning companies as well, “[t]he company is filling a niche, catering to overworked and time- depleted parents who don't have the hours in the day or the creativity to plan that perfect gala.” This sentiment was echoed above by Sophie Maletsky of Sophie’s Stress Free Soirees in San Francisco when speaking of party planning for kids 10 years old and younger: this is “a testimony to how busy people are these days” (cited in Lelchuk 2006).

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<sup>37</sup> <http://www.ooglesngoogles.com/press-releases.aspx>

There is also the fact that the expectations for these occasions have increased either through competition (i.e. who can produce the most extravagant/elaborate event) and/or the desire to produce a unique experience. Even at the upper end of extravagance where “[a] couple of decades ago, a country club or catering facility would have sufficed as a venue” there has been a process of upping the party ante (Barker 2006). For example, because of the demand for “uniqueness” David Tutera, a party planner that has worked for celebrities, now “scours around for old castles and even airport hangers” for birthday party venues. However, even in more modest income brackets there is more pressure to produce a lavish party. For example, Laskas (2004) notes that after attending the parties with professional ballerinas and remastered cartoons featuring the birthday boy/girl, “you feel like a fool having a simple cake-and-birthday-hat party for your kid”.

In all, increased expectations plus a lack of time and/or knowledge of the part of parents leads to the need for outside help. In this case, help comes from specialists in the party field who can provide all the necessary accoutrements for the event (or provide them for you). In other words, these parents are coming more to rely on what Giddens (1990: 27) calls “expert systems” (as opposed to relying on the resources of family and friends to produce these events). The role of expert systems in the outsourcing of intimate affairs is a topic that will be discussed further below. For now, it is important to note that it is not just parents that are outsourcing the special events of their children to specialists, so too are couples outsourcing what is arguably the most special event of their union – their wedding.

## Wedding Planners

While older than some of the other industries discussed here, wedding planning is apparently experiencing growth similar to them. On the one hand, this is an occupation that is focused on arranging and managing the events that occur the day of a wedding, and all of the work required to make this event special. But, as this event is comprised of a number of different elements and planners are involved in a number of different tasks, this is not a one-dimensional occupation. In this regard, a wedding planner can be seen as an “orchestrator of the wedding” (Otnes and Pleck 2003: 91) coordinating what the various aspects involved in the ceremony (e.g. the budget, location, invitations, photography, floral, musicians, rehearsal, reception location, menu, etc.). However, this coordination often goes beyond the arrangement of things and people such as where the flowers will go and who will stand where etc., and extends itself into the emotional management of the various actors involved. That is, as Thompson (1998) notes, wedding planners must engage in what Hochschild calls “emotional work” by managing the highly-charged emotional states of the various participants. Needless to say, given the significance of this event, emotions can, and do, run very high.

The wedding planning industry can be dated to the 1950’s when professional organizations such as the National Bridal Service (1951) and the American Association of Professional Bridal Consultants (1955) were formed. These organizations, however, represented more the formalization of specialized services for persons, mostly brides, on their wedding day than the first time “outside” help was used in the wedding ceremony. As Otnes and Pleck (2003: 85) note, in the late 1800’s elites began to hire “masters of

ceremonies” to help coordinate wedding day activity, while in the 1920’s “bridal secretaries” began to be employed in bridal salons and provided specialized advice regarding such things as etiquette and dress of the betrothed. Nevertheless, it was not until 1979, the year that 4.6 million persons were married, a record for that time, that “[w]edding planning truly began to emerge as a profession” (ibid.). Fueled not only by demographics, the expansion of this profession was also aided by the fact that since more women were working, they had less time to devote to planning such events. At the same time, the idea of a “lavish wedding has taken hold of consumer consciousness” making these events more involved and thereby requiring more time to be devoted to them (ibid). These two factors - less time on the part of women to devote to planning their wedding and the increasingly intricate nature of the ceremony - in conjunction led to an increased need for outside help.

The result of this need has been a fairly dramatic growth in the wedding planning industry. As the webpage for Weddings Beautiful Worldwide, the division of the National Bridal Service that offers home education courses on becoming a wedding planner, notes, “[p]lanning and coordinating weddings is perhaps the fastest growing professional service in the wedding industry as more and more brides are working, or attending college, and do not have the time required to coordinate the many details.” This growth can be seen in the fact that while the number of marriages in the U.S. has remained steady at around 2.3 million per year for the past 20 years, “the number of wedding planners has risen 25 percent in the past 18 months” to an estimated 7,000 (Horyn 2004). Similarly, the Association of Bridal Consultants (ABC) has seen its

membership grow fairly significantly: in 1997 it had 1,300 members (Howard 2006: 155). Today, ABC's website lists their membership at 4,000.<sup>38</sup>

Taken together, this means that more and more brides and grooms, though mostly the former, are employing the use of these professional outsiders to make their special day a reality. More generally this means that these couples are using specialized outsourcers to fulfill their desires for this event.

Of course, a common cultural expectation of weddings is that guests will bring a gift for the new couple. As will be seen in the next section, this too is something that can be outsourced.

#### The Outsourcing of Gift Giving

Though there is no direct measure of the extent to which shopping for gifts for has been outsourced others, two types of service – personal concierges and personal shoppers – are more than willing to take this task on for their clients. For example, in an advice book on how to start your own personal concierge business, Addison (2003: 4-5) describes how a personal concierge “is not employed by a hotel or corporation. Instead, they market their services directly to clients who pay them for running errands, *buying gifts*, making travel arrangements, or myriad other tasks” (emphasis added).

Similarly, in *The Concierge Manual*, Giovanni and Giovanni (2002) note shopping for gifts as one of the services that a personal concierge can perform and repeatedly note this in a sample business proposal that they offer. However, they not

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<sup>38</sup> <http://www.bridalassn.com/about.tmpl>

only offer to shop for the gifts (“Why not let us buy that special gift for your friends and relatives?” they ask [op cit. 81]), but note that they can also wrap and/or return gifts if need be. Similarly, in an article entitled “How to be a Personal Concierge” Tiffany (2001) lists “Gift-buying” as one of the services offered by people doing this kind of work. This service can be particularly attractive during the Holiday season: as Amy McCasland, founder of a concierge company in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, notes “[a]round the holidays your concierge can pick up a last minute gift, wrap it and deliver it to your home or office, grocery shop for a holiday feast, plan a special night out...or put the finishing touches on the Christmas tree you simply haven't had time to decorate... Your personal concierge can even return or exchange those less-than-desirable gifts after the holidays” (cited in Page 2005).

It is not surprising that personal concierges are willing to buy gifts for others given that many of these businesses are willing to do almost anything so long as it is legal, though it may be surprising that people are willing to outsource this task to others. Nevertheless, those more specialized in shopping, i.e. personal shoppers, are also willing to buy for others.

For example, in a book on becoming a personal shopper Kim-York (2005: 6) notes that “[y]ou’ll also need to be creative. Many times a client will need a gift for someone. The client gives you a description of the person, and then it’s up to you, the personal shopper, to find the gift to fit that person.” Similarly, in describing the work of Samantha von Sperling, Flaherty notes that “[a]s a personal shopper, [von Sperling] is paid to find perfect, heartfelt presents for everyone on someone else’s list” (Flaherty 2003). Indeed, some personal shoppers even keep track of when their clients might need

gifts to be bought. For example, Rosina Zollino, a personal shopper who works for Saks “maintains a detailed database of upcoming occasions in her clients’ lives and makes suggestions for whatever clothing or gift-giving needs may arise” (Thiruvengadam 2005).

So why are personal concierges and personal shoppers being used to buy gifts for others. Here again there is surprising convergence between the forces fueling this trend and those noted above: a lack of time, energy, and/or desire on the part of the gift-givers creates the impetus to outsource this activity. As Harrison McBride et al. (2005: 9) describe it, “[t]oday, people have less time for leisure, including shopping for clothing, gifts or even food”. Kim-York (2005: 2-3) echoes this sentiment in a more expanded form: “With the fast-paced, high pressure professional lifestyles of today, more and more people have limited time to do their personal shopping. Holding down a full-time job, raising children, and maintaining a household doesn’t seem to leave enough hours in the day to get everything done. That’s why more people are now opting for a ‘service’ to do much of their personal shopping for them” including the purchasing of gifts.

For others, a lack of time might be coupled with a lack of desire and/or interest. One client of von Sperling “typically puts off Hanukkah shopping until the last minute” so that she ends up doing a lot of catalog shopping and purchasing gift certificates. This setup an ironic situation in that when paid proxy is used to do her gift shopping the client’s family “probably end[s] up with more personalized gifts” (cited in Flaherty 2003).

All in all, given the extent to which shopping has been outsourced it should not be too surprising that a specific kind of shopping (i.e. shopping for gifts) has been, and is being, outsourced too. And while Miller (1998: 23) notes “that love is not only



normative but easily dominant as the context and motivation for the bulk of actual shopping practice” the fact that even the emotionally-laden activity of gift giving is being outsourced cannot tell us whether or not the actual sentiment involved is being outsourced as well. But, if shopping is a loving activity, when it is outsourced it is love from a “paid proxy” to borrow a phrase from Hochschild (2005: 82). In the next section we will explore an older form sentiment expressed through paid proxy. However, as will be seen, with the new services available this sentiment is coming in an even more mediated form.

#### Thank You Cards and Remembrance Services

Greeting cards can be seen as an early forerunner to many of the types of services discussed here. That is, in their commercialized form, these represent the transfer of expressing sentiment to the card company. The result is that the customer does not create the (printed) sentiment on the card, but rather selects the best expression for the occasion and then personalizes with a note and/or signature. But it was not always like this: as Gillis (1996: 78) notes, “[t]he first holiday and greeting cards that circulated among kin were homemade”. This, however, began to change by the end of the nineteenth century as “bought cards accounted for an increasingly greater share of family correspondence as people took advantage of this relatively cheap form of symbolic interaction to extent their family worlds...” (ibid.). One of the pioneers of producing these types of cards in the U.S., and who today is the world leader in this industry, is Hallmark cards. Formed in

1911<sup>39</sup>, Hallmark today is responsible for 1 of every 2 of the 6 billion cards sent annually in the U.S. ([http://pressroom.hallmark.com/Hmk\\_corp\\_history.html](http://pressroom.hallmark.com/Hmk_corp_history.html)). And so while bought cards, as opposed to those that are handmade, may represent an early form of the kind of outsourcing discussed here, new services are developing that takes this kind of outsourcing to a whole other level.

This can be seen in the sprouting number of professional thank you note writing companies who will, for a fee typically between \$3 and \$5 per note, handwrite cards for any occasion (e.g. newlyweds thanking their guests for their attendance and/or gifts) (*The Montana Standard* 2005; Chatzky 2005). Says Chris Hagan, co-founder of the Baltimore, MD-based That's Gratitude, of this service, it "is discreet... Unless somebody knows your handwriting, they're not going to know [that the cards have been written by someone else]" (*The Montana Standard* 2005). Storybook Cards, who provides a similar service, advertises on its webpage that "[w]ith our thank you services, your cards will get done with *the same personal attention and accuracy you would devote*" (<http://storybookcards.com/services.php> - emphasis added).

The Minneapolis, Minnesota-based company Red Stamp Cards similarly offers to handwrite for their clients. However, they also offer something more: after filling out an initial calendar of important dates throughout the year (e.g. birthdays, anniversaries, holidays, etc.) Red Stamp Cards will send you email reminders as this date approaches so that you can get an appropriate card selected from their offerings to the recipient on time with the option of having Red Stamp Cards write out the card for you. In other words, what Red Stamp Card offers is the outsourcing of remembrance in the sense that

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<sup>39</sup> Prior to 1954 Hallmark Cards Inc. was named Hall Brothers ([http://pressroom.hallmark.com/timeline\\_key\\_dates.html](http://pressroom.hallmark.com/timeline_key_dates.html))

customers pay this company to be their memory bank of important and/or sentimental dates and to remind them of these. As an article that ran on Scoop du Jour<sup>40</sup> featuring Red Stamp Cards describes the benefit of this service: “They say as we age, the memory is the first to go... We have a hard enough time remembering how old we told people we were on our last birthday...*how can we possibly be expected to remember other people's milestones, faux or otherwise? Thanks to Red Stamp Cards, we don't have to.* Not only will this gem of a site send us a nifty little note prompting special occasions like birthdays and anniversaries per our own personal calendar, they also happen to have an amazing assortment of cards to boot” (emphasis added).<sup>41</sup>

A similar, though cruder and male-oriented, version of a remembrance service is offered by Save My Ass.com. As their website ([www.savemyass.com](http://www.savemyass.com)) describes their service: “You provide us with your billing info and her delivery address. We'll *periodically* send her flowers every 4-6 weeks, and bill you for each delivery individually... We'll notify you before each order, and you can edit them in advance if you'd like. We'll schedule flowers for all the *obligatory* dates she *expects* (you'll never miss an important date again!) [note: on the website the text in parenthesis is in a different color than the rest of the text] and we'll score you major points by making deliveries she doesn't expect. You will be amazed at what *impact sending flowers for no apparent reason has*” (emphasis added). In other words, it not only reminds men of

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<sup>40</sup> “Seeing Red” <http://www.scoopdujour.com/scoop/archives/000157.html>

<sup>41</sup> A similar service, though one more oriented to businesses and their clients, is offered by Hunter Greetings (<http://www.huntergreetings.com/howitworks.html>). This company apparently does not see the contradiction things being automated and unexpected in stating the benefits of their services: “Nothing makes people feel more appreciated than a kind word contained in a personalized greeting card from you. *It works because it's unexpected*, shows attention to detail, and it communicates your message in a way that's virtually guaranteed to be well received. By *automating* the process of sending a personalized greeting card, we've made it possible for you to **touch the people that matter to you frequently, easily and cost effectively**” (bold in original, emphasis added).

when their significant other's important ("obligatory") dates are and sets up to have deliveries made, it also makes random deliveries that feigns romantic spontaneity of the part of the client. And in response to the question of "Will she be upset if she knows I'm using this service", the website notes that:

On the contrary, most women we have talked to love the idea! Many have even said, "Tell my husband/boyfriend to sign me up!!". Initially this was counterintuitive to us too, but then we did some research and here is what we learned: Women love getting flowers. They also know you well enough to recognize you are busy and may not be great at stuff like this, and the fact you are finally taking control and making an effort is a big, big deal. Finally..[sic] what woman doesn't like getting flowers for all her friends and coworkers to see how much you adore her?

Perhaps this is so, perhaps not. In either case, what this does represent, as with the case of the handwriting of thank you card services noted above, is an increased mediation in the expression of sentiment and affection through a process of outsourcing.

Taken together, the above leaves us with the picture that a variety of affairs necessary to reproduce intimate sphere are increasingly being given over to commercial sources for their performance. However, the above is just a sample of some of the affairs that are being outsourced. Others include the care of elderly parents, dog walkers, businesses that will stand in line for their clients, home replacement meals (essentially take out food offered in grocery stores), and pet transportation services to name but a few. These businesses work either by trying to take on large chunks of intimate life (e.g. personal concierges taking on a myriad of tasks) or by specializing in a particular slice of

it (e.g. food, birthday parties, shopping, transporting children, etc.). This is not to say that all aspects of intimate sphere are being outsourced, nor that these affairs are only flowing outward to commercial sources. In fact, in some cases there may be an ‘insourcing’ (Gershuny 1978, 1983) of affairs – i.e. the performance of tasks in-house that used to take place in the commercial sphere. For example, the technical capacities of digital cameras and photo printers may make it easy for people to handle their photo processing needs entirely at home. Nevertheless, despite these cross-currents of the intimate sphere, the general trend in the direction of outsourcing.

### *Who is Outsourcing and Why?*

In terms of numbers, the outsourcing of food and parenting, in the form of daycare, are the two most common types of outsourcing activities. And so while those with more resources may engage in these activities with greater frequency and/or use better quality services, these are the most democratic of the types of outsourcing discussed above (cf. Bittman et al. 1999).

The others seem to be concentrated in the time-starved homes of busy professionals (cf. Gregson and Lowe 1997). If nothing else, this is the group that businesses advertise their services to, and the ones who receive the most attention in the media. In fact, Bittman et al. (1999: 266) note that this group of people are often seen as playing a “vanguard role” in this process; in other words, they are seen as the canaries in the mineshaft of intimate outsourcing.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Bittman et al. (1999) are critical of this concentration of attention on this “vanguard” group. As they note, food and childcare are the most common forms of “domestic outsourcing” and these activities are not confined to this group alone.

Empirically, a number of factors have generally been found to influence the decision to outsource at least one of three aspects of intimate life – food away from home, childcare, and housekeeping. These are income, the employment status of women, and the presence of children. In terms of the former, many studies have found that as a family’s income rises, so too does its propensity to outsource at least some of these activities (Bellante and Foster 1984; Bittman et al. 1999; Cohen 1998; Oropesa 1993; Soberon-Ferrer and Dardis 1991; Zick and McCullough 1996). The employment status of women (i.e. if they work and, if so, how much) has also been positively linked to the outsourcing of food away from home and childcare, but not housekeeping (Bellante and Foster 1984; Bittman et al. 1999; Soberon-Ferrer and Dardis 1991). Lastly, the presence of children is positively related to the outsourcing of childcare (Bellante and Foster 1984; Soberon-Ferrer and Dardis 1991; Zick and McCullough 1996), but not housework (Cohen 1998; Soberon-Ferrer and Dardis 1991; Zick and McCullough 1996) or the use of food sources away from the home (Bellante and Foster 1984; Cohen 1998; Zick and McCullough 1996).

Zick et al. (1996: 15), however, have found that “single-mother families demand significantly more food prepared away from home, child care, and housekeeping service compared to two-parent families, *ceteris paribus*.” This study suggests that, all else being equal, single-mother families are more likely to outsource these aspects of intimate life than are their two-parent counterparts. However, the caveat of “*ceteris paribus*” is quite significant since, all else being equal, two-couple families make significantly more than families comprised only of single mothers. In fact, in 1998, single mothers made less than a third of two parent families and had a poverty rate that was approximately five

times higher than families with two parents (Casper and Bianchi 2002: 116). Thus, relatively it may be that single-mother families outsource more, but on an absolute scale it would appear that two-parent couples, and especially those with two incomes, have the economic advantage when it comes to this kind of outsourcing.

Moreover, most of the existing empirical studies have tended to look at outsourcing only along the lines of food away from home, childcare, and housekeeping, and not some of the other, perhaps more exotic, forms discussed above. If we can assume that businesses market to those who use their services, this would signal that it is two-income families who are their clients. Thus, there might be types of outsourcing activities (e.g. the use of personal chefs, personal concierges, or professional organizers) that two-income families engage in that current studies miss but this is an empirical question that cannot be solved here.

Overall, the picture we are left with is a general trend in the direction of outsourcing at least some aspects of the intimate sphere that is more or less concentrated in different social locations. And so while some (e.g. busy professionals) may outsource many aspects of their life, others (e.g. a poorly paid daycare worker) may only outsource a few (e.g. eating take-out food) or even none. But on the whole it appears that there is a drift in this area of life toward turning over at least some aspects of the intimate sphere to the market for its performance. This situation in turn begs the question of why are more and more people choosing to outsource at least some of their intimate affairs?

Aside from the simple ability to outsource intimate affairs given an increased (and increasing) number of businesses willing to perform these services, there appears to be two general motivating factors on the part of individuals and families fueling this trend.

One is that *outsourcing is a coping mechanism* for relieving what Hochschild (2003b) has termed the “second shift” – i.e. all of the domestic responsibilities that must be performed after the ‘first shift’ of work is done. And as more and more women have entered the labor force, an increasing number of families, both dual-income and single-parent, are facing the work that comes after work. The result is that in such families there are simply more ‘roles’ than people to fill them (Christensen and Gomory 1999). Outsourcing, however, is a means of alleviating this situation by shifting some of the second shift to others who are outside of the family. Dual-income couples in particular that are likely to “have high disposable incomes to purchase services, but less discretionary time for housework” (de Ruijter et al. 2005: 305) that makes outsourcing an option for relieving some of the burdens of the second shift. In this sense, outsourcing is “an adaptive strategy” for these couples since they can trade their disposable money for the performance of activities that they would otherwise have to spend time performing. As one owner of a company that takes on one’s intimate affairs puts it, “her business helps people cope” with situations of role-overload (cited in Joyner 2002).

However, aside from outsourcing as a coping mechanism, another motivational factor can be detected in many of the types of outsourcing discussed above. In this case, *the outsourcing of intimate affairs is used to preserve the intimate sphere*. That is, individuals and families will outsource some aspects of the intimate sphere in order to preserve others. For example, a family will go out to eat so that they can spend time together, without one or more members being pulled away from their time together in order to prepare the food and/or clean up afterward. Or they will hire a housecleaning service so that they can spend time together on the weekends instead of spending it



cleaning toilets and scrubbing floors. As one person whose business is to take on the intimate affairs of others notes, one of the benefits of using this kind of service is “being able to have more quality time to spend with friends or family or to do things that you enjoy doing” (cited in Krischer Goodman 2006). For a man who outsources many aspects of his life, the question was “[h]ow do you spend your time? That’s the most important question you need to ask yourself... If your personal values are that you want to spend time creating amazing art that’s going to change the world, or I want to spend time with my family, and you weight that with the many trips to Home Depot, you realize you can outsource your chores, spend more time with family and work so you can make more money to pay the contractors” (cited in Morris 2006). A similar sentiment was echoed by a woman and her husband who spend between \$700 and \$800 per month on various outsourcing activities. She found that this level of outsourcing let them “concentrate on their two children and their jobs...” (cited in Joyner 2002).<sup>43</sup>

There are certainly other factors leading to this situation and these will be discussed below in a different context. However, from a *motivational* standpoint these two – outsourcing as a coping mechanism and outsourcing as a means to preserve the intimate sphere – seem to be the most dominant. But is new? Is outsourcing, either in its motivation and/or practice, somehow historically unique? We have seen also how at least some of the activities discussed above (e.g. domestic workers and the delivery of groceries) have not always been in the exclusive provenance of the so-called “traditional

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<sup>43</sup> This situation would seem to parallel the finding that despite the fact that more women are working thereby limiting their time with their children, it is also true that more time is also being devoted to, and invested in, children by their parents than was the case in the past (Bianchi et al. 2006; Robinson and Godbey 1997). In other words, despite the overall time available for parenting being less than it was in the past (i.e. the potential time for parenting), the actual time spent in this task has increased. This suggests that parents are concentrating more and more of their efforts on this aspect of the intimate sphere. One possible mechanism allowing for this type of concentration is outsourcing.

family” and have been transferred to others in the past. As Kent Norton, a field marketing representative for a delivery company, notes, “[y]ears ago, people had home delivery. You saw milk routes... I believe we’re going back to those days. This is the wave of the future” (cited in Joyner 2002). Is the wave of the future really a return to the past, or is there something really new involved with outsourcing?

### Chapter 3: What is New in the Outsourcing of Intimate Affairs

The use of help outside of the family is not something that has been uncommon in American history while many of the activities that the family once performed have been transferred to sources outside of it (e.g. the education of its members to schools, medical care to doctors, the provisioning of many material goods to the market). These two factors in conjunction raise an important question: what, if anything, is new in with the outsourcing that we are seeing today in comparison to the past? That is, if familial activities have been transferred to sources outside of the family in the past, and ‘outsiders’ have come into the family to help it out before, is there anything new to the outsourcing that we are seeing today?

In this chapter I argue that though the transfer of familial activities to outside sources is not something that is categorically new, there are, nevertheless, many elements to outsourcing that make it distinctive in comparison to past transfers of intimate affairs. The first relates to the *quantity* of affairs that are being transferred and the fact that the current wave of outsourcing represents an increased use of outside sources by individuals and families in comparison to the recent past. This is especially the case if one’s reference point is the 1950’s family: in this case, it appears that there has been an explosion in transfers of this type. However, if we look into the past beyond the 1950’s family, we can see that while there has been the *emergence* of many new types of outside support, there has also been a resurgence in the use of some older forms. That is, some uses of outside support are making a comeback after being popular for part, if not all, of America’s history only to fade in popularity in the post-World War II era. But there are

others that have no real historical precedents and thus can be thought of as new in this regard. Taken together, we can think of these as different trajectories in an overall increase in the use of outsourcing practices and I will refer to these different trajectories as *resurgent* and *emergent* respectively.

A second distinctive feature of the current wave of outsourcing is that there has been *an overall expansion* in the total array of activities that one can outsource. In other words, there is a wider variety of tasks that an individual or family can outsource today than was the case in the past as more and more businesses are seeking to make a business out of specific segments of the intimate sphere.

There are also a series *qualitative* aspects to outsourcing that make it distinct in comparison to the past. These relate to *how* these activities are being transferred to others, *to whom* these they are being transferred to, and *in what context* this transfer takes place. As will be seen, these dimensions are particularly important to keep in mind when placing outsourcing within a theoretical context.

*The Increased and Expanded: The Unique Quantitative Dimensions of Intimate Outsourcing*

Though the transfer of familial activities to sources outside of the family is not something that is historically new, this does not take away from the fact that these transfers have been on the increase, in some cases dramatically, in the recent past. In Chapter 2 we saw this growth in terms of a number of specific industries that have taken on various intimate affairs. In looking at how certain activities were transferred in the

past, however, or if they were at all, we can see that these increases have tended to take one of two general forms.

The first are what we can call *resurgent* practices. These are practices that, after being popular for part, if not all, of America's history prior to World War II, faded in their use around this time, but have subsequently made a comeback in terms of their popularity in the recent past. For example, the current use of housekeeping services and personal chefs represent resurgent forms of outsourcing in the sense that domestic service and cooking, sometimes combined into the same occupation, sometimes divided into separate ones, have a long history of being given to others in the context of American family life (Romero 1992; Katzman 1978). However, after peaking in terms of absolute numbers in 1940 (Martin and Segrave 1985: v), the use of servants fell steadily until more recent times. Since then, the popularity of housekeepers and personal chefs has increased and shows no signs of decreasing anytime soon.

Another case of a resurgent form of outsourcing can be seen in the use of sources outside of the home for the preparation of food. The use of sources outside the home to obtain food has been going on for centuries, though, as we saw in Chapter 2, there has been a recent upsurge in the use of these sources. But in looking back at the past we can see that this increase has not been a linear development. Rather, between 1929 and 1945 there was a general increase in the proportion of people's food budgets devoted to sources outside of the home. However, this spending more or less leveled off in the second period between 1945 and approximately 1960, i.e. the time frame that encompasses the very domestic decade of the 1950's. But since 1960 there has been a resurgence in the use of these services, though, on a much larger scale than was the case

in the past. In this last period the proportion of disposable income devoted to food sources outside the home has roughly tripled from approximately 25 percent in 1960 to over 75 percent in 2004.

Resurgent practices highlight that the outsourcing of intimate affairs has not been a linear development but rather one whose intensity has varied over time. Indeed, part of what is new in the current situation is how these past practices, while fading in use particularly in the 1950's, have become increasingly popular since then. But during this time we have seen not only the resurgence of older practices that transfer familial activities to sources outside of the family, but also the emergence of many new forms.

For example, it was not until the 1950's that high ideals for what a lawn should be (i.e. golf course-like) turned lawn care into a labor intensive domestic chore (Steinberg 2006). And it was these ideals that subsequently prompted the formation of an industry to take on the specialized activities now needed to maintain a perfect looking lawn (e.g. seeding, watering, fertilizing, chemical application, etc.). Similarly, daycare as an industry was not established until the 1960's when women with small children began to enter the labor force in significant numbers. Prior to then most women either did not work when their children were small or worked in a manner compatible with childcare. However, beginning in the 1960's large numbers of women with small children began to enter the labor force prompting both the creation, and subsequent expansion, of this industry. More recently, as work has eaten up an increasing proportion of both men and women's time (Jacobs and Gerson 2004), other industries have developed to take on other parental functions: e.g. kiddie cabs industry, potty trainers, businesses that teach children how to ride bike, etc.

The industries of professional organizers, personal concierges, and personal shoppers are also of recent origin, being formed within the past twenty to thirty years, though their real growth has taken place more recently within the past decade or so. Birthday party planning and pet waste management are also of a similarly recent origin as are those businesses willing to hand write your thank you cards for you or remind you of important dates.

An interesting example of an emergent form of outsourcing can be seen in the case of the home delivery of groceries. As was noted in Chapter 2, in the early days of the grocery industry home delivery was part of the standard, full-service model and was a service available to customers at no extra charge. However, beginning in the 1920's, and being fully established by the 1960's, a new self-service model was implemented in the industry that required customers to be personally responsible for the transport of their groceries to their homes. This model and the concomitant need of consumers to perform this work for free reigned as the industry norm until the advent of online grocers in the 1990's. These grocers challenged the self-service model by offering to deliver one's groceries to their homes. However, unlike under the older full-service grocery model, this was now a service that a customer had to pay for. As such, it is only now that this represents a case of outsourcing because, while it is true that the home delivery of groceries was once performed by sources outside of the family (i.e. by the stores), this cannot be considered a case of outsourcing since customers were not required to pay anything additional for it. Rather, it was simply a service that the store provided. And while there was certainly a "work transfer" (Glazer 1993) when stores shifted this work to consumers, this was similarly not a case of outsourcing since the stores did not pay its

customers to perform this service for them. Indeed, it was not until this labor was *recommodified as a service that customers could purchase at a cost above and beyond that of the goods being bought* that the home delivery of groceries became an instance of the type of outsourcing that we are discussing here. And since this only began to take place on a significant scale in the past 10 to 15 years we can think of the home delivery of groceries as an emergent form of intimate outsourcing.

The above activities are ones that have only begun to be outsourced to any appreciable degree within the past 50 years at the outer limit, with most being of a more recent origin. And given the recent origin of these outsourcing activities, we can think of these as *emergent* forms of intimate outsourcing. However, despite their relative newness, these practices are increasingly being employed by individuals and families as a place to offload some of their intimate affairs. This has also been the case for the resurgent practices that can trace their history back prior to the 1950's and 1960's; they too have tended to see fairly dramatic surges in business in the recent past. Taken together, we can say that, with outsourcing, there has been an overall increase in the transfer of intimate affairs along both of the lines of emergent and resurgent practices.

Today, there is also a wider array of activities that one can outsource as these practices creep into more and more areas of life. That is, there are more and more services developing that are seeking to take over areas of the intimate sphere and transform them into businesses. And so while such a process is not categorically new, what is new is the variety of tasks these businesses are willing to take over<sup>44</sup> all the way from pooper-scooping one's yard, to standing in line for their clients, to writing out thank

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<sup>44</sup> As one commentator put it, what is new in all of this is that companies are "chopping up" the intimate sphere into "finer and finer pieces" (Slater cited in Winslow 2000).



you cards for them. As Hochschild (1997: 230 – emphasis added) describes this in terms of the family, “[i]ncreasingly...new products and concepts are being developed to extract smaller and smaller bits of time from family life and return them to the family – for a price – as ready-made goods and services” (ibid. 230 – emphasis added). More generally, “[i]t seems that the range of services is limited only by one’s imagination” (Winslow 2000) and as more and more businesses come to compete in this area of life, one can only expect that the range of tasks they are willing to take on will expand.

Overall, we can see that there has been an increased use of, and expansion in, various outsourcing practices and these quantitative aspects of this trend are part of what make the current wave of outsourcing historically unique. But there are also a number of qualitative dimensions to the outsourcing that we are seeing today that set it apart from previous transfers of intimate affairs to others outside of the family.

*How, to Whom, and in What Context: The Unique Qualitative Dimensions of Intimate Outsourcing*

We have seen how the quantitative increase in, and expansion of, the outsourcing of intimate affairs is part of what is new and/or unique about the current wave of outsourcing. However, in addition to these quantitative dimensions, there are also a number of qualitative elements that distinguish this trend from past practices. Particularly, there have been changes in *how* these activities are being transferred, *to whom* these activities are being transferred to, and *in what context* this transfer takes place. These will be outlined below and while not every practice will be defined by each

of the changes listed, on the whole outsourcing practices are moving in these directions. It should also be noted that these are not mutually exclusive categories and that many practices can be, and are, defined by many of these changes at once.

In terms of how these activities are being transferred to others, a distinguishing feature of outsourcing is that these transfers are increasingly taking place *along purely commercialized lines*. That is, while it is undoubtedly true that past transfers of intimate affairs took place in the context of economic exchange, these transactions tended to also be mixed with personal and/or social relationships. For example, we have seen how servants in colonial times were not just workers in a home but were also seen as being members of the family they were working for and were treated as such. Similarly, though in a very different social environment, Katzman (1978: 107) has shown how the personalized, i.e. not purely economic, relationship between employer and employee in domestic service prevented this kind of work from being transformed into an industrial or even a preindustrial occupation. Rather, domestic work

was a nonindustrial...occupation... *The distinctive structure of domestic service centered on the unique personalized mistress/servant relationship between women*. Whether the servants lived in or were day workers, *that intense personal interaction remained and had no comparable counterpart in any other occupation* (emphasis added).

In this regard, while these employment relations were certainly economic in nature (domestic servants were paid in exchange for their work), they were not exclusively so (see also Coser 1973).

Indeed, the highly personalized nature of this work has had significant ramifications for almost every part of the labor process of domestic workers. For example, “[b]ecause domestic service involved the hiring of a person rather than just the obtaining of her labor, both servant and mistress probably felt that the complex interrelationships could not be adequately defined” (ibid.). This consequently tended to limit the use of contracts that spelled out the specific rights and duties of each party which, in turned, allowed the employer a great deal of discretion in deciding how a servant used her time, even if this time was nominally designated as being the personal time of the servant. As such, domestics were basically always on call even though, in theory at least, there were designated times for servants to be off. Ultimately, the result of this highly personalized relationship was the greater ability on the part of employers to exploit employees in comparison to other, more commercialized, occupations. As Rollins (1985: 156) puts it, “[w]hat makes domestic service as an occupation more profoundly exploitative than other comparable occupations grows out of the precise element that makes it unique: the personal relationship between employer and employee”.

Today, while there are undoubtedly cases of such highly personalized relationships in domestic work and perhaps other forms of personal service, there is reason to believe that, especially with the development of large housecleaning corporations, these personal relationships in domestic work have, if not been eliminated, then at least been limited in comparison to the past. In part, this limitation of the personal nature of domestic work is due to the increasing formalization of domestic work that has accompanied its commercialization and corporatization. That is, as domestic work is

commercialized, especially in large companies, the nature of the work tends to be changed in ways that limit more personalized forms of exploitation once open to clients.

For example, when domestic workers live in their employers' homes, these workers are essentially always on call and subject to the vicissitudes of their master at all times. In contrast, when a maid service is hired to clean a house, under normal circumstances there is only a limited time frame in which the workers will be in a space that a client could try and direct their actions (i.e. the time in a house that a client contracted for) and at all other times the worker is in spaces beyond the direct control of the client. Moreover, especially for large companies, a client is not necessarily guaranteed that the same workers will be in his/her house each time they visit thereby limiting the personalized nature of any potential relationship between the employee and the client. This is due to the fact that when clients hire a maid service, they are hiring an organization and not particular workers. As such, the employment relationship between the client and workers is mediated by the contracting organization. This mediation of employment relations through an organization is one of the central features that Weber (1946: 196-240) identified with bureaucracy. Bickham Mendez (1998: 119) describes this situation specifically in terms of large housecleaning organizations: in a "bureaucratized organization structure workers and managers become representative of the agency. The owner of the home to be cleaned is no longer an employer, but a client, and is relieved of the responsibility of managing the domestic worker. Clients and workers are distanced from one another, largely because in the majority of cases clients are absent while HHH [an acronym for the fictionalized name of a nationwide housecleaning franchise] workers clean their homes".

As we will see, work taking place in a client's home when the client is not there is another distinctive feature of the current wave of outsourcing. In these cases, even when businesses are trying to provide specialized services for their clients, the spatial separation of the clients from those who are taking on their affairs limits any in-depth, personal relationship that may develop between worker and client. As such, these services are defined almost exclusively by their commercial nature.

Beyond commercialization, another qualitatively unique feature of the current wave of outsourcing can be seen in who takes on the tasks that are being transferred in a process of outsourcing. In the past, many of these activities were commonly transferred to informal sources for their performance such as friends, neighbors, or members of the community. For example, grandparents would baby-sit their grandchildren when the parents could not be around, children in the neighborhood could be hired to mow one's lawn, or members of one's community would be taken in to help with a variety of domestic chores. Certainly such instances of "informal outsourcing" (de Ruijter et al. 2003: 475) still occur today but as we have seen, at least for those who can afford it, individual and families are increasingly turning over their intimate affairs to more formal sources in the business sector via outsourcing. In part, this is because many of the informal sources one could previously rely on are drying up as more of these persons are engaged in the formal labor market. As Sharpe (2000) notes, "[m]any of these [outsourcing] businesses flourish because already-strained family support systems are getting even weaker. Even grandparents who live nearby often can't help out these days, since they are still working themselves". Moreover, research has shown that while nuclear family circles may have tightened in the past couple of decades, a family's

connections to broader social networks (e.g. connections to friends and neighbors) has shrunk over this same period of time (McPherson et al. 2006; cf. also Putman 2000). Commenting on the research by McPherson et al., Goodman (2006) notes that “[t]he greatest loss [in social networks] has been in neighbors and friends who will provide help, support, advice and connections to a wider world”. This is significant given that the people who form one’s social network act as an informal safety net: “They’re the ones who see you through a life crisis, lend you your spare bedroom or pick up your kids at school in a pinch” (ibid.; see also Wellman and Worley 1990; Hurlburt et al. 2000). With this erosion of informal support systems, either within family circles or in broader social networks, the need for other forms of support has been created and formal business specializing in taking on what informal sources can no longer handle have been quick to fill the void.

At the same time, while there are certainly individuals and organizations out there willing to do almost anything a person or family needs for money, most, if not all, of the businesses engaged in taking on these personal affairs have moved to some degree at least in the direction of formalizing their occupations and industries. And this formalization has tended to occur along one of two lines. The first is by attempting to turn the occupations that take on intimate affairs into professions (or at least give the appearance of this). But what exactly is a profession, and how do occupations obtain this status? As Ritzer (1975: 630) has argued, the most central feature of a profession is its ability to create a monopoly over certain work tasks by convincing the state and/or the public “that they need, and deserve, such a right”. Sanders and Lyon (1976: 44) echo this, defining professions as “those occupational groups that can successfully convince

the public of the societal necessity of their skills and the ‘rightness’ of their authority. The maintenance of this authority rests upon control of access to and utilization of the ‘essential’ skills and upon codes of conduct which emphasize public service”.

With the occupations that take on intimate affairs, we are not dealing with the state or with issues of public service, but rather with individuals and families (i.e. the public at large), and the creation of personal services. Nevertheless, many of the occupations that take on intimate affairs are trying to obtain an occupational status by, if not gaining a monopoly, then at least a greater foothold, over various intimate affairs. However, this situation is particularly problematic for these occupations given that, since they are by and large everyday affairs, they are *highly substitutable* forms of labor (de Ruijter 2004: 223). That is, individuals and families can easily choose to perform these tasks for themselves instead of contracting them out.

How, then, are these companies to convince consumers to spend the money to outsource these tasks instead of performing them in-house? Many do this by laying claim to specialized knowledge and skills that make them “better” at performing these types of affairs than the lay person. In other words, these companies claim to be experts in intimate affairs and proclaim that by using their services they can deploy the systems of knowledge and specialized skills they have at their disposal to the benefit of their clients. In Giddens’ (1990: 27) terms, they frame their services as “expert systems”; i.e. “systems of technical accomplishment or professional expertise that organise large areas of the material and social environments in which we live today”. For Giddens, such systems as these are not necessarily confined to areas of technical knowledge such as engineering, chemical processing, or the proverbial rocket science. Rather, they also “extend to social

relations themselves and to the intimacies of the self” (Giddens 1991: 18). Giddens offers doctors, councilors, and therapists as examples of expert systems that have extended themselves into the more intimate areas of life. We can extend this usage, however, to occupations such as wedding planners, professional organizers, personal chefs, and the like, who promise that they have access to specialized and technical knowledge that is not available to the common person. Thus, a professional organizer offers not only to put away one’s articles in the same (and possibly disorganized) manner as their clients would, but to do so in an expert fashion (i.e. in a way that a non-expert supposedly could not do, or could only do with great effort). And it is by laying claim to specialized and technical knowledge in these everyday affairs that these companies not only try to create a market for themselves and their services, but also try and gain a greater share of, if not a monopoly on, particular intimate affairs.

This may not be the case for some of the more routine tasks that are outsourced (e.g. housekeeping and some forms of outsourcing food preparation) where the goal is simply to replace the labor of the client with that of another person. In cases like this, outsourcing is used as a labor replacement strategy and firms compete to take on these affairs in a different manner (see below).

However, the appearance of professionalism is important to the firms that take on intimate affairs in another regard as well. This is that, given that many intimate affairs are sensitive in nature, and that outsiders are given the responsibility of performing them, a number of “trust problems” (de Ruijter et al. 2003) are introduced into the decision to outsource in comparison to having them performed ‘in-house’ or to outsource them informally (e.g. to relatives or neighbors). This is not to say that these issues are absent



when internal informal sources of support are used (e.g. a relative may be a neglectful babysitter, a neighbor watching one's house dishonest). However, such problems tend to be mitigated by the knowledge and information each party has of one another (e.g. if parents know who is, and who is not, trustworthy in their family and neighborhood, they can hire accordingly).

But, when formal sources of support are used, especially when one has no prior contact with the company, clients may look for signs that this company can be trusted. In such cases, companies can attempt to display a number of signs that show their trustworthiness. One prominent sign in this regard is an affiliation with a trade association or professional organization and its associated credentialing programs, codes of conduct, industry standards, insurance and licensing programs, and occupational definition (i.e. the tasks those working in this industry will and will not perform). Such an affiliation is meant to signify that the standards and policies of the industry as a whole will be upheld by a particular firm and, thus, that a particular firm can be trusted. Not surprisingly, many of the industries that take on intimate affairs have created their own professional associations. These include:

- Personal chefs: United States Personal Chef Association (USPCA) founded in 1991
- Professional organizers: National Association of Professional Organizers (NAPO) founded in 1985
- Pet waste management: Association of Professional Animal Waste Specialists (aPaws) founded in 2002)
- Wedding planners: National Bridal Service (NBS) founded in 1951 and the American Association of Professional Bridal Consultants founded in 1955

- Birthday party planners: Party Pixies founded in 2002
- Professional shoppers: Association of Image Consultants International (AICI) founded in 1990.<sup>45</sup>

This is true even in the case of the more generalist outsourcing occupation of personal concierges that, as we have seen, will perform a variety of services for their clients. In fact, this industry has two main professional organizations, the International Concierge and Errand Association (ICEA), founded in 2001, and the National Concierge Association (NCA), found in 1998. In both, attempts at formalizing this occupation are evident. For example, the ICEA includes in its list of benefits for joining the organization the establishment of “Industry Standards” (“ICEA will work with all interested parties to develop and maintain industry standards so that we may better serve our clients and maintain the integrity of the concierge services industry around the world”) and a “Professional Affiliation” (the “Official ICEA Member Certificate and Membership Pin may be used to announce your affiliation with ICEA and your commitment to the professionalism of our industry.”) (<http://www.iceaweb.org/mc/page.do?sitePageId=21513>). The list of benefits for the latter includes “[e]xceptional vendor products and services backed by the organization” and “NCA ‘Certified Concierge’, ‘Preferred Vendor’ & Annual Awards programs”. All of these are attempts to standardize, formalize, and professionalize an occupation that takes on a variety of, often sensitive, tasks for its clients.

An affiliation with a professional organization is supposed to convey the message that, since certain standards will be upheld, the company can be trusted as well.

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<sup>45</sup> Additionally, the “kiddie cab” industry had formed an industry group, the National Child Transportation Association, but this was subsequently disbanded in 1998 due to sagging membership numbers.

Of course, companies may offer other signs of trustfulness as well, for example, by posting client testimonials on their website. Meagher (1997: 19) has found that companies in Australia that will “do or arrange *virtually* anything (with the exception of childcare)” (emphasis in original), that is, companies close to personal concierge firms in the U.S., try both to combat possible trust problems and to garner higher wages by attempting to show high levels of shared cultural capital between themselves and their professional clients (e.g. dressing nicely and presenting themselves clearly as other professionals would). These too are meant as signs of trustworthiness intended to mitigate the trust problems involved when an unknown, outside source is used to perform intimate affairs.

But issues of trust in this area are not necessarily new, though how they are combated is. As Coser (1973: 35) has noted, masters attempted to generate trust in their servants by establishing an affectual bond of loyalty between the servant and himself: since these servants were in a structural position to observe all of what their masters did and did not do in their private lives, there was “a strong interest [for the master] to insure for himself the totally loyalty of the servant so that he [the servant] may not be tempted to make use of the intimate knowledge that he has acquired during his service”. In other words, “[f]ear of betrayal looms large when men are structurally forced to reveal intimate facets of behavior and personality to status inferiors” (ibid.). The result of this from the master’s point of view is the need for loyalty on the part of the servant to his/her employer. However, “[o]nly when there are strong affectual ties binding servant to master, and concomitantly only when the servant has few outside ties, can the master be reasonably sure that the requisite loyalty is forthcoming” (purely contractual relations

were not seen as strong enough for generating this level of loyalty)(ibid.). Thus, masters did many things at this time to ensure the generation of this level of loyalty: they limited the outside contact their servant had; they hired only servants who were single or couples in a relationship; and they gave their servants “gifts” such as old clothing to name but a few examples.

Today, and for reasons that will be discussed in greater detail below, the transfer of intimate affairs often takes place in very different social context than the one that Coser discussed. In particular, it is often the case that while these transfers take place in the home the “masters” who hire out this work, they are not there to supervise or be seen by their employees. Thus, the need for loyalty on the part of the servant so that they do not betray the secrets of their employer’s personal life may not be as great in this context as it was in the past. But it is true that those who take on intimate affairs today often work in an environment where they are potentially free to rummage through their employers articles at will since they are not under direct supervision so the need to provide at least some guarantees that standards of privacy and trust will be upheld remain today. Such guaranties, or rather, promises, of particular standards are what affiliations with professional bodies and other signs of trustworthiness are supposed, in part at least, to provide.

For more routine affairs companies may not compete so much in terms of professionalism as in terms of rationalization. That is, these companies will argue that, all things being considered (e.g. the price of one’s time, the cost of the service, the drudgery of the work involved, etc.) outsourcing these tasks is a more efficient solution than having them performed in-house because of the rationalized systems and

mechanisms that they have in place for performing these types of affairs (e.g. standardized systems for cleaning homes). In some cases, these rational systems are couched in the language of professionalism: For example, Bickham Mendez (1998: 121) notes how “Helping Hands Housecleaning” (HHH), the fictionalized name of a large, nationwide franchise of housekeeping business, “uses a discourse of professionalism to differentiate itself from other smaller agencies and to justify its much higher prices” even though this professionalism tends to translate into a “rigid consistency and impersonalism” in the work process and is facilitated by a “‘fast food’ approach to housecleaning” (ibid. 121 and 120 respectively; cf. also Ritzer 2004).<sup>46</sup> Ehrenreich [2002] found a similarly routinized and systematized approach to cleaning houses when she, as part of her study of low-wage work, worked for a cleaning service that showed each employee videos of how each task was to be performed and in which order, as well as imposing a system for how each employee was to move through a home while cleaning it. Meagher (1997: 10) found a similar strategy in place in some Australian housecleaning companies.

Helping Hands Housecleaning also tries to instill in its workers notions of service and quality, as well as the more formalized “principles of CARE (credibility, appearance, responsiveness and empathy)”, that will show that the company and its workers care for its clients and their needs. This stress upon care, however, is not unrelated to the standardized work process that they implement: “[t]he emphasis of CARE in the service encounter with clients attempts to offset the ‘fast food’ aspect of HHH service, mitigating the depersonalized effect of HHH’s standardized service” (Bickham Mendez 1998: 122). As such, “[t]he ideal ‘team worker’ (the term used to designate workers) strives for high

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<sup>46</sup> See Meagher (1997) for similar developments taking place in smaller housekeeping firms in Australia.

quality results and completes work in a speedy and efficient manner, using specific HHH cleaning techniques. In addition to offering professional and high quality service, she [i.e. the worker] cares deeply about service both clients' cleaning *and* personal needs" (ibid.121 – emphasis in original). In this sense, HHH is trying to standardize, formalize, and, in many respects, McDonaldize (Ritzer 2004) not only the work process of these domestics, but the workers themselves, particularly their stance toward the customer and customer service.

This strategy of rationalizing the labor process should not be confused with the above strategy of professionalization, despite the similar language used. In the case of the former, to borrow language from Braverman's (1974) critique of capitalism and Taylorism, conception has been separated from execution and workers are merely the enactors of pre-established systems. In the case of the latter, though it is certainly constrained in a number of respects (e.g. through training processes and codes of conduct), there is a much greater space open for the worker's discretion in performing these tasks. In fact, these workers are often hired for their ability to conceive of how certain tasks should be performed (e.g. wedding planners knowing which flowers to use or personal chefs knowing good dishes to make). Of course, what the relative balance is between conception and execution will vary in each occupation but professionalization on the whole leaves a much greater space open for the former, while rationalization tends to reduce the labor process almost exclusively to the latter. In either case, a more formalized system is left in place vis-à-vis the use of other outside sources in the transfer of intimate affairs (e.g. the use of friends and relatives).

Another unique aspect of the current wave of outsourcing is that these transfers are taking place in different spatial, social, and emotional environments. In terms of the former, to use the language of reflexive modernization, outsourcing has allowed a greater time and space distantiation (Giddens 1990) to take place between those who outsource their intimate affairs and those who take them on. We have seen how many intimate activities in the past were transferred to others to perform. But while these transfers might have involved the labor of “outsiders”, the labor itself still took place inside the home (e.g. domestic servants, as the name implies, worked almost exclusively in the home).

In contrast, today an increasing number of these outsourcing practices “disembed” these activities from the home and transfer them to places outside of it. For example, daycare, as opposed to the use of nannies and au pairs, transfers childcare to places outside of the child’s home (though it may be the home of another person and not necessarily a daycare center). In fact, the daycare industry is largely premised on the need to care for children outside the context of the home environment. Similarly, while kiddie cabs pick children up from their home, or drop them off there, their main operational environment is the space outside of the home.

On a different front, remembrance services and the outsourcing of handwritten thank you cards also take place outside of the home. But since these transfers can generally take place electronically via the internet or through the mail, the remembrance of important dates and events as well as the handwriting of thank you cards can take place almost anywhere in the world. Thus, a person in California can hire a company in Minnesota to send customized handwritten thank you cards out to persons all across the

country without these cards actually ever being in the presence of the person ‘sending’ them out. This is different from the case of daycare centers and kiddie cabs where there are obvious geographical limits to the distantiating that can take place between the customer and the service provider given that this type of work must be performed on a local, not national or global, scale. However, though operating on potentially different scales, in both cases a geographical separation can take place between those outsourcing these tasks and those who take them on; a separation that is largely unique to the practice of outsourcing.

There are also cases where there is now a spatial separation between those who outsource particular tasks and those who take them despite the fact that these outsourced tasks are still performed in the home. In these cases this separation is not the result of this work being moved to locations outside of the home, but rather the result of that fact that those who are outsourcing these tasks are not there when the work is being performed. For example, personal chefs and cleaning services routinely work when their clients are not home. This is not surprising given that these businesses cater largely to busy, dual income families.

But the situation of a client-free environment yields a different social environment in which these tasks are performed than was common in the past, particularly in the case of domestic work. For example, Bickham Mendez cites past research on domestic work which found that most clients “preferred an individual, female worker to either a household service agency or to a male employee” because they could develop a personal relationship with the person cleaning their home (Bickham Mendez 1998: 123). However, in her research Bickham Mendez (*ibid.*) found the situation to be quite



different: “Domestic workers and HHH managers told me of employer/clients who were too busy to establish personalistic relationships with employees. These women specifically requested that housecleaners clean while they were not home and expressed a desire to escape time-consuming and emotionally-draining personal relationships with them... [C]lients often hire a household service agency precisely in order to achieve distance between themselves and housecleaners, thereby avoiding the emotional work involved in personalistic management of domestic workers”.

Similarly, in the past when servants worked as cooks they did so at times when a client was home and could direct their actions. However, many personal chefs note that most of their clients are not home when they perform their work. For example, one personal chef in detailing her workday notes that “[m]ost of my clients are not home, and I’m often able to unload, set up, prep, cook, cool, package and clean up in about four hours. I leave a handwritten ‘love note’ next to the flowers and bread and head home.” (Anderson 2004). This situation is echoed by another personal chef who notes that “I do all of the work in their [i.e. the client’s] home. I’m using 99 percent of my own utensils. I clean up. *Most often people don’t know that I’ve been there* except for the smell in the house or the food in the fridge or they realized the kitchen is really clean” (cited in Winslow 2000 –emphasis added; cf. also Cone 2005).

Personal concierges can also provide a number of services for clients when they are not home. For example, here are some of the services listed for the Chicago-based Everything But Time personal services company: “This bonded and insured concierge service helps clients with personal shopping, errands, *house-sitting, pet-sitting*, checking on elderly relatives, and special occasion planning and preparation. *We’ll also wait at*

*your home to sign for that special delivery or open the door for the plumber or the electrician.* Need something else? You name it, and we'll try to do it! If we cannot personally help, we'll help you find a professional who can" (emphasis added).<sup>47</sup> Note that many of these services are needed because their clients are not home when they are performed (if they were home, presumably they could open the door for the plumber).

Of course, these services could also be employed because a person does not want to be home when something is happening: the same website notes how the owner of Everything But Time was hired to housesit for two days while her client's floors were being redone. In either case, that many of these outsourcing activities are taking place in the home while the client is not there speaks to the changing social context in which the transfer of intimate affairs to others is increasingly taking place.

But perhaps the biggest change in context has to do with the emotional environment in which these transfers take place. Today the family is defined culturally around the notion of intimacy in the sense that families are both defined and held together by emotional bonds of love and support (Coontz 2006; Giddens 1991, 1992; Gottlieb 1993: 248; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995; Giddens 1992). This has not always been the case and the transfer of intimate affairs (e.g. sending out one's children to be an apprentice in someone else's home) did not carry the emotional weight that it does today (Mintz and Kellogg 1988: 4-17; Aries 1965). However, with the rise of the conception of the bourgeoisie in the seventeenth century and its vision of the family as one based on intense and deep emotional bonds (Habermas 1991 [1962]), the intimate sphere was born and subsequently, if slowly, disseminated to wider segments of the population.

Eventually, this conception would intensify itself into the common cultural norm of what

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<sup>47</sup> <http://www.time-less.com/aboutus.html>

family life should be constituted of and this is the dominant conception of the family that we find today. And while some worry, as they have ever since this conception of the family was first put forward, that relationships freed from logics other than that of emotional fulfillment are inherently unstable (fulfillment is a fickle thing), this conception forms the backdrop of family life today. This is also the conception of the family that forms the backdrop from which Hochschild works in an attempt to understand the 'meaning' of outsourcing and its possible emotional consequences. Without such a backdrop, such concerns would not seem to be that important: e.g. a concern over where the line between the market and intimate life is and should be assumes that there is a separable world where intimacy, and not market principles, reigns.

All of this is to say that even if the same transfer of intimate affairs took place in the past as it does today, and this is just one of the many differences that exist between outsourcing and other activities that see intimate affairs transferred to others for their performance. These differences are important because they highlight what is unique about outsourcing. But they are also important to keep in mind when trying to place this trend within a theoretical context.

## Chapter 4: Alternative Theories of Intimate Outsourcing: Insights, Extensions, and Evaluations

As previous chapters have shown, intimate affairs are increasingly being outsourced and outsourcing is in many respects distinct from past transfers of intimate affairs. The focus of this chapter is to critically evaluate a number of theories address the issue of outsourcing to see what insights they offer in this regard as well as the limitations they have in account for this phenomenon.

### *Commodification Theory: The Encroachment of Capitalism*

A long tradition in sociology has explored the ways in which capitalism and capital accumulation have acted in a seemingly continuous process commodification that has targeted elements of the social world ranging from the most mundane and material to the most intimate and personal. With this perspective there is a fear that capitalism is expanding its market into personal and intimate areas of life and that something, if not sacred, then at least meaningful beyond money, is upset and devalued in this process. Moreover, since it appears that the market is increasingly expanding, and thus ever-encroaching upon more personal and intimate matters, this is a constant, if not accelerating, fear. *The Hedgehog Review* (2003) has summarized the overall tenets of this perspective nicely:

This issue of *The Hedgehog Review* explores what is at stake in the *encroachment* of commodification into almost every aspect of life. While commodification is certainly not a recent innovation, what is new is its scope and power. It has become intensified and institutionalized in new and far-reaching ways, carrying meanings that reconfigure our understanding of the world and our place within it. (op cit. 5 –emphasis on encroachment added)

In short, this line of thought seeks to explore the ways in which the market increasingly infuses itself into areas of social and personal life. Hochschild (2005) has linked the outsourcing of intimate affairs to this process of the encroachment of the market into personal and familial life. But before looking at Hochschild's work, it is first important to trace, albeit briefly, the history of this line of thinking, a history that can be traced back to the work of Karl Marx.

Marx was one of the earliest in sociology to devote attention to the issue of commodification and many have used his work as a foundation for understanding this issue. For Marx, the major issue regarding commodification was how labor, which Marx regarded as the fountain of human potential, was being transformed under capitalism from gateway to species being into nothing more than a "callous 'cash payment'" (Marx and Engels 1968: 38). That is, Marx was critical of how species being was being commodified and, as such, leveled to the status of a mere instrument in the creation of surplus value. Thus, Marx saw labor and work being devalued in the very process that made it valuable to capitalists - i.e. its conversion into an implement for creating surplus value. The result of all this is that:

[t]he bourgeoisie has stripped of its halo every occupation hitherto honoured and looked up to with reverent awe. It has converted the physician, the lawyer, the priest, the poet, the man of science, into its paid wage-labourers (Marx and Engels 1968: 38).

This means that for Marx not only are capitalist relations intrinsically exploitative in the economic sense (i.e. workers generate surplus value that is never returned to them), but also degrading in the sense that work-as-the-means-of-human-development has been replaced by the alternative logic of work-as-a-means-of-generating-surplus-value. In other words, capitalistic wage relations turn “[m]an’s *species being*...into a being *alien* to him, into a *means of individual existence*. It estranges from man his own body, as well as external nature and his spiritual essence, his *human being*” (Marx 1964: 114 – emphasis in original). Thus, in all, Marx saw capitalism as crippling human potential to the extent to which the logic of capital entered the work relation and the extent to which the work relation was transformed into a capitalistic enterprise.

Marx’s work on commodification has served as a model for later thinkers who have explored how aspects of social life have been usurped by the orientations of capitalism. For Lefebvre (2000, 2002), following in the Marxist tradition, this reorienting power of capitalism has extended beyond the realms of work and culture to the whole of everyday life. As such, for Lefebvre, the pangs of alienation have become a condition endemic to the entire social sphere, not just the world of work. For the critical theorists, a major problematic was the commodification of culture (Horkheimer and Adorno 1998 [1944]; Marcuse 1979). For Horkheimer and Adorno in particular, this means that the once autonomous realm of culture has been appropriated by the mechanics of capitalism, transforming its once emancipatory potential into an aid in reinforcing the dominant

order. In other words, culture is transformed into a culture industry where cultural goods are no longer valued in their own right, but rather by the dictates of the market:

The work of art, by completely assimilating itself to need, deceitfully deprives men of precisely that liberation from the principle of utility which it should inaugurate. What might be called use value in the reception of cultural commodities is replaced by exchange value; in place of enjoyment there is gallery-visiting and factual knowledge: the prestige seeker replaces the connoisseur.... No object has inherent value; it is valuable only to the extent that it can be exchanged. The use value of art, its mode of being, is treated as a fetish; and the fetish, the work's social rating...becomes use value-the only quality which is enjoyed (Horkheimer and Adorno 1998 [1944]. 158).

Habermas' (1984) work on the "colonization of the lifeworld" can also be included in this tradition, though it should be noted that he sees twin forces acting to colonize the lifeworld – the state and the market.<sup>48</sup> Nevertheless, commodification is a force of colonization for Habermas and it acts to redefine elements of the lifeworld in a manner constant with market, and not social, imperatives.

There are also a number of works dealing with commodification that, though they may be sympathetic to Marx and his overall project, are less Marxian or even non-Marxian in orientation.<sup>49</sup> For example, there are works such as Schor's (1998) *The Overspent American*, de Graaf et al.'s (2005) *Affluenza*, and Klein's (2002) *No Logo* that address the increasing presence of commercialization and commodification in the

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<sup>48</sup> Habermas also focuses his analysis more on the level of discourse and language than many of the other thinkers outlined in this section.

<sup>49</sup> Some could argue that Habermas is similarly of a non-Marxist orientation. However, given his connection to the critical theory tradition and the influence Marx had in his work, I have decided to include Habermas here.

everyday lives of Americans (and the negative effects that this presence has). There are also more classical works that address similar themes such as Galbraith's (1998 [1958]) *The Affluent Society* and Veblen's *Theory of the Leisure Class* (2001 [1899]).

Many other works have explored how more specific aspects of social life have been usurped by market forces. These include works detailing the commodification and/or commercialization of childhood (*Born to Buy* [Schor 2005]; *The Commodification of Childhood* [Cook 2004]; the environment (*The Earth for Sale: Reclaiming Ecology in an Age of Corporate Greenwash* [Tokar 1997]), dissent (*Commodify Your Dissent* [Frank 1997]; *The Conquest of Cool* [Frank 1998]), education (*College For Sale: A Critique of the Commodification of Higher Education* [Shumar 1997]), and information (*The Commodification of Information* [Elkin-Koren 2002]). All of these works argue that specific aspects of social life have been commodified and reoriented around the prerogatives of commercialization.

More generally, the issue of *The Hedgehog Review* cited above was devoted entirely to the issue of "The Commodification of Everything" and was an attempt "to understand the cultural significance of the fact that commodification...has become a totalizing cultural force" (*The Hedgehog Review* 2003: 6). Similar themes are echoed in Kuttner's (1999) *Everything for Sale* and Rifkin's (2000) *Age of Access*.

Katsiaficas extends this perspective by linking it to issues of private and familial life:

Since the imperative of capital is to grow, pressure on corporations continually to expand profits means that mundane activities revolving around basic needs (food, clothing and shelter) are severed from group contexts, increasingly mechanized and made into arenas for financial gain.



The life-world in which humans participate as members of families further breaks down under the pressures (and allure) of consumer society as human relations are increasingly instrumentalized...[N]early all traditionally private functions of the family have become public and often part of the system of monetary exchange (2006: 362 – emphasis mine).

The result of this has been that food, once traditionally prepared in the home, is given over to fast food establishments, childcare is taken from the home and given to paid daycare centers, and seniors are removed from their homes and placed in retirement communities/nursing homes as capital penetrates the realms of personal life. In all, for Katsiaticas, this means that personal matters are increasingly being given over to the market for their performance in a manner that we could identify as outsourcing.

However, in connecting the issue of commodification and commercialization to personal and intimate life, the work of Arlie Hochschild (1983, 1997, 2003a, 2003b, 2005) has special relevance. In part, this is because she has been at the forefront of this issue. For example, in her (1983) first major work, *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*, Hochschild explored how businesses are attempting to manage and dictate the emotions of workers by imposing commercially driven “feeling rules” upon them in the hopes that workers will come to feel what the business wants them to feel (e.g. standards regarding one’s emotional disposition toward customers). Later, Hochschild extended this concern over the commercialization of feeling into a broader array of work and non-work settings (see in particular the essays in Hochschild 2003a).

But Hochschild (1997, 2003a, 2003b, 2005 ) has also been one of the first in terms of social theory to explore how “outsourcing” is coming to seep into intimate and

emotional life. That is, just as in the business world where more and more workplaces are increasingly giving aspects of their work process to others to perform, so too, though for different reasons, are the intimate tasks and emotional labor of individuals and families increasingly being outsourced to others.

And, as we have seen, Hochschild is concerned with these issues because of the emotional dynamics involved as tasks of the culturally defined, intimate family are given over to others to perform. In particular, this type of outsourcing, and the encroachment of capitalism into intimate life more generally, is troubling to Hochschild because “[t]he market changes our benchmarks. Though no one intends it to, the market influences the norms that guide our lives at home” (ibid. 22 – emphasis mine). In other words, Hochschild is concerned that the “benchmarks” of intimate life will become only those of commerce and not of other standards (e.g. emotional bonds or social relations) so that we will come to evaluate personal experiences through the impersonal standards of the market alone. The outsourcing of intimate affairs threatens to bring these market-based standards straight into the home: “[w]hat outsourcing does...is to import cultural images and stripes of rhetoric from somewhere outside of the home into it. Responsibility for the task goes out. Newcomers with their own notions...of a ‘real need’ and a ‘good home’ come in” (ibid.). Thus, “outsourcing can bring work culture into the home that is distinctly not homey” while, at the same time, introducing “a market-laundered version of hominess” (ibid.).

Like others working in this line of thought, the impingement of personal life brought about by the culture of outsourcing is part of a broader trend of how the forces of

commercialization are increasingly penetrating our intimate affairs. In other words, the “commodity frontier” (Hochschild 2004) is increasingly encroaching upon intimate life:

[i]n the USA over the last 30 years, various trends have jointly pushed us in the direction of commodifying intimate life...[T]his relationship [between the market and intimate life] infuses itself into virtually all other relationships, via our connection to the premises of capitalism as they play out in everyday life. It raises the question of *what* we hold important and sacred and *how* we should hold it (Hochschild 2005: 84 – emphasis in original).

The outsourcing of emotional labor is then the latest manifestation of this broader trend of the encroachment of capital upon intimate life and it again raises the question, though perhaps with more force than in previous cases of commercialization, of where the dividing line, or “wall”, is (or should be) between the market and non-market areas of life. In short, the outsourcing of emotional work raises the “question of what [if anything] is ‘too meaningful’ to outsource” (ibid. 78).

Overall, this line of thought, be it Marxian or non-Marxian in orientation, argues that capitalism in its never-ending quest to capture new markets is constantly seeking to commercialize new areas of the social world, and that personal and intimate life are not immune from this. As such, under this perspective the outsourcing of intimate affairs can be seen simply as a continuation of the commodification process that dates back at least to Marx’s time, but which has penetrated more and more areas of life as time has gone on. Thus, if one attempts to account for the outsourcing of intimate affairs using this perspective, the causal mechanism is straightforward: *capitalism is the driving force of*

*all of this with more personal and intimate affairs becoming new markets for entrepreneurs.* In short, it is the private sphere that is encroaching upon the intimate one.

And while some of these accounts do identify other factors that help contribute to the need to outsource (e.g. Hochschild [2005: 76] notes how women entering the labor force leads to a time-scarcity for parents who then become targets of these new outsourcing businesses), *all of these perspectives tend to overlook the fact that many individuals and family members are actively seeking to outsource their intimate affairs and willingly give them up to others to perform.* That is, while it is undoubtedly true that market forces are encroaching upon intimate life as these accounts suggest, it also the case that many people are willing, if not wanting, to have this outsourcing take place. Hochschild does account for this possibility of wanting to employ these types of services, but does so in a manner that shows that these decisions take place within the context set by the processes of commercialization: “commodification provides a way in which people individually manage to want or not want certain elements of family life. The existence of...market substitutes becomes a form of societal legitimation for” the ambivalence between market and non-market life (Hochschild 2003: 43). Here again the economy is the driver of wants.

While there is much merit to this position and the idea that intimate affairs are a new target for commercial enterprise, this position can only account for so much. Specifically, this perspective misses the fact that outsourcing may not be so much an issue *of colonization as it is of invitation* – of individuals and families *wanting* to outsource their intimate affairs. As will be seen below and in the next chapter, there have been significant social developments not accounted for by the encroachment perspective

(e.g. cultural shifts toward individualization and an emphasis on self-development) that go a long way in explaining the invitation aspect of this trend that the encroachment perspective overlooks.

There is another issue with this perspective as well, and this relates to the historical question of why is the outsourcing of intimate affairs occurring now and not one hundred years ago, or one hundred years from now? The encroachment perspective is largely silent on this issue except to suggest that it has taken this long for the market to get to intimate life to commodify it. However, we have seen that many intimate affairs were commodified before (i.e. they were transferred to others in a commercial context), so how and why were they subsequently de-commodified only to be re-commodified via the process of outsourcing? This is a question that this perspective cannot answer as it tends to assume that the commodity frontier pushes ever forward and never back. But in assuming this constant push, this perspective overlooks the fact that the commodification of intimate affairs has tended to come in waves, sometimes surging into this sphere of life, at other times retreating out of it. As such, only a historically sensitive theory can account for the waves of commodification that the intimate sphere has seen. In the next chapter I will argue that such a level of sensitivity is offered by the reflexive modernization perspective.

### *Marxist Feminists and the Socialization of the Family*

The question of who is to perform the affairs of the intimate sphere is a very important question to Marxist feminists. In fact, the resolution of this issue is a key

factor in the liberation of women. However, the outsourcing of these affairs to others through the market was not the remedy that these scholars were looking for, though the possibility of this was anticipated. This can be seen in one of the earliest expositions of this position: Benston's (1969) "The Political Economy of Women's Liberation" published in *Monthly Review*. Her work will be treated as an exemplar of this line of thought.

In this work, Benston aims to develop a "structural definition of women" as a class. Such a definition is necessary as women's labor has traditionally stood outside of, and has been invisible to, classical Marxian conceptions of class based on the production of surplus value in industrial settings. Thus,

[i]n sheer quantity, household labor, including child care, constitutes a huge amount of socially necessary production. Nevertheless, in a society based on commodity production, it is not usually considered "real work" since it is outside of trade and the market place. It is pre-capitalist in a very real sense. This assignment of household work as the function of a special category "women" means that this group does stand in a different relation to production than the group "men." We will tentatively define women, then, as that group of people who are responsible for the production for simple use-values in those activities associated with the home and family. (ibid)

In other words, "[i]n a society in which money determines value, women are a group who work outside the money economy. Their work is not worth money, is therefore valueless, is therefore not even real work.... In structural terms, the closest thing to the condition of women is the condition of others who are or were also outside of commodity production, i.e., serfs and peasants" (ibid.). So how then to liberate women from their current structural position as members outside of the economy? For Benston, in order for this

liberation to occur, it is not so much an issue of bringing women into the same work contexts as men (e.g. having women work in industrial production) as it is a more fundamental change in how the reproduction of labor is to occur: “converting [the] private production of household work into public production” (ibid.). In other words, it requires the *socialization* of household production,

the work now done in the home as private production [being converted] into work to be done in the public economy. To be more specific, this means that child-rearing should no longer be the responsibility solely of the parents. Society must begin to take responsibility for children; the economic dependence of women and children on the husband-father must be ended. The other work that goes on in the home must also be changed--communal eating places and laundries for example. When such work is moved into the public sector, then the material basis for discrimination against women will be gone (ibid.).

According to this line of thought, if these changes were to occur, the basis for the emancipation of women from the home would be laid.

Many of these themes are similar to those raised by Marx’s frequent collaborator, Friedrich Engels (1968), in his *Origins of the Family: Private Property and the State*. In particular, Benston and Engels share that idea that women will be liberated with the socialization of many intimate affairs (e.g. as private housework is transformed into “a social industry” and the care and education of children becomes a collective endeavor) (op cit. 511). However, Engels focuses less on the class aspects of this liberation and more on how the socialization of these domestic chores will undercut the economic foundations of monogamy. However, in disrupting the economic base of monogamous marriage, whose history he traces in this work, monogamy is not abolished in this

process. In fact, “far from disappearing, it will only begin to be completely realized. For with the conversion of the means of production into social property, wage labour, the proletariat, also disappears, and therewith, also the necessity for a certain...number of women to surrender themselves for money” (ibid.). In other words, the socialization of the means of production and domestic functions will allow women to pursue relationships and marriage independent of economic or other considerations outside of the emotional rewards that the relationship brings. Thus, the liberation that Engels speaks about is more emotional in nature than that of Benston’s class focus. Nevertheless, both see the socialization of domestic functions (and perhaps more than just domestic functions) as a necessary precondition for the liberation of women.

But Benston notes another possibility that, while liberating women from household production at least in a limited extent, still occurs under the auspices of capitalism: this is *the transfer of these household functions to the market for their performance*. As she notes, “[t]he changes in production necessary to get women out of the home might seem to be, in theory, possible under capitalism. One of the sources of women's liberation movements may be the fact that alternative capitalized forms of home production now exist. Day care is available, even if inadequate and perhaps expensive; convenience foods, home delivery of meals, and take-out meals are widespread; laundries and cleaners offer bulk rates” (ibid.). However, Benston thinks this is an development given that “cost usually prohibits a complete dependence on such facilities, and they are not available everywhere, even in North America. These should probably then be regarded as embryonic forms rather than completed structures” (ibid.). Today, it seems that, if not complete, the “structures” necessary to take on household tasks through the



market are much more mature than when Benston wrote this article in 1969, and seems to be functioning quite well.

Benston based this prediction of the market failing to take on household tasks on the fact that “the need to keep women in the home will grow” which is itself based on two claims. The first is that the unpaid labor that women perform in the home is “very profitable to those who own the means of production” in that they reap the benefits of this labor without having to pay for it. What Benston fails to realize here is that, so long as workers do not demand that these services be paid for by their employers, then having the market take on household responsibilities does not drain the economic resources of the employing the workers and is, in fact, very profitable for those who make a business by taking on these affairs. The second “is the problem of whether the economy can expand enough to put all women to work as a part of the normally employed labor force”. While this may not be true in all cases, the increasing participation rate of women in the labor force suggests that the economy can expand enough to employ many women. In fact, some of this expansion even comes from those household tasks that have been commodified through outsourcing.

In the end, the commodification of household tasks and the expansion of the economy may not be the barrier to a privatized solution to household production that Benston envisioned it would be. And as the increasing outsourcing of intimate affairs to the market suggests, the privatization of household tasks, a possibility in Benston’s framework, has become more the reality.

To Benston’s credit, she did outline two consequences of what would happen if the market took over these household functions that seem to have a great deal of

relevance today. The first is that “even if these necessary changes in the nature of household production were achieved under capitalism it would have the unpleasant consequence of including all human relations in the cash nexus”. Secondly, “[a]t best the change to capitalization of housework would only give women the same limited freedom given most men in capitalist society” (ibid.). Both of these possibilities seem to have come true as more and more aspects of family life and the intimate sphere are being outsourced via the market thereby entrenching both men and women more and more into the market’s operations. And, to the extent that some women have been liberated from the home so that they can pursue careers outside of it, this liberation has occurred primarily through privatization, not socialization. So while many saw in the socialization of domestic affairs a hope for the liberation of women as a class, this hope has come to fade as intimate affairs, if anything, have been given over to the market and not the state for their performance.

*Pushing Work into the Intimate Sphere: Glazer and Ritzer*

As noted above, encroachment theorists have explored how capitalist forces have come to penetrate into more and more areas of intimate life. In other words, we could say that these theories explore how elements of the private sphere impose themselves on the intimate sphere. Another set of works sees a different relationship existing between these two spheres of life. For both Glazer (1993) and Ritzer (2004), a central issue in the relationship between the private and intimate spheres is that businesses, in an attempt to increase profits, have divested themselves of tasks they had once paid employees to

perform and have transferred these tasks to individuals and families who must now perform them without recompense. In other words, *formerly paid work from the private sphere is thrown into the intimate sphere where it is now to be performed for free.*

Glazer talks about this as a “work transfer” and focuses particularly on how this situation differentially affects women, as it is women who have historically performed the bulk of the tasks associated with the family and family life. Here two examples of this process come from the grocery and healthcare industry, though, here I will focus on the former. As we have seen, as grocery stores went from being full- to self-service, the work of locating, selecting, and transporting groceries was transferred from the store to the consumer who must now perform this work on her own and with no compensation. In other words, it is now the customer’s job to drive herself to the store, locate the items she wishes to buy, select the items with the best value, and transport these goods back to her home. Viewing this from a labor process perspective (Marx 1977 [1867]; Braverman 1974), Glazer sees this as not only as adding a third layer of oppression upon women (i.e. another layer of unpaid or undervalued work that they must perform) but also as a mechanism that deskills the occupations that are transformed into a self-service model: since it is now the responsibility of the customer to select and acquire her goods, grocers, i.e. those with specialized knowledge of the goods being sold, are transformed into mere cashiers, i.e. those who simply take the money in exchange for the goods being bought. Moreover, once these occupations are deskilled (Braverman 1974; Wardell et al. 1999; Ritzer 2006: 172-174), they become jobs that are disproportionately given to women and/or minorities who perform them for commensurately lower wages.

For Glazer, this is an interesting development as it stands in contrast to theories of capitalism which sees the market as a system of ever-expanding commodification. In contrast, with the work transfer

[l]abor is decommodified, in part, when employees cease buying the labor power of service workers or buy less of it and from fewer workers. But the need for the service labor does not disappear, and so the work remains. Employers force a new division of labor through the work transfer, redistributing tasks between paid service workers and customer-clients (and their caregivers). The new labor process is at odds with the view that the trend in capitalism is always to commodify labor power, including services, and never to decommodify (Glazer 1993: 6).

Ritzer sees the same general phenomena of a work transfer occurring. However, Ritzer's analysis comes more from a Weberian perspective and is connected to his more general theory of McDonaldization. In short, McDonaldization is the theory that the principles of rationality upon which the McDonalds fast-food franchise empire is founded – efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control, particularly through the substitution of nonhuman for human technology – “*are coming to dominate more and more sectors of American society as well as of the rest of the world*” (Ritzer 2004: 1 – emphasis in original). In this, Ritzer is not arguing that the principles of rationality are something that is new to McDonalds, rather, that they best epitomized in today's society by the practices and processes of this restaurant empire, just as they were best represented by the bureaucracy in Weber's time (Weber 1946: 196-244).

Accordingly, one mechanism for “increasing efficiency in a McDonaldized world [at least from a business' point of view] is to put customers to work” (ibid. 57). Thus,

fast-food restaurants require their customers to seat themselves, take their own food to their tables, and to bus their own refuse if they eat inside the restaurant or, if they use the drive-thru window, to take their debris with them. Similarly, “[t]he advent of the automated teller machine (ATM) in the banking industry allows everyone to work, for at least a few moments, as an unpaid bank teller” (ibid. 60). There are just a few of the examples of putting customers to work that Ritzer notes.<sup>50</sup>

But Ritzer (2006) has also connected this issue of businesses using unpaid work by customers to the labor process tradition, the same tradition from which Glazer works. As he says, “[i]n these and many other settings, McDonaldization has brought the customer *into* the labor process: The customer *is* the laborer!” (op cit. 174 – emphasis in original). Ritzer goes on to say that “[t]his is the most revolutionary development, at least as far as the labor process is concerned, associated with McDonaldization.... The analysis of the labor process must be extended to what customers do in McDonaldized systems. The distinction between the customer and employee is eroding...and one can envision more and more work settings in which customers are asked to do an increasing amount of ‘work’” (ibid.). In contrast to Glazer, however, Ritzer talks about this process as affecting customers in general, and not specifically in terms of gendered inequalities apparent in this process. Nevertheless, both thinkers outline the same basic process: work that was once paid for in the private sphere is being transferred to the intimate sphere where it is performed for ‘free’.

Undoubtedly, the process of businesses giving work to customers to perform for free is something that is still occurring (e.g. the increasing use of self-checkouts in grocery stores [*The Economist Technology Quarterly* 2004]). Nevertheless, what both of

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<sup>50</sup> See Ritzer (2000: 57-61) for more examples of customers being put to work.

these accounts miss is the fact that increasingly tasks from the intimate sphere are being given over to the private sphere to perform. In other words, it is not only that more and more work that was once performed in the private sphere is being thrown into the intimate sphere, but also that many of the tasks of the intimate sphere are being given over to the private sphere to perform. The latter is fundamentally what the outsourcing of intimate affairs is all about.

Moreover, there are cases where tasks that were once performed in the private sphere and were subsequently transferred over to the intimate sphere in a process of “decommodification” are now being transferred back to the private sphere for their performance. That is, these once decommodified tasks are now being returned to the market and are being *recommodified* in the process in that these are now services that customers must pay extra for (i.e. the cost of these services is not included in the cost of the goods) if customers want them. As was seen above, a case in point of this process is the home delivery of groceries: once a service stores provided for no extra charge, and then one that consumers must perform on their own for free, the delivery of groceries is now a service that is available again, though, this time at a charge. In this regard, formerly decommodified labor is recommodified with the cost of this recommodification being shifted to the consumer and his/her decision to purchase this service.

This is a development that both Glazer and Ritzer have overlooked, though, they are right to point that businesses will, at times at least, push work into the intimate sphere so its performance is no longer their responsibility. However, it is also true that new businesses have arisen to take over these tasks that other businesses have pushed into the intimate sphere. Thus, some of what businesses once transferred to consumers is now

something that consumers are outsourcing to other business and, in both cases, this is something that is economically profitable to the respective companies involved: for the businesses that divest themselves of work, labor costs are saved as the work is performed for free by the consumers, while new markets are created for those companies willing to perform the tasks that were shifted to the intimate sphere.

This begs the question of what is gained by the consumer in this process as, by outsourcing the tasks given to them from businesses, consumers must pay for these services. What, if anything, is gained in this process and why would consumers be willing to pay for such services? These are questions that will be addressed below. Suffice it to say that more and more consumers are willing to pay for these services and if they feel resentment over being forced to do decommodified tasks once performed in the private sphere, their resentment has not come in the form of an attack on the market, but rather its reinforcement through the recommodification of these tasks.

### *The Rationalization of Intimate Affairs*

Studies of rationality have been a staple of sociological thought since Weber's seminal work in this area. This topic has been important to the critical theorists and their study of instrumental rationality, Braverman (1974) and his critique of capitalism, Bauman (1989) and his study of the Holocaust, and, more recently, Ritzer (2004) and his study of McDonaldization. As will be seen in this section, rationality can be seen to be playing an important role in the outsourcing of intimate affairs. We have already seen how rationalized structures, in the form of McDonaldized systems (Ritzer 2004), affect

the intimate sphere by pushing formerly paid work into it, and also how some of the businesses and organizations that take on intimate affairs have attempted to formalize and rationalize their industries and operations. Here the focus is more on how aspects of the intimate sphere itself can be seen as being rationalized in the process of outsourcing.

Arguably outsourcing is a very rational way to have one's intimate affairs performed. Specifically, it is a very efficient means of performing these activities and, as Ritzer (2004) has noted, efficiency is one of the hallmarks of the type of rationality that Weber saw as coming to dominate the Western world. It is in this sense that it can be argued that outsourcing acts to rationalize the intimate sphere. This may not be considered a problematic situation until one considers that, as Ritzer (2004) has noted, rationality of this type can often produce irrational consequences. One such irrational consequence is one that Weber himself identified: i.e. that formally rational systems tends to *disenchant* the social world (Gerth and Mills 1946: 51). As will be seen, with the outsourcing of intimate affairs a number of irrational consequences of rationality, including the possibility of disenchantment, are evident.

However, as Ritzer (2005) has also shown, rationality can be used to "re-enchant" that which has been disenchanted, e.g. by using rational principles to make an environment appear magical or fantastic. Some of the businesses involved in the outsourcing of intimate affairs can be seen as engaging in such re-enchantment practices.

More generally, in viewing the outsourcing of intimate affairs through the prism of rationality, a more fundamental concern comes to light. At the level of social action, outsourcing poses the potential to replace affectual action, the type of nonrational action that Weber saw as characterizing the family, by a more calculating, means-end rationality



that can be seen in outsourcing. To see how this can take shape, however, it is first necessary to explore the relationship between outsourcing and rationality in more detail.

As was mentioned above, outsourcing can be seen as being a very rational means for performing one's intimate affairs in the sense that it is a very efficient way to have these affairs performed. As Ritzer (2004: 43) defines it, efficiency involves choosing the optimum means for a given end and if one's end is to have certain intimate affairs performed, outsourcing, especially for those individuals and families who have more money than time, is a very efficient means for having these tasks performed. A woman who outsourced the hanging of her Christmas lights explicitly recognized this in her decision to outsource: "It is much more time efficient for us to hire someone who knows what they're doing [than to do this task ourselves]" (cited in Alsever 2006). However, in a number of other cases this manifests itself in a means-ends calculation whether or not to outsource a particular task. The best expression of this was given above in the discussion of kiddie cabs where one parent noted that, "[w]hen you start to add up all the lost (work) time, the miles on your vehicle, the gas and all that other stuff [spent in driving a child to school] – not to mention the intangible hassle that you can't really put a price on – [i.e. hiring a kiddie cab service is] definitely worth it" (cited in Pollack 2005). In other words, hiring a kiddie cab service is efficient when one considers all of the costs involved between outsourcing this task and performing it on one's own. But often the 'worth' of outsourcing comes in the form of calculating what tasks one can outsource in order to better concentrate on one's personal wants and interests. As one mother who uses a variety of services to outsource some of her intimate affairs puts it, "[outsourcing] offers me more time to do the things I want and less time spent on things I don't like to do"

(cited in Winslow 2000). Says a father in a family that also outsource some of their intimate affairs: “It comes down to time versus money. We would rather work at the things we love or we enjoy and work into our budget [the money to outsource] the things we don’t like to do or don’t have time to do” (cited in Moreno 2005). Also, a client of the San Francisco-based The Personal Concierge (TPC) thanked the company in her testimonial for “making my business and my home life to run more *efficiently* and for allowing me time to focus my strengths and skills in other aspects of my life” ([www.thepersonalconcierge.com](http://www.thepersonalconcierge.com) – emphasis added). Moreover, in those cases where outsourcing is used as a means to allow one to concentrate on one’s friends and families, it can be seen as an efficient means for concentrating one’s efforts on the intimate sphere.

Nevertheless, this ability to concentrate on one’s personal wants and interests is one of the benefits that these companies advertise that their services can provide. For example, Potomac Concierge encourages its customers to “[l]et us take care of your growing ‘to do list’, so *you can focus on family, work, friends and what you enjoy*” ([www.potomacconcierge.com](http://www.potomacconcierge.com) – emphasis added). This is echoed by another concierge company: “Fini Concierge is here to help you achieve balance between what you want to do and what you have to do, freeing you to live the life that you want to be living but never seem to have the time to. Trust us to handle the aspects of your life that you don’t enjoy or never have time for, *so you can focus on what is important – family, work, friends and enjoying your leisure time...* You’ll finally have time to do all those things you keep promising yourself you will, like getting to the gym or taking that painting class” (<http://www.finiconcierge.com/> - emphasis added).

And so while outsourcing may be a very rational way to have one's intimate affairs performed, and may allow one to live a more efficient life, with these rationalized practices we can see how some of the dangers that relate to rationality in general may be coming to affect intimate life in particular. Specifically, there is the possibility of disenchantment coming in the wake of intimate life being ordered in this manner. This possibility is most evident in cases where intimate affairs involving symbolic or emotional exchanges (e.g. the exchanging of gifts, the giving of toasts, or the writing of cards) are given over to others to perform. While outsourcing is a very rational and efficient means for providing these exchanges, the logic involved here runs counter to the type of social action that Weber sees as being dominant in the family: affectual action. As Weber (1964 [1947]: 115) conceives of it, this type of action is defined "in terms of affectual orientation, especially emotional, determined by the specific affects and states of feeling of the actor". Moreover, it is a form of action that "stands on the borderline of what can be considered 'meaningfully' oriented, and often it...goes over the line" (ibid. 116) in the sense that these actions are rooted in sentiment and not reason and are thus nonrational in nature (e.g. passion may overcome one's 'reason' and cause them to act in an irrational manner)(Kalberg 1980: 1161). Weber saw this type of social action as being "most conveniently illustrated by the family" (Weber 1964 [1947]: 137).

With many of the activities associated with the outsourcing of intimate affairs, and particularly those involving the exchange of emotional or symbolic goods, the affectual basis of action in the family that Weber identifies is, if not replaced, then at least challenged, by a means-ends form of rationality. Take, for example, the case of gift giving. Arguably, gift giving is an activity that is motivated by sentiment and this can be

seen in the popular notion that it is the idea, and not the actual gift, that ‘counts’ in gift exchanges. In other words, what makes a gift meaningful is not actually what is received but rather the thought and care that went into making and/or obtaining it. Thus, the ‘enchanted’ nature of a gift is rooted in what the giver put into it, not in the actual gift itself.

This logic would appear to be challenged when the selection of gifts is given over to someone else. We have seen how personal shoppers and personal concierges can be hired to outsource gift giving doing all of the work required in obtaining the gift and sometimes even selecting the gift itself. This would seemingly undermine the affectual basis of the gift as the nonrational act of gift giving is displaced by a rational and efficient means of providing for it. In other words, this is a disenchanting form of symbolic exchange in the sense that the magical/sentimental qualities of gift giving are replaced by rationalized systems and structures used for obtaining it.

Many of the businesses that engage in this kind of work know that their services have this disenchanting nature to them, and consequently they try to hide their involvement in this process or show how it will remain invisible to the receiver (e.g. companies that handwrite thank you cards note that as long as someone does not know your handwriting, they will never know that the writing of the card was outsourced). However, in some cases it is not just that these services try and preserve at least the appearance of the affectual nature of these activities by not exposing their involvement in the process, they sometimes try and imitate it. That is, these services try and feign nonrational action by “randomly” offering to send out gifts or flowers to loved ones (see, for example, the discussion of Save My Ass.com’s services in Chapter 2). Though such

gifts might appear to be motivated by nonrational forms of action to the recipient, they are actually the product of, from the company's perspective at least, a very rationalization system for the delivery of these gifts. We can see these as being examples of businesses attempting to use rationality to enchant social action by giving it the appearance of nonrational motivations (Ritzer 2005). But these attempts at enchantment, or even reenchantment, through the employment of rational systems in the outsourcing of intimate affairs carries with it the same potential for disenchantment.

But Ritzer (2005) has also argued that, despite their potential to act as agents of disenchantment, highly rationalized systems may act as enchanting agents as well. That is, part of the allure of these systems may be in the fact that they can have enchanting qualities. As Ritzer (op cit. 89) puts it, while "[t]here is no question that ...rationalized systems lead in various ways to disenchantment, they paradoxically and simultaneously [can also] serve to create their own kinds of enchantment" (Ritzer 2005: 89). For example, "[p]eople often marvel at the *efficiency* of rationalized systems; their ability to manage things so effectively can seem quite magical" (ibid. 90 – emphasis in original). Most, if not all, of the services that take on intimate affairs are, from the client's perspective at least, very efficient systems and are able to both deliver and manage these affairs very effectively which can give them a magical quality. For example, from a division of labor perspective, having a number of one's affairs performed while one is at work is very efficient and the fact that one can just hand these off and they are performed can seem quite magical; in many cases it just takes a phone call and a short time later these affairs are handled. Thus, these tasks appear to be performed as if by magic; they simply happen.

The outsourcing of intimate affairs possesses the potential to displace the affectual logic of the family with means-ends calculations and rationalized systems. And while in some cases outsourcing can be seen as a tool used to preserve temporal or metabolic reserves for affectual action and the intimate sphere (e.g. one outsources food preparation so that a family actually has time to eat together), this is done by giving these activities over to systems whose logic can act to undermine that of the family's. Thus, in a certain sense, these are cases of trying to preserve the family with some of the very forces that work against it.

Viewing outsourcing through the prism of rationality yields a number of insights into this process. For example, it gives a good understanding of how and why the desire for efficiency can lead to the outsourcing of intimate affairs. However, this perspective also highlights a number of dangers that accompany rationalization – i.e. a possible displacement of affectual action by rational systems and accompanying process of disenchantment.

But this perspective has a number of deficiencies in explaining the outsourcing of intimate affairs as well. The first issue is the historical one: how and why is it that the outsourcing of intimate affairs is rational now as opposed to in the past or in the future? In other words, this perspective can highlight the calculus involved in this kind of outsourcing but says very little of how the factors involved in this calculation have come to be. Secondly, this perspective does not speak to how individuals and families may come to if not desire, then at least appreciate, the benefits that outsourcing as a rational means to organize one's life can provide. That is, it does not speak to how or why goals such as efficiency in life come to be valued. A related point is that, though showing how

affectual action can be challenged by rational systems, this perspective does not speak to why this form of action is being displaced by these rational systems unless, of course, rationality is ‘encroaching’ upon the intimate sphere in a manner similar to capitalist forces. Though there may be some truth to this proposition, there are other factors – particularly individualism - that better illustrate how and why this kind of logic can creep into intimate environments. And so while most of the discussion of these other factors will have to wait until the next chapter to be discussed, an aspect of this can be seen in the argument that within the recent past the Western world in general, and America in particular, has undergone a change of values.

*Intimate Outsourcing and a Change in Values: Inglehart and Lesthaeghe*

In this section I explore two theories that posit the same basic proposition: that within the recent past Western nations have seen a change in their cultural values take place. The first theory comes from Inglehart (1977, 1987, 2000, 2004) and his argument that a general cultural shift in values has taken place as materialist (modern) values are coming to be replaced by their post-materialist (postmodern) counterpart. The former are values that give “top priority to economic and physical security”, while the latter are those that give “top priority” to self-expression, belonging, and quality of life issues (Inglehart 2000: 222). Inglehart rests this claim of a cultural shift on two hypotheses: first the scarcity hypothesis which claims that a person’s values reflects his/her socioeconomic environment; the second the socialization hypothesis which claims that linkage between values and the socioeconomic environment is made in one’s formative,

pre-adult years (ibid. 220). Taken together, this means that it is the socioeconomic environment of one's childhood years that shapes one's general value orientations throughout one's life. Given this, the economic affluence of Western nations in the post-World War II period has yielded an "historically unprecedented situation" where most people in these societies do not have to live under conditions of hunger and economic insecurity as was common in the past (ibid. 221). The result of this has been a new value orientation that takes economic security and stability, the focus of materialist values, for granted and instead focuses on nonmaterial goals such as living a good life.

This transition can also be seen as a shift from modernist to postmodernist value orientations in Western societies. Modernist values were shaped around economic insecurities and thus tended to be materialistic in nature. That is, they were formed around issues of economic growth and accumulation. Inglehart argues that one specific manifestation of this value orientation was the Protestant ethic which, as Weber has so famously shown, "opened the way for capitalism and industrialization" (Inglehart 2000: 225). However, this ethic and its offshoots were so effective in delivering high levels of economic security for such significant numbers of the population that it provided the very conditions that were to engender postmaterialist/postmodern value orientations - i.e. those conditions which allow the populations of Western societies to take favorable economic conditions for granted and instead focus on more nonmaterial factors. This is not to say that people are no longer interested in money or other material goods (certainly they are), nor that people are no longer working hard, as we have seen, many are. Rather, it is to say that the relative ranking of materialist and postmaterialist values has changed with the latter taking precedence over the former in the generations that have grown up in the



post-World War II era. And though Inglehart's theory has, to my knowledge, never been connected to the issue of intimate outsourcing, there is reason to believe that these value orientations are playing a role in supporting and encouraging this type of outsourcing. This can be seen in the changing relationship between time and money.

A materialistic outlook on life, for example that embodied by the Protestant ethic, tends to view time as money. That is, it tends to view time that is not engaged in productive activities as money that is wasted: "Remember, that *time* is money. He that can earn ten shillings a day by his labour, and goes abroad, or sits idle, one half of that day, though he spends but sixpence during his diversion or idleness, ought not to reckon *that* the only expense; he has really spent, or rather thrown away, five shillings besides" (Franklin cited in Weber 1992 [1930]: 48) – emphasis in original). In this regard, *time stands as a medium of money* and self-interested action oriented around this value system would encourage one to use one's time in such a manner as to fully capitalize on it.

However, the reverse is essentially the case when one outsources one's intimate affairs; what one is essentially doing is trading money for the time and the concomitant energy that would normally be involved in performing these tasks. Here, then, *money acts as the medium of time* as, by giving up the former, one gains the latter. This link between money and time is made by a number of those engaged in the outsourcing of intimate affairs: says Chris Watson, a busy professional who outsources many aspects of her personal life, "I'd rather have free time than more money...and I've found that I can hire someone to do almost anything I don't want to do myself" (cited in Sandholtz et al. 2004). Similarly, as Ted Zoller, executive director of the Center for Entrepreneurial Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, notes of business professionals

who outsource: “They have the money. They don't have the time. They are willing to trade the money for time” (Ranii 2005). Indeed, “[w]ith both parents in the workforce and women making more money than in the past, families can afford to think about outsourcing. *It's a simple equation of trading money for time*” (Krischer Goodman 2003).

Of course, if money was traded for time so that one could use one's time more efficiently or effectively in translating it into money, then this type of action would still be operating on the basis of a materialist value orientation. However, as was seen above, while this sometimes happens, often tasks are outsourced so that one can concentrate on issues other than the translation of time into money (e.g. spending time with one's family or on one's interests). And, in this regard, postmaterialism, while resting on an economic base built by materialist values, reverses the ethos of the Protestant ethic and its orientations toward time and money (Inglehart 2000: 225). It also allows for new and different forms of action, one example being outsourcing, than would not be the case with a more materialist orientation.

A similar account of value changes in the West can be found in the work of Lesthaeghe (Lesthaeghe and vande Kaa 1986; Lesthaeghe and Neidert 2006) and his theory of the second demographic transition (SDT). In essence, Lesthaeghe posits that recent demographic changes such as later marriage, greater cohabitation, lower overall birthrates, etc., “and a plethora of different living arrangements other than classic marriage [Lesthaeghe and Neidert 2006: 2]) cannot be accounted for either by more traditional demographic models or by economic factors alone. Rather, they are the result of a “cultural shift” that has taken place in terms of values, a change that Lesthaeghe and Neidert (ibid. 1) note is similar to Inglehart's conception of post-materiality. Specially,

these are values characterized by secularization, the new political left, egalitarianism, tolerance for unconventional or relativist ethics, a retreat from classic forms of social capital and community involvement (e.g. religious affiliations) in favor of self-selected friendships, individual autonomy with respect to ethics, and an accentuation of expressive values that emphasize individuality and self-actualization (Lesthaeghe and Surkyn 1988). In general, what these values allow for is a greater level of individual autonomy when it comes to demographic issues such as marriage and childbearing which account for the demographic changes that Western nations in general, and the U.S. in particular, have seen take place in the recent past but cannot be accounted for by either classical demographic models and/or economic factors.

These values can also be seen to facilitate the outsourcing of intimate affairs by making such actions as outsourcing a demographic choice as well. In other words, outsourcing intimate affairs, in part at least, can be seen as an expression of the greater autonomy individuals and families have in regard to demographic issues. On the one hand, such values allow for the formation of family types that are most likely to outsource – e.g. dual income couples and single-parent families. On the other hand, an emphasis on individuality and issues of self-actualization may encourage the giving over of those tasks that stand in the way spending one's time how one wishes.

As will be seen in greater detail in the next chapter, these are important pieces when trying to understand the outsourcing of intimate affairs. And while Inglehart's and Lesthaeghe's work is important for documenting and measuring these changes in values, I want to argue that such value orientations are a manifestation of the more general phenomenon of reflexive modernization and the concomitant wave of individualization

that has accompanied it. For now, it is important to note that in many ways outsourcing can be seen as being encouraged by these shifts in the value structures of society.

Becker, Rational Choice, and Household Production

“One of the most significant recent developments in economic theory has been its application to behavior outside the monetary market framework... I believe that this extension has not only increased the theory’s relevance, but also strengthened its structure because of the need to adapt the theory to novel situation” (Becker 1974: 317). Since this statement was made over 30 years ago by the future Nobel Laureate economist Gary Becker, he has sought to apply the principles of economic/rational choice theory to a number of “novel situations”. One area in particular that Becker has devoted a great deal of attention to has been the family and the issues of family life. In this section I will explore Becker’s work on the family and particularly focus on the elements of his work that argue that it is ‘rational’ for families not to outsource their intimate affairs.

Becker’s theory of the family stems from a rational choice perspective where “[e]ach family is *assumed to maximize utility* by producing and consuming different commodities, subject to its production functions, the limited time of each member, their wage-generating functions, and other variables” (ibid. 317-318 – emphasis added). From this assumption, a number of consequences follow. For one, Becker argues that “even if a husband and wife are intrinsically identical, they gain from a division of labor between market and household activities, with one of them specializing more in market activities and the other specializing more in household activities” (Becker 1993: 3). That is, just as

efficiency is gained in the workplace when specialization and a division of labor take place, so too is this the case within the home. Thus, a two-parent household would function most efficiently, and the most utility for a family would be derived, when specialization and a division of labor take place between the partners with one member concentrating his/her efforts on the world of work, the other on matters of the home.

But who should specialize in taking care of the home, and who should concentrate their efforts on the market? For Becker (ibid. 3-4), the answer is simple: given the “small differences between men and women” which “advantages...women in the birth and rearing of children” and thereby produces “a heavy biological commitment to the production and feeding of children” on the part of women, if one follows the assumptions of rational choice and utility maximization the so-called “traditional” division of labor between home and work along the lines of gender is the most rational course of action. In other words, since women have a ‘comparative advantage’ in childbirth and childcare, it only makes “rational” sense for women to specialize in affairs in the home and for men to seek work outside of it.

However, as Becker notes, “women are becoming less specialized in household activities, and men are spending more time at household activities” (ibid. 40). In other words, it appears that households (and work for that matter) are becoming more *inefficient* as each sex specializes less in its specific tasks thereby undercutting its comparative advantage. But this would be true even if the division of labor was not divided along gender lines as even if a wife worked and a husband stayed home, efficiency would be lost if each party took on tasks of the other.

Becker links this change in the family, along with others such as declines in fertility, increased divorce rate, the rate of single-mother headed homes, to “the growth in the earning power of women as the American economy developed” (ibid. 350). This implies that the relative value of raising children has fallen vis-à-vis the economic opportunities that women now find in the market: i.e. it must be, given the presumptions of the theory, that more utility can be had by women from entering the market as opposed to not doing so. However, Becker notes that when married mothers do work, they tend to earn less than married men even if they work the same amount of time as a result of the fact that, given a relatively fixed amount of energy per day for an individual, working mothers who still are traditionally saddled with more household responsibilities have less total energy that they are able to devote to work in the marketplace in comparison to married men who are free of these activities. In other words, they do not work as efficiently as married men since their energies must be divided between work and home (see ibid. 64-79 for a discussion of these points). This reduces not only their wages, but also the likelihood of their investment in human capital and market-related skills which, in turn, discourages women from spending as much time in the market as men do. This situation also encourages women to take less energy-intensive jobs than those who do not have household responsibilities to perform. The result of this is that “household responsibilities lower the earnings and affect the jobs of married women by reducing their time in the labor force and discouraging their investment in market human capital” (ibid. 77).

Given the tenets of Becker’s theory, this seems like a logical conclusion. However, this logic rests on an assumption that may no longer be tenable, or is at least

less the case today than it was in the past: i.e. *that household activities, including childcare, are things that must remain in the home*. This can be seen in Becker's central proposition regarding the gains that can be made from the specialization of household affairs: "If  $n$  basically identical persons consume in equilibrium  $m \ll n$  commodities produced under constant or increasing returns to scale with specific human capital, each person will completely specialize in producing only one commodity and accumulate only the human capital specific to that commodity. The other  $m - 1$  commodities will be acquired by trades with other specialized producers. If  $n > 1$  is smaller or not much larger than  $m$ , or with decreasing returns to scale, specialization may be incomplete, but *some* commodities *must* be produced by only one person" (ibid. 61 – emphasis in original). Becker goes on to say that "[t]his analysis is applicable to the division of labor and specialization within households and families because the production of children, many aspects of child care and investments in children, protection against certain risks, altruism, and other 'commodities' are more efficiently produced *within households* than by *trades among households*" (ibid. emphasis added). But why must these specific commodities (childcare etc.) only remain within or between households? Why can these not be transferred to the market? If anything, firms that specialize in household activities and employ multiple workers between whom the labor of these tasks can be divided might be more efficient than just one parent who performs a variety of household and childcare activities.

Becker notes that "most societies forbid the purchase and sale of children" (ibid. 44) and that "[p]ractically all married couples have and rear their own children instead of hiring persons in separate households to rear them..." (ibid. 43). However, in a footnote

(# 8 on p. 44 in *ibid.*), he notes: “Of course, many upper-class families have reared their children with the help of nurses and tutors, and some have sent their infants to the homes of wet nurses...”. So while it is true that most societies have forbid treating children as a saleable good, it is also true that both historically, and it seems increasingly so today, that the care of raising of children is something that can, and has been, commoditized. That is, families have the possibility of giving over the rearing of children to the market for at least some period of time. And though Becker notes the possibility of this, he does not factor such situations into his theory of household production and, unnecessarily it seems, limits the “efficient” solutions available to actors.

In a way parallel to Beck’s (2000b) discussion of globalization, we can say that Becker holds a “container theory” of the family: i.e. he assumes, for the most part at least, that reproduction, socialization, and most other household activities must take place within the boundary of the family (and the particular form of the nuclear family at that). However, if one removes this assumption, then the outsourcing of these affairs seems almost immanent in his theory. That is, if domestic work, including the raising of children, is confined within the home, Becker’s theory seems to hold some weight; it probably is more efficient for each person to specialize in a sphere of activities and to invest most of their energy there, this being the case even if the division is not necessarily based on gender.

However, if household production can be given over to the market to perform, a whole new range of possibilities opens that are perhaps even more “efficient” than Becker’s scenario. In part this is because household production, even when performed by one person who specializes in these activities, involves a variety of different tasks (e.g.



cooking, cleaning, organizing, feeding, and educating to name but a few common domestic activities). If these activities are confined to the home and between two persons, the specialization of these activities by one person is probably the most efficient division of labor that can be achieved. However, if opened to the market, room is made for professionals who are specialists in specific domestic activities who can perhaps perform these activities more efficiently than someone who performs a more general set of tasks. This is the general principle that stands behind so much of economic theory: i.e. that efficiency is gained through specialization. In this sense, specialized services in domestic activities may be a more efficient division of labor than simply confining the performance of domestic activities within the home. Indeed, Becker notes that efficiency has transferred activities from the domestic sphere to the market in the past:

If modern society evolved from traditional society..., the individualism and familialism of modern society would have evolved from the extended families and kinship groups of traditional society. Many deplore individualism and lament the passing of the traditional family, but my analysis implies that individualism replaced familialism because many family functions in traditional societies *are more effectively handled by markets and other organizations of modern societies*. For example, family insurance and family provision and certification of training are less efficient than market insurance and market training in the dynamic environments of modern societies. (ibid. 349 – emphasis added)

If this is true for some familial activities, why not others? Would not many of these be more “effectively” and more efficiently handled by market forces in today’s very dynamic society? Becker ignores this implication of his theory.

Becker also notes that a married woman's wages tend to be lower than that of a married man's because, unlike the latter, she must split her energies between the home and the market. But if a woman was to transfer all of these homemaking functions to others thereby allowing her to specialize in the area of work in a manner similar to her married male counterpart, following the tenets of this theory, her wages should increase to levels commensurate with that of a married man. And if these wages are greater than the costs associated with outsourcing and any potential decreases in what her children will contribute to her in her old age, would this not be a more economically efficient strategy for this woman to pursue? It seems that from many angles within this theory that if we allow for domestic production functions to be transferred to the market, then efficiency in Becker's sense is gained by outsourcing.

Becker's theory also relies on the assumption that marriages will last the entire duration of a couple's working life so that one partner does not at some point in his/her life lose the person who is their complement such as when a young mother becomes a widow and must now work. Such a loss could come either in the form of the death of one's spouse or, more likely these days, from a divorce. And since the latter is a not an uncommon situation, there is an inherent disincentive to specialize in housework since, upon the ending of a marriage union, this is a skill that is not very marketable and has little economic value attached to it (unless, of course, this person goes into an industry where he/she can take on the household functions of others). In other words, there is an inherent economic risk in specializing in housework that Becker's theory ignores (de Ruijter et al. 2005: 307). As de Ruijter et al. (ibid) put it: "Extreme specialization [between the home and the market] is vulnerable to the loss of a partner and cannot

accommodate the shifting demands of the family life course”. Moreover, “[u]nlike investment in a career, investment in domestic skills is tied to a specific relationship and has little value if that union ends... Unless protected from this risk, *neither* partner has an incentive to be the ‘housewife’. Outsourcing makes specialization in housework [within the family] unnecessary, lets both partners focus on careers and equalizes martial power” (ibid. – emphasis in original). In situations where there is a high probability that a marriage will not last a lifetime, it is economically rational for both parties to concentrate on careers that will, if not maximize, then at least generate a livable income in the case that the marriage ends. At the same time, this situation also diminishes any incentives that there are to specialize in household activities.

Becker’s theory also suffers from some of the paradoxes inherent in rational choice theory more generally. For example, if this theory is taken to its logical conclusion then “choice” on the part of the actor is actually eliminated and the theory slips into environmental determinism: given the parameters of a situation, there is seemingly only one rational course of action for an actor to pursue; if one knows the former, then one should know the latter as well. As such, what is of interest to the researcher then is not the actor’s choice *per se* as this is a given when one knows the situations that actors are operating in. Rather, what is of interest is the environment in which the actor finds him/herself as it is this that will condition his/her choice. And so while it is the environmental context that actually determines what actors should or should not do, this context is not what rational choice theory seeks to explain.

This paradox can be seen in the difference between Becker’s work and that of de Ruijter (de Ruijter 2001, de Ruijter 2004; de Ruijter et al. 2003; de Ruijter et al. 2005;

van der Lippe et al. 2004) who similarly works from a rational choice perspective. For the former, the outsourcing of intimate affairs is not rational; rather, it is better to have specialization and a division of labor between household production and work in the market. For the latter, however, intimate outsourcing is accounted through a rational choice perspective. That is, it is now “rational” to outsource. What are the factors that have made this transition of outsourcing from not being rational to being so? Given the tenets of rational choice theory, it cannot be the motivation of the actor since this is always the pursuit of utility maximization. Rather, it must be something in the environment in which these actors operate that must have changed (de Ruijter [2001] links this to the fact that more women are working]). However, what this change is and how this, in turn, makes outsourcing a rational decision is something that escapes the theoretical lens of this theory. As such, what this theory seeks to explain is exactly what it does not look at.

Lastly, as a theoretical proposition, the conception of social actors as utility maximizers is as elegant as it is dubious: it is elegant in the sense that a seemingly simple proposition can explain so much of the social world and it is dubious for the same reason. In particular, it is dubious in the sense that a theory of rational choice easily slips into a theory of intentionality and self-interest which rests on the notion that actors pursue certain things that are beneficial to themselves. While the course of action that *maximizes* utility is often not clear in the social world, conscious strategies that pursue self-interest are quite common, and indeed might be more commonly sought today as communal or familial obligations carry less social weight in today’s social world. However, the latter, in theoretical terms at least, is not equivalent to the former in the

sense that self-interest is not the same thing as utility maximization: while one can pursue self-interested goals, this does not necessarily mean that one is seeking to maximize the utility of the situation.

These issues notwithstanding, Becker's theory is insightful as a theoretical model from which one can compare how a family should act if they were utility maximizers in comparison to how they do act in the social world. However, this theory's container conception of the family and its inability to study the ever-changing context in which the family operates leaves it unable to account for many of the trends affecting the family, including those that have made the outsourcing of intimate affairs as seemingly rational choice for so many families.

*Intimate Outsourcing and the Division of Labor: Durkheim and Parsons*

Both Emile Durkheim and Talcott Parsons have offered a theory of the the division of labor that looks at this process in functional terms, and both of these theories have implications when considering the outsourcing of intimate affairs, a topic very applicable to their work but one that these authors did not address. To see these implications, however, it is first important to outline each of these theories on the relationship between the division of labor and social integration. After this, the question of if and/or how these theories can account for the outsourcing of intimate affairs can be raised.

## Durkheim: The Division of Labor and Social Integration

Durkheim's *The Division of Labor in Society* (1997 [1893]) is undoubtedly a seminal work in the sociological canon and like the other classics in this field, it has stood the test of time. In part, this is because it is still able to generate insights into the social world and its operations. This is no less true than in the case of the outsourcing of intimate affairs, a subject which, though Durkheim did not treat in any measurable fashion but which suggests a number of insights into this topic. These implications come from the link between the division of labor, social integration, and the 'development' of society that Durkheim posited in this work.

In *The Division of Labor* Durkheim (1997 [1893]) argued that social development has taken place in two distinct stages that are differentiated from each other both in terms of what holds them together - i.e. their form of social solidarity - and in terms of their distribution of functions in society - i.e. their division of labor. Durkheim (op cit. 172) summarizes the difference between these social formations and their systems of integration as follows:

In the first case the individual is socialised because, lacking any individuality of his own, he is mixed up with his fellows in the same collective type. In the second case it is because, whilst his physiognomy and his activities are personal to him, *distinguishing him from others, he depends upon them to the very extent that he is distinguished from them, and consequently upon the society that is the result of their combining together* (emphasis added).

In other words, in the first case what holds the society together are the wide range of commonalities found between members of a group and the concomitantly relatively low levels of individuality evidenced within them. Durkheim calls “mechanical solidarity”, or a solidarity of similarities which is made possible, in part at least, because the division of labor is relatively low in societies ordered like this. For Durkheim (ibid.), “[s]ocial life is derived from” two sources, “the similarity of individual consciousnesses and the social division of labour” which are inversely related to one another. Thus, because the number and level of distinct social roles is limited in this type of society, the influence of the collective conscience upon all individuals is great making its members relatively indistinct from one another and this, in turn, allows social integration to proceed along collectivist lines of similarity. For Durkheim, this was the general situation of all pre-modern societies.

All of this begins to change as societies evolve and undergo an increase in their “dynamic density” (ibid. 200-5). That is, as societies become larger, as the physical and social distances between individuals and groups are reduced, and as they become defined by greater levels of social interaction, a change in the factors that hold society together undergo a change as well. In particular, this new level of interaction between members of a now larger group forces competition between those “segments” of society that provide the same function forcing the selection, elimination, and/or adaptation of these now competing segments. In Durkheim’s (ibid. 212-3) words, as the “partitions” between different segments of a society “disappear, it is inevitable that organs similar to one another come into contact, embark upon a struggle and try to substitute themselves for one another. However, in whatever way this substitution occurs, some advance along

the road to specialisation cannot fail to be the outcome”. Thus, for Durkheim, increased competition within a social environment will produce higher levels of specialization and increase the division of labor found within it in a manner similar to what economic theory would assume.

However, where Durkheim departs from, or rather, extends beyond economic theory, is in exploring the social consequences of this development. That is, while it is tempting to see in this specialization and increased division of labor social fragmentation and the dissolution of common social bonds, Durkheim saw in this development something more: while on the one hand this situation does break apart what was previously held together mechanically, on the other hand it also lays the groundwork for a new form of social integration, what he calls “organic solidarity”.

Unlike its mechanical counterpart where social bonds were established on the basis of the similarities found between members of a group, with organic solidarity social ties are forged on the basis of their differences. This is what Durkheim meant when he said in the above quotation that, under these conditions, a member of a group “depends upon them to the very extent that he[/she] is distinguished from them, and consequently upon the society that is the result of their combining together” (ibid. 172). In other words, because each person or groups of person have a specialized role and have a specialized function, they cannot be self-sufficient under these conditions (e.g. a blacksmith, while specializing in metalworking literally cannot eat the product of his/her labor, and is thus dependent upon someone to produce food, and other goods, for him/her). One finds this same situation in the organs of more ‘advanced’ animals: as tissues differentiate and functionally specialize, they become dependent upon the



specialized functions of other organs. For Durkheim, just as physical bodies have these interdependences, so too are these organic relations evident in social bodies. And, as greater levels of specialization occur and as the division of labor increase, so too do the levels of interdependence between the various parts of the social world. Thus, the division of labor is a socially integrative force because of the functional dependencies it produces between the parts of society.

This general situation can be seen in the history of the family and the functions it performs. As Durkheim (*ibid.* 78) notes:

The history of the family from its origins shows in fact a mere uninterrupted movement towards dissociation, in the course of which these various functions, at first undivided and overlapping, have gradually separated out and been constituted independently, being distributed among the various relatives according to sex, age and dependent relationships, so as to make each relative a specialized functionary in domestic society. Far from being only an ancillary and secondary phenomenon, this family division of labour, on the contrary, dominates the whole of the development of the family.

Here Durkheim confines his discussion of the dispersion of more specialized functions within the family unit itself. However, equally as evident, especially in the case of outsourcing, though not exclusively so (e.g. in cases where family functions such as education are transferred to the state), is a similar dispersion of functions from within the family to sources outside of it: “Instead of remaining an autonomous society within a larger one, [the family] is drawn increasingly into the system of organs of society. It becomes one of these organs itself, invested with special functions” (*ibid.* 158). What

exactly these functions are is a question that Durkheim (but not Parsons as will be seen) left largely answered.

This raises an important issue that has a bearing on the issue of outsourcing: what, if any, are the limits to the division of labor. Durkheim thought that if the evolution of the division of labor was allowed to proceed naturally (e.g. there was no forced division of labor [ibid. 310-22]), it could proceed without producing any disharmonizing effects, including the threat of over-specialization. This is because, if left on its own, natural systems of regulations would develop that would preclude any “abnormal” consequences of the division of labor:

For it to be able to develop without having so disastrous an influence on the human consciousness, there is no need to mitigate it by means of its opposite. It is necessary and sufficient for it to be itself, for nothing to come from outside to deform its nature. For normally the operation of each special function demands that the individual should not be too closely shut up in it, but should be kept in constant contact with neighboring functions, becoming aware of their needs and the changes that take place in them, etc. The division of labour supposes that the worker, far from remaining bent over his task, does not lose sight of those co-operating with him, but acts upon them and is acted upon by them. He is not therefore a machine who repeats movements in the sense of which he does not perceive, but he knows that they are tending in a certain direction, towards a goal that can conceive of more or less distinctly... For this he[*she*] has no need to take in very vast areas of the social horizon; it is enough for him to perceive enough of it to understand that his actions have a goal beyond themselves (ibid. 307-8).

This is perhaps an overly optimistic picture of the situation assuming that, on an individual level, the division of labor will produce this type of understanding.

However, Durkheim does posit that there are some natural limits to the division of labor in terms of the relationship between the form and the function of a social organ. On the one hand, Durkheim notes that as society evolves a widening gap develops between social forms and functions allowing greater freedom and flexibility in social operations. On the other hand, there are limits to how de-coupled (i.e. disembedded) a form and function can be: “[d]oubtlessly it does not follow [from this widening gap between these two elements that a] function can exist outside any organ, nor even that there can ever be an absence of any kind of relationship between the two elements. *But the relationship becomes less direct*” (ibid. 275 – emphasis added). This of course raises a question that was brought out above: what are the specific functions that social organs are supposed to perform? Again, and especially in the case of the family, what exactly the function of these organs should be is a question that is left largely unanswered by Durkheim. As such, what exactly the limiting factor(s) is in terms of the division of labor both within the family and between the family and other social organizations is not exactly clear in this theory. As such, the question of if and/or whether the outsourcing of intimate affairs has gone too far, i.e. has too greatly separated the function of the family from its form, is one that Durkheim would be hard pressed to answer within the context of this theory. And, in the absence of clearly defining these functions, it would seem that the outsourcing of intimate affairs is nothing more than a natural consequence of the division of labor.

Moreover, *functionally* this would seem to produce greater levels of social interdependence, though, there are questions of whether on a *social-psychological* level this would be true as well (this issue will be addressed in the discussion of post-social

relations). Nevertheless, even though the outsourcing of intimate affairs seems to be something immanent in Durkheim's theory, it also seems unlikely that Durkheim would have viewed this situation, or at least parts of it, favorably. But again, without clearly outlining what the functions of the family are, a division of labor in the form of outsourcing is not something that Durkheim's theory can preclude. Parsons seems to have detected this situation in Durkheim's work and responded in a very interesting way

#### Parsons and the Functions of the Family

Parsonian social theory, once the dominant paradigm of social thought in the immediate post-World War II era (Turner 1998: 28), has largely fallen out of favor in more recent times. This situation has led many to ask, just as Parsons did for Spencer before him, who reads Parsons today? Nevertheless, in his attempt to produce a theory of social action, Parsons has offered a (perhaps unprecedented) vision of how the various spheres and segments of the social world are related and interrelated to one another. And though it is beyond the scope of this work to outline the whole of his theory, I will focus here on the family and both its relations to other social institutions as well as the specific intra-familial relationships that Parsons saw as being so critical for the "normal" development of personality. As will be seen, though Parsons did not talk explicitly about outsourcing, he did talk about how many activities that the family once performed have been transferred to other institutions through a process of social differentiation. In part, Parsons can be seen as trying to define the functions of the family in order to preserve them from being transferred to other social institutions. However, it appears that Parsons

did not envision the extent to which the core functions of the family that he identified, principally the socialization of children – are today being outsourced. That such outsourcing is taking place has significant consequences for Parsons' conception of the family, its dynamics, and how it relates to society at large.

If for Durkheim (1997 [1893]: 78) the history of the family has been the “uninterrupted movement towards dissociation” of its various functions and their subsequent redistribution to various members of the family and other, outside social institutions (e.g. the market, the state, etc.), Parsons wanted to make sure the movement stopped at a certain point when it came to the family. In his *Family, Socialization, and Interaction Processes* (Parsons and Bales 1955), Parsons notes that one of the central concerns regarding the family at the time was “what has sometimes been called the ‘loss of function’ of the family”, or “the fact that so many needs, for example as for clothing, which formerly were met by family members working in the home, are now met by *outside agencies*. Thus clothing is now usually bought ready-made; there is much less food-processing in the household, there is a great deal of commercial recreation outside the home, etc” (op cit. 3 – emphasis added). This, along with other trends (e.g. increased divorce rates and lower birth rates) suggested to some at the time that Parsons was writing that the family was in a state of disorganization, and possibly dissolution. Parsons and his colleagues viewed the situation differently: for them, these trends reflected not so much the dissolution and disorganization of the family as the reorganization and reorientation of family life around a narrower set of ‘core’ functions more amenable to the contemporary social context. “This means that the family has become *a more specialized agency than before*, probably more specialized than it has

been in any previously known society... [T]he family is more specialized than before, but not in any general sense less important, because the society is dependent *more* exclusively on it for the performance of *certain* vital functions” (ibid. 9-10 – emphasis in original). In other words, though the number of functions that the family was performing at the time that Parsons was writing (which, incidentally, are many more than is the case today) is fewer than was the case in the past, the importance of these functions to the social whole has increased. Thus, while specialization “has involved a further step in the reduction of the importance in our society of kinship units other than the nuclear family. It has also resulted in the transfer of a variety of functions from the nuclear family to other structures of society, notably the occupationally organized sectors of it” (ibid. 9). But while “[t]his represents a decline of *certain* features which traditionally have been associated with families”, Parsons and his colleagues do not see this as representing the decline of the family itself (ibid. emphasis in original). Rather, they see “a *new* type of family structure in a new relation to a general social structure” emerging that, while having historically fewer functions to perform, the tasks left to it are more vital to the proper function of society as a whole (ibid. emphasis in original).

There are two such “basic and irreducible functions of the family” for Parsons: “first, the primary socialization of children so that they can truly become members of the society into which they have been born; second, the stabilization of the adult personalities of the population of the society” (ibid. 16-17). However, in order for socialization to occur along “normal” lines, a number of structural requirements must first be met. These were determined by viewing nuclear families as a specific example of the more general category of small groups from which Parsons and his colleagues drew analogies between

the dynamics in the latter and applied them to the former. In doing this, what they found is that in small groups leadership tends to differentiate itself between “instrumental” (i.e. task oriented) and “expressive” (i.e. emotional management) lines which are embodied by two different persons. Given the structural slant of their theoretical orientation, for Parsons and his colleagues the differentiation of leadership in these groups along these lines could essentially be seen universal phenomenon common to all small groups. As such, the question is not so much if this occurs in the nuclear family (as an example of a small group, it does) as it is how this differentiation takes place within this particular type of grouping and why it has historically taken place along gendered lines. For Parsons (ibid. 23), the answer rests on a biological foundation: since it is women who bear and nurse children in their infancy, a “strong presumptive primacy of the [emotional/expressive] relationship of mother to the small child” is established early on and in a manner that is not, under the current biological circumstances, open to men. Thus women are advantaged in taking on the expressive functions of the family vis-à-vis men what the result “that the man, who is exempted from these biological functions [i.e. bearing and nursing children], should specialize in the alternative instrumental direction” (ibid.).

Parsons is quick to note that the recent change in family structure (i.e. the specialization of the family function around the socialization of children) has not reduced this differentiation along gender lines; “in fact, in many respects it reinforces and clarifies” this change. This is not only because the lines between home and work become more solidified at this time as more men were pulled away from the home and into the instrumentally dominated world of work, but also because, by having husband-fathers

absent more from the home most of the emotional/expressive management of the family fell on the shoulders of the wife-mother. “Hence, it is suggested that, if anything, in certain respects the *differentiation* between the roles of the parents becomes more rather than less significant for the socialization process under modern American conditions” (ibid. 24 – emphasis in original).

But Parsons’ analysis implies more than this as well. That is, there is more to this differentiation along gender lines than simple historical/biological happenstance. Rather, it is that these differentiations become institutionalized in the form of a role that expects men and women to act in accordance with this differentiation so that the husband-father is expected to act more instrumentally, while the wife-mother expected to act more expressively in the family system. In other words, these differences become institutionalized in the form of role expectations and, for Parsons, it is under this structure of family life that the socialization of children does, and should, take place.

Parsons’ vision of family life and the socialization process rests on a number of assumptions and conditions that, even if they were relatively true of his era, are severely challenged in the contemporary context. For one, Parsons’ theory can only see socialization and the socialization process of the family as taking place under a nuclear family structure. Related to this, Parsons assumed that the socialization process, and implicitly the overall care and management of the household, was something that could only be confined to the home. Thus, while Parsons at one point indicates that the “agent of care” of a child need not necessarily be its mother (“it is the function [of this care] which is essential”, not the person *per se*) (63), he sees no alternative to the structure of the nuclear family in the socialization of children: “Thus even if the socialization



function could be cut loose from the biologically constituted family..., it could *not* be performed without placing the child in a small group structure of which was *generically* the same as that of the family, *no matter what* the values of the society” (ibid. 161 – emphasis in original). In other words, in Parsons’ account there seems to be no alternative to the socialization process taking place either within the nuclear family or a small group structured similarly to it.

The implication of this is that in order for “normal” socialization to occur, the child must be exposed to a leadership structure differentiated by one person taking the instrumental role, the other the expressive. Indeed, it is with issues over differentiation that Parsons is critical of homosexual relationships. As he says, in “a homosexual relationship...*one* of the partners must be radically denying his sex role, while the other does so less drastically by admitting erotic attraction to the same rather than the opposite sex. Put very generally, homosexuality is a mode of structuring human relationships which is radically in conflict with the place of the nuclear family in the social structure and in the socialization of the child” (ibid. 103-4 – emphasis in original). But in this analysis Parsons misses the extent to which today the socialization of children takes place under a plurality of family structures. Moreover, Parsons’ theory misses how today the care and socialization of children are, for some periods of time at least, increasingly being given over to others outside of the family to perform (e.g. with day care).

But perhaps the factor which Parsons’ theory most overlooks is an increasing lack of differentiation, in leadership terms, between the wife-mother and husband-father roles as more and more women with small children are entering the labor market. Indeed, for Parsons, “a distinctive feature” of the social structure of his time was extent to which the

roles and responsibilities of the family were centered around the occupational/instrumental role of the husband-father. Thus, while noting the increased labor force participation of women in general around the time of his writings, Parsons also notes that the “role of ‘housewife’ is still the overwhelmingly predominant one for the married woman with small children” (ibid. 15). In fact, Parson shows in one of his footnotes that in 1949 only 10 percent of women with children under the age of 5 participated in the labor force. As we saw above, the situation is quite different today.<sup>51</sup>

This signifies a more general issue in Parsons’ theory: while noting the significance and effect that differentiation has played in the ‘evolution’ of the social world, he sees this differentiation as halting when it comes not only to the gender-roles that Parsons’ sees as constituting the family system but also to the family itself. That is, Parsons does not ask why differentiation stops at the differences between gender-roles and not continue to operate on differences within gender-roles. Indeed, is not the logical conclusion of a process of differentiation individualization, a state beyond gender-specific roles? If so, what Parsons’ theory might have captured was social differentiation in process but not as fully completed.

Secondly, based on the above, Parsons assumed that certain functions (e.g. the socialization of children) are things that must be confined within the home. However, even as Parsons notes, the family has lost many of its functions in the past, why not this function too? That is, just as the family has divested itself largely of clothing and food production, why not the raising of children as well? The only answer Parsons can pose in this regard is that the family is “organically integrated with the socialization process”

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<sup>51</sup> In 2004, the percentage of women with small children under the age of 6 working is nearly 60 percent (*Statistical Abstract of the United States*, 2004)

(ibid. 16). But was the family not once “organically integrated” with the collection of food and the production of many household goods? And if these functions can be transferred out of the family, why not socialization as well? That is, as society evolves, why is it that this function must remain wholly within the familial sphere and not be transferred to other parties or transformed in some manner so that it takes place outside of the home? Again, in terms of differentiation, why must differentiation stop at the role of the family and not be transferred to even more specialized agencies?

In the end, while noting the “loss of function” that has taken place within the family in the past, Parsonian theory, unless it is to be read as a normative theory, can offer no justification for why other functions of the family such as socialization cannot be lost to it as well. I believe that part of this oversight on Parsons’ part stems from that the basic unit of society for Parsons was the family, and for Parsons it is from this unit that all else emerged. However, as we will see in the next chapter, there is reason to believe that the individual has replaced the family as the most basic unit of society and that this has allowed for developments that Parsons’ theory overlooks (this despite Parsons noting the growing importance of individualism as a cultural variable in modern society). In this regard, society may be even more differentiated than even Parsons envisioned.

Both Durkheim and Parsons offered theories of the division of labor that have implications for understanding the outsourcing of intimate affairs. And while the outsourcing of intimate affairs as the result of functional differentiation would seemingly be something immanent to their theories, it seems unlikely that either would have looked upon this development, or parts of it at least, without concern. In fact, both sought to

outline where and when the division of labor should stop: for Durkheim, this could be found in the idea that while the coupling between a form and a function could be loosened as the division of labor increased, it could not be severed completely; for Parsons it was in stating specifically the functions that the family was supposed to perform. It seems that today, however, the limiting influence of the factors offered by these thinkers have not had the power that they imagined and that the transfer of intimate affairs has come to pass.

*Coser: Modernization and the Obsolescence of an Occupational Role*

In an article published in 1973 entitled “Servants: The Obsolescence of an Occupational Role” Coser seeks to investigate how it is that under modern conditions the servant role has become, as the title of the article suggests, obsolete. Coser (op cit. 31) begins by noting how a century ago domestic servants were “among the most common occupational roles in all Western countries”, the U.S. included, but has seen a “precipitous decline” since. The question Coser asks is why has this role declined so much in such a short period of time. His answer is that the role of domestic service is essentially a pre-modern one. That is, it lacks many of the characteristics that define more modern forms of work. In Coser’s (ibid. 32) words:

[t]he anomalous position of the servant in the modern occupational structure becomes apparent if it is compared to two key characteristics that distinguish the modern worker from his forebears in the preindustrial world: his abode is typically separated from that of his employers, and his labor commitment to that employer is limited to a specified number of hours.

As both Coser (ibid.) and others have noted (e.g. Katzman 1978), both of these conditions tend to be lacking in terms of domestic service, and both allow the employing family to act as a “greedy organization” (Coser 1967) by seeking to extract, if not the “fulltime allegiance” (Coser 1973: 32) of the worker, then at least more than the time and devotion to the work than is common in other occupations.

“The servant’s role is premodern in still another respect: it is highly diffuse and non-specific, and it involves only tasks that are defined as menial and hence below the dignity of the master and his wife” (ibid.). In other words, “the tasks of most servants continue to be characterized by functional diffuseness” and this diffuseness gives employers room to dictate a servant’s actions and to tack on more work than would be the case if, like in other occupations, a specific job description were attached to this occupation. There are other aspects of this type of work that make it pre-modern as well: e.g. it is patterned more on a familial than an occupational role; as a role it is more ascribed than achieved; and there are no defined working hours to name but a few. All of these highlight the fact that this is a more asymmetrical form of employment than modern occupations and these asymmetries make this occupation less attractive than other forms of work.

So how and why has this role become obsolete? On the one hand, Coser (ibid. 36-7) notes that such unequal relationships can only survive if they are supported ideologically and that America’s ideology of equality tends to undermine this justification. When this happens, faced with the choice of taking domestic work or another occupation lacking its unappealing pre-modern elements, one is likely to take the

latter. This, coupled with the profusion of more modern jobs made possible by the Industrial Revolution has led people to do just that: i.e. they have, in large numbers at least, left domestic service for other types of work despite the fact that the Industrial Revolution increased the demand for servants (ibid. 37). Moreover, for those who have remained in this occupation, they have demanded that their work be less diffuse, and more contractual in nature, thereby setting limits to work that servants do (e.g. stating what tasks a servant will or will not do, or establishing set working hours for a servant). Nevertheless, even if there are attempts to modernize it, many of its pre-modern elements remain and render this a still “highly undesirable” occupation. “As a result only marginal, deviant, or in some other way disadvantaged persons are nowadays ready to accept [this role] in America” (ibid. 39). The result is that this role

is now predominately staffed by persons to whom society-at-large grants very little respect. Hence it is relegated to an underclass of social inferiors who have no place in the respectable scheme of things. The status is now so stigmatized that it can hardly attract potential recruits among ordinary citizens and must increasingly turn to a pool of otherwise ‘undesirable’ foreigners. *When conditions have reached such an impasse, the status and role become obsolete* (ibid. - emphasis added).

Why exactly an ‘inferior’ social role necessarily becomes obsolete Coser does not say. Moreover, he notes that, while many technologies have lessened the need for servants, they have not completely eliminated it.

Thus, the servant role is more obsolete in the sense that it is out of date (i.e. it contains many pre-modern elements) than in terms of falling out of use since, though the

extent of this occupation has fallen considerably in comparison to the past, the desire for this type of service remains. Coser recognizes this and offers the prognostication that this type of service may very well in fact remain in the future. However, and this is the main implication Coser's theory has for the outsourcing of intimate affairs, it will do so along more modern lines. In his (ibid.) words,

part-time housework may in the future become a new profession, and the traditional servant's tasks may be provided on a specialized basis by caterers, dog walkers, clean-up services and the like. But if that should happen, household workers will little resemble the traditional servant. That role is dying. Families will no longer be able greedily to devour the personality of their servants.

Coser was very prescient in his forecast: many of the tasks that servants once did are now being performed on a specialized basis and the working conditions of at least some of those who now take on intimate affairs little resemble those of what a tradition servant faced. And even personal concierges whose list of tasks that they will perform is very "diffuse", they, nevertheless, operate with an appearance of professionalism and not as inferiors taking on only menial tasks.

Thus, Coser is arguing why one occupational role was on its way to obsolescence also outlined how other, more modern, occupations that could come in a fill the gap left over.

Overall, we have seen how diverse theories have had a number of important implications in being able to account for the outsourcing of intimate affairs. However,

we have also seen how these same theories have a number of weaknesses in being able to account for this same phenomenon. Perhaps the most general limitation is the ability to place the insights that these theories have within an overall context that accounts for how and why the outsourcing of intimate affairs has come to pass. In the next chapter, I will place these developments within such a context. I will do this by arguing that the most comprehensive account of this phenomenon comes from viewing it as a manifestation of the process of reflexive modernization and the disembedding of the social world.



## Chapter 5: Reflexive Modernization and the Outsourcing of Intimate Affairs

So far we have explored what outsourcing is; how it can be applied to intimate affairs; what are the intimate affairs that being outsourced today are; who is doing this and why; what is new with outsourcing; and, in the last chapter, some theoretical accounts of intimate outsourcing. In terms of the latter, it was shown that, while many insights into intimate outsourcing can be gathered from these alternative theories, all had some deficiencies in being able to account this trend. Specifically, these theories tended not to be able to place intimate outsourcing within a broad enough context so that, while being able to offer particular insights into this trend, a more comprehensive picture of the trend is left lacking. In this chapter, I argue that a much more comprehensive picture of intimate outsourcing comes from the reflexive modernization perspective. And, in doing so, I will show how many of the insights of the alternative theories, far from being overlooked by this perspective, can actually be incorporated into it (and in a manner that overcomes many of limitations highlighted in the last chapter).

### *Reflexive Modernization and Intimate Outsourcing*

As we saw in Chapter 1, the theory of reflexive modernization essentially argues that while first modernity acted to disembed many social structures from their feudal ties, it also reembedded many of these (e.g. fates of the family, gender, class, etc.) into its own traditions, and that it was upon these newly established traditions that industrial society was born. However, this theory also argues that with the coming of second modernity,

the disembedding process was carried forward to the institutions and traditions of modernity itself. The result is a generalized process of disembedding where any reembedding takes place in very fluid (i.e. unstable) structures such as the market (Beck 1992; Bauman 2000). And in the wake of this disembedding process has come an accompanying wave of individualization that compels actors to choose how they are to live 'a life of one's own' (Beck 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002; see also Giddens 1991). I want to argue on a general level that it is this disembedding of the social world and its accompanying process of individualization that best accounts for the outsourcing of intimate affairs. But more than just reflecting these process, I argue that outsourcing actively encourages them as well. To see this, it best to begin by looking at how reflexive modernization can be seen as promoting intimate outsourcing in both a negative and a positive manner.<sup>52</sup>

*How Reflexive Modernization Promotes the Outsourcing of Intimate Affairs: Negative Aspects*

On one level, the individualization made possible by reflexive modernization makes the outsourcing of intimate activities permissible: as individualization makes life increasingly variable and something self-chosen, outsourcing aspects of one's intimate life becomes one of the many options that one can use in one's life project. That is, by increasingly separating the contexts of the intimate sphere from the regulative forces of

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<sup>52</sup> "Negative" and "positive" are not used here in a normative sense referring to 'good' or 'bad' developments. Negative in this sense refers to how specific social systems merely allow something to happen (i.e. they open it up to the possibility of happenings). Positive, in contrast, refers to how social systems actually encourage certain things to happen by promoting them.

traditional and/or cultural norms that relate to how family life should be lived (be these industrial or otherwise), and by making life increasingly an individual project that each person must figure out him/herself, offering tasks once seen as the heart of the intimate sphere to others to perform becomes a permissible course of action in the attempt to fulfill one's life project. In this sense, individualization is a *clearing force* in that it opens the space of the intimate sphere of any regulations that would prevent intimate affairs being transferred to others. In other words, individualization allows for intimate affairs to be disembedded from the intimate sphere and transferred to sources outside of it. It does this by challenging normative ideals of familial and intimate life that see it as something having an order of its own above and beyond that of any of its individual members. That is, it challenges the notion that 'the family' has a socially prescribed form and function that the individual must conform him/herself to (e.g. ideal conceptions of a nuclear family centered around a gendered division of labor). Instead, individualization compels individuals to decide how they themselves are going to live their lives, including matters of the intimate sphere. This, of course, is not to say that traditional forms of the family are immediately abandoned in this process and rejected. Rather, it is to say that living in accordance with a traditional lifestyle itself becomes a decision that an individual can choose either to live in accordance with or not. Similarly, living in a wide array of non-traditional arrangements, including one that outsources many aspects of the intimate sphere, are also living arrangements that individuals can decide to live by.

The same is true for social conceptions of the family that see it as something that should be free of the influences of the market and as standing outside of the economic realm. In this regard, and this is what encroachment theories have generally missed,

individualization is in a sense a necessary precondition for the encroachment of capital into the intimate sphere: as long as the familial sphere was socially regarded as being outside of the economy and economic relations (i.e. as haven in a heartless world), capitalistic forces were, if not prevented, then at least limited, in the degree to which they take on or over aspects of intimate life. The same is true in terms of a means-ends stance toward intimate affairs: when the family is conceived of as being based on affectual action and not self-interest, then the influence of this kind of calculus is limited. However, when such conceptions of the family are emptied, there is nothing to prevent this type of action from filling the vacuum left.

In this sense, individualization has cleared the cultural or normative roadblocks that saw family and intimate life as something outside of market relations and as being based on something other than self-interest. On the one hand the result of this has been, as the encroachment theorists have rightly noted, an increasing penetration of economic forces into the heart of the intimate sphere. However, this was only possible when the social logic of the family was undermined by processes of individualization. On the other hand, Weber's fear of rationality coming to displace other types of social action can also be seen as coming true as affectual social action within the family is increasingly displaced by more rationalized forms of social action, though, here again such a displacement was only made possible when a more individualist logic opened the family to this type of calculus.

A similar conception of the role that individualization plays in the social world can be seen in what Knorr Cetina (1997, 2001; Knorr Cetina and Bruegger 2000) calls "postsocial" relationships. For Knorr Cetina (Knorr Cetina and Bruegger 2000: 142), the

notion of the postsocial “serves as a gloss on an open range of cultural forms which transcend common definitions of the social order but which are manifest today in a variety of settings”. In part, this refers to a process “of de-socialization...in which the principles and structures we have known [of the social] ‘empty out’, lose some of the meaning and relevance they had.” (Knorr Cetina 2001: 520). In part this is the result of how individualization, or a subject-centered imagination more generally, acts to undercut classical conceptions of the social.<sup>53</sup> Indeed, “[o]ne of the most important elements in the development [of individualization] described so far may well be the loss of a social imagination, the slow erosion of the belief in salvation by society” (ibid. 532). Thus, subject-centered thinking comes to dominate conceptions of how society is ordered and how it operates, and in doing so ‘empties’ them; conceptions central to classical sociological thought: notions of the nation state, of social forces, social structures, and social organization to name but a few (ibid. 521-2). We can also include in this list the family and how social conceptions of this institution are, as a result of individualization, de-socialized. The result of this is the opening of the family to the forces and logics mentioned above.

However, with postsociality it is not only that these social principles are thinned out. Rather, it is also that “‘other’ cultural elements and relationships take their place, mediate them, and in some measure collapse in on social relations and structures” (ibid). Thus, Knorr Cetina has explored how in postsocial environments subjects increasingly interact with objects (e.g. consumer goods, technological devices and scientific objects) in a manner that approximates what is traditionally conceived of as a social relationship

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<sup>53</sup> Knorr Cetina (1997, 2001) cites reflexive modernization theorists, including Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, in her work.

even though one is interacting with objects instead of people (or, if there are interactions with people, they are somehow mediated through or by objects). We can see similar developments in family and personal life as the relations within this sphere are increasingly being mediatized as they are given over to outside organizations and occupations. For example, when gift giving is outsourced either through the use of a personal shopper or a personal concierge, there is still a social relationship between the giver and the receiver. However, this is no longer a direct relationship, but one that is mediated by various services; it is in this sense that it is a postsocial relationship.<sup>54</sup>

But postsocial elements can also be seen in the working environments of those who take on these intimate affairs. As we have seen, one of the defining features of the transfer of intimate affairs in the past was their personal or social natures in the sense that they were transferred to members of the community who were treated like family members, or to domestic servants whose occupational role was structured more in terms of the family than in terms of a contract (and, not always in a way that was beneficial to the worker) (Cosser 1973; Katzman 1978). Today, however, outsourcing often takes place within the context of an empty home as all of its members are gone at work or, in the case of children, at daycare. In these cases, there is still a relationship between the outsourcer and the outsourcee, but it is one that is mediated spatially and socially and often takes place without any propinquity being evident between its participants. In other words, the distantiation between workers and employees compels these to be postsocial relationships.

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<sup>54</sup> Hochschild's (2005: 82) captures a similar idea when she talks about outsourcing as being a form of care by "paid proxy".

So far the discussion of individualization has been largely negative in nature. That is, it highlights how individualization undercuts notions of what the family should be (e.g. how it should be ordered, who should do what within the family, who is a member of family, etc.) and thereby opens it to other outside logics and influences such as the market or a means-ends rationality. This has also tended to create new, more postsocial, contexts in which these affairs occur. But disembedding and individualization do more than just make the outsourcing of intimate affairs possible in this negative manner. Rather, they can be seen to encourage the outsourcing of intimate affairs in a number of positive ways as well.

*How Reflexive Modernization Promotes the Outsourcing of Intimate Affairs: Positive Aspects*

In addition to the negative aspects of reflexive modernity that allow for the outsourcing of intimate affairs to occur, there are a number of positive aspects to reflexive modernization that can be seen as actually encouraging and promoting this kind of outsourcing. For one, individualization encourages a person to focus on his/her core self. That is, individualization encourages a person to focus on what that he/she wants to be and how he/she wants to live her life. In Beck's terms, individualization fosters an outlook on life "that puts ego at its center" (Beck 1992: 136).

What is demanded [under current circumstances] is vigorous activity in everyday life, which puts oneself at its center, selects and opens up opportunities and so enables one to plan and make meaningful decisions about one's own future. Behind the intellectual shadow-boxing we all

indulge in, we must develop a self-centered attitude if we want to survive, turning relations between the world and ourselves upside down, so to speak, so that it provides us with the openings we need (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995: 40).

However, some aspects of daily life may prevent or distract the person from pursuing these “core” aspects of the self in the time and energy that they take up (e.g. running errands can take away time one could spend on their individual pursuits). One way to overcome these encumbrances is to shift all “peripheral” activities of life to others to perform in a manner similar to how businesses outsource their non-core activities (Prahalad and Hamel 1990). And while this shifting of core and non-core activities is not something that Beck or other reflexive modernization theorists talk about in any detail, it is something that those soliciting to take over people’s intimate affairs readily promote.

For example, as one concierge service puts it, “[t]he realities of work and home life often do not leave time left over for leisure, relaxation, or fun. [Quicksilver Concierge and Errand Service’s] purpose is to take care of the necessary and practical, even the mundane, such that you—the client—can get on with *living your life as you wish*” (<http://www.quicksilverconcierge.com/aboutus.htm> - emphasis added). Beck argues that the individualization of second modernity offers the promise of a “life of one’s own”; this service offers to fulfill this promise by allowing you to live “your life as you wish”. Similar themes are found in many other solicitations for such services.

Thus, individualism promotes outsourcing through its emphasis on focusing on one’s core self. However, this emphasis on the self has differential effects in terms of gender that, when equally applied between the sexes, can also be seen to promote outsourcing. This is because individualism promotes gender equality in the sense that it



challenges conceptions that gender should necessarily structure the life courses of men and women in a differential manner. That is, individualism opens what were previously bifurcated life courses to all thereby permitting women to enter the 'male' world of work and men to enter the 'female' world of domestic affairs. In practice this has translated into the fact that more and more women are entering the world of work, and thus are becoming increasingly dependent upon the labor market in a manner similar to that of men.

But when women enter the labor market, alone or in tandem with their significant others, this takes away time and energy that has traditionally been spent performing tasks associated with the intimate sphere (e.g. caring for children, preparing food, cleaning the house, etc). Individualization, therefore, by making both men and women more dependent on the world of work actually promotes living situations that are likely to feel significant time and energy strains, factors which happen also to be the prime motivators of individuals and families to handover the work that they can to have others. Weinstein (1997) has made this connection between working more and the use of the market to relieve some of the stresses working causes: "The harder people work, the more services they need to make their lives easier, services such as corporate and personal concierges who 'take some time-consuming chores off [these persons'] backs". And, to the extent to which this is true, individuals, by relying on privatized resources (i.e. the market) for the performance of their intimate affairs, actually become more dependent on the economy than just in terms of work. Thus, Beck's statement that "individual situations" are the result of "the extension of market dependency into every corner of (earning a) living" (ibid. 130) is more true than it would seem his intention was: Beck's focus was how

individualization promotes a dependency on the labor market, and even connects this dependency to other areas of the economy, most notably consumption. However, the outsourcing of intimate affairs suggests that the market is used to facilitate time spent in the market working. In this case, the market is used to overcome the contradictions found between family and work.

This situation needs to be coupled with another, and this is the fact with the wages of single-income families are declining relative to their dual-income counterparts. As Casper and Bianchi (2000) explain, “[t]wo-parent families in which just one parent works produce less income, and have been losing ground to the two-earner families since the 1970s. For every \$1 of per capita income in the two-earner family, the one-earner family – the traditional working dad and stay-at-home mom family – had just 82 cents in 1977, and just 66 cents in 1997” (Bianchi and Casper 2000). This means that even if a family wished to structure itself in a ‘traditional’ manner with one person staying home, and the other working, it is increasingly difficult to do. Moreover, “[t]oday most families can no longer think of the earnings that wives and mothers bring home as a bonus that can be put aside when family needs call. Nor, increasingly, do the jobs women hold allow them the luxury of choosing to cut back or quit when family priorities change, any more than their husband’s jobs would. By 1993, married women working full-time contributed 41 percent of their families’ incomes. Indeed, in 23 percent of two-earner couples, the wives earned *more* than their husbands” (Coontz 1997: 57 – emphasis in original). In these cases, there is not only the lure of the labor market as a means to living a life of one’s own to pull women into the labor market, but also an economic incentive, if not need, that pushes many women into the labor market as well. In these cases one could argue

that it is the economy and the lack of wages that can support a family on a single income (be this the wage of either partner) that creates the conflict between work and family that outsourcing seeks to overcome. Thus, for some, the economy is both the root of the contradiction between work and the family as well as the means for overcoming it, this being the only viable solution available under current circumstances.

However, the individualism promoted by and through the market for women in particular, while being largely negative in nature, can also be a source for establishing gender equality in a relationship: with both parties capable of earning a living on their own, one is no longer necessarily dependent on the other. The result of this is that both women and men can raise the question of who should do what kind of work both within the home and outside of it. Housework provides an interesting example of this.

In a recent study of this topic, Bianchi et al. (2000) found that, despite the average size of homes getting bigger in the recent past, the overall amount of housework being done by Americans has declined since 1965: in that year, the average number of hours spent performing housework was 17.5, in 1995 the same number was 13.7 (Bianchi et al. 2000: 206). This global figure, however, overlooks important gender differences in this trend. In 1965, women spent about 30 hours doing unpaid household work, a figure that is roughly six times that of men who put in roughly 4.9 hours per week. In 1995, the average number of hours spent on housework by women had dropped to 17.5, while men's average number of hours have essentially doubled in this timeframe to 10 hours per week. Thus, while men are doing more housework than they did in the past, women are doing much less than their counterparts 30 years ago. Nevertheless, women are still more likely to perform the "core" household chores (i.e. cooking, meal cleanup,

housecleaning, and laundry and ironing) while men are still more likely to spend time performing more discretionary tasks such as outdoor chores, repairs, gardening and animal care, and paying bills,<sup>55</sup> and there also remains a gender-gap in housework with women spending more time in this activity than their male counterparts. On the one hand, this shows that the world of domestic responsibilities has been opened to men, while the increasing percentage of women working similarly shows that the world of work is no longer solely a male sphere. On the other hand, this also shows that there has been an overall unequal shift in terms of gender roles with women advancing more into the 'male' sphere of work than men reciprocating and taking on a commensurate level of domestic responsibilities (though there is some movement in this direction).

To this must be coupled the fact that on the social level there has been an overall lack in the development of social support systems that facilitate women entering the world of work. As Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002: 103) note:

in everyday life there is little support for these expectations [of gender equality in pursuing a life of one's own]; in other words, not much has been done to follow up the rhetoric of equality with a reshaping of social practice. The unfavourable structures of work and attitudes of employers, together with the shortage of nurseries, all-day schools and other institutional support for young families, have been amply demonstrated... They represent massive obstacles to a combination of career and family and hence to the life project most favoured by women, insidiously establishing new inequalities and hierarchies in the relationship between the sexes.

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<sup>55</sup> Hochschild (2003b: 9) found a similar pattern in terms of childcare in her study of two-income families where women tended to do more of the maintenance work (e.g. feeding, clothing, or bathing the children) while men did more of the fun activities such as playing with their children.

At the same time, the demands of work still stand largely in contradiction to the needs of the family. In part, this is because “[t]he logic behind modern life presupposes a single person...[as] market economies ignore the needs of the family, parenthood and partnership”. In other words, working life is largely structured around someone who is mobile with few commitments outside of this world such as a family.

The result of all of this is that, though men and women are equally promised the opportunity to shape and pursue a life of one’s own, and are held accountable as such, in the absence of support systems within or without<sup>56</sup> the family to relieve the unequal division of domestic labor and care, women are held back from fully being able to pursue a true life of their own (this is also another instance of formally equal systems being compatible with substantively unequal outcomes). This does not mean that women are completely lacking in solutions to this situation, rather, that the solutions available to them and their partners have to be individualistic and private in nature, not social or public. That is, they and their families have had to find help on their own and increasingly this has come in the form of resources made available by the market. As was noted earlier, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) offered outsourcing as one possible

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<sup>56</sup> Many of the support systems that were created by the government to help keep families afloat during rough economic times have eroded in recent times which also fuels the trend of outsourcing as a privatized means for dealing with the contradictions that families face. For example, welfare benefits “lost more than half of their purchasing power between 1970 and 1996” (Coontz 1997: 48). “At the same time, government funding for parks and forest protection, highway building, urban investment, and school construction was steadily reduced, making people ever more dependent on private investments in schools, home security, and recreation to maintain the quality of their lives” (ibid.). Both of these trends were reinforced with the passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act in 1996 where the old welfare program, Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), was transformed into the Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF) program. “This was a dramatic and controversial measure that brought an end to six decades of federal social policy guaranteeing at least a minimum level of aid to those in poverty” (Iceland 2003: 126). In general, its goal was to transfer as many people as possible from the welfare rolls and have them take employment in the private sector. It did this not only by putting in place a number of enticements to attract persons on welfare to the market (e.g. the expansion of the Earned Income Tax Credit) but also by putting in place a number of sanctions for those who did not make this transition (e.g. restrictions on both the amount of time a person can be on welfare for any given continuous period – 2 years – as well as the total amount of time a person is eligible for benefits – 5 years).

solution to this situation. However, as we have seen more and more people are turning this possibility into an actuality. But that outsourcing as a more individualized and private solution is used in this situation should not be surprising. As Beck (1992: 137) has noted, under conditions of reflexive modernity “how one lives [one’s life] becomes the *biographical solution of systemic contradictions*” (emphasis in original). In short form, this is exactly what the outsourcing of intimate affairs represents, a private, individual, biographical solution to the systemic contradictions that one finds in the world today (e.g. the contradiction between work and home, between the number of roles in a family and the number of people available to fulfill them, between the housework performed by men and women, between the promise of living a life of one’s own and its actuality, etc.).

However, other elements of reflexive modernization can be seen to positively promote this type of outsourcing as well. One such factor can be seen in the relationship between individualization, detraditionalization, choice, and accountability. Modernity, especially in its reflexive form, is what Giddens (1991, 1994) has called a “post-traditional” order – i.e. a social order where wide swaths of life are open to choice, or at least the possibility of choice. This level of choice, however, stands in contrast to tradition which, “by definition,...orders life with relatively set channels” (Giddens 1991: 80). This is not to imply that tradition is the simple mechanical reproduction of the same over and over again but rather an orientation that looks to guide both the present and the future in light of how things were done in the past (Giddens 1979, 1991). Moreover, tradition carries with it a normative orientation in the sense that it outlines not only how

things have been done but how they should have, and should be, done. In short, tradition is a conservative force and one that tends to circumscribe choice.

Modernity, in contrast, “confronts the individual with a complex diversity of choices and, because it is non-foundational...offers little help as to which options should be selected” (Giddens 1991: 80). In other words, modernity opens up greater and greater horizons of choice for the individual in areas once governed by tradition. And since this process is “non-foundational” in the sense that there is no overarching social framework to tell individuals how they must live, individuals are largely left on their own to chart a path through life. This is true not only for the trivial affairs of life (e.g. what to eat for dinner) but more monumental ones as well (which religion to be; who to marry; what type of family to have; etc.). It is also true of tradition: while modernity does not necessarily imply that one cannot live a traditional way of life, it does imply that tradition can no longer simply operate as, or be justified by, tradition. Rather, tradition becomes, just like so much of life, a choice and something that one must select if one is to live in accordance with it.

However, by opening more areas of life to reflexivity and choice, late modernity not only makes everyday life more “risky” in the sense that it becomes an open and on-going project where there is always the possibility of both success and failure, it also makes the individual accountable for a greater number of elements of their life in the sense that these aspects of life are seen as being shaped, or at least being potentially shaped, by individual choice. In other words, the accountability structure of society increasingly holds the individual to be responsible for more and more areas of their life which are seen to be under the control of the individual (see above for a discussion of this

issue in terms of Beck's work). Thus, both success and failure in the reflexive project of the self and the "everyday experiments" of life (Giddens 1994: 59) are increasingly seen as the outcome of individual decision and choice.

Overall then, we are left in a situation where individuals live in a state where there is greater choice, greater risk, and greater degrees of levels of individual accountability than was the case in the past. And since, as was noted above, modernity is "non-foundational" in the sense that there is no final authority to whom one can consult for the right answers or the correct way to live, individuals can always be held accountable for the choices that they either make or do not make in their everyday lives (e.g. the choice to go to college or not; the choice to pursue a career or to stay home with one's family; to live in a rural environment or go to the city; etc.). But while there are no final authorities in this situation to take away the risk and accountability of individual decision, outsourcing can be used as a strategy to protect individuals from the risks of their decisions, and the possible negative sanctions that accompany any 'bad' choices that are made. This is done by transferring these decisions to those who are purportedly 'good' at making them. In other words, individuals can rely on "expert systems" to help them make good choices or choices they feel that they cannot, or do not wish to, make alone.

As we saw in a previous chapter, Giddens (1990: 27) defines expert systems as "systems of technical accomplishment or professional expertise that organise large areas of the material and social environments in which we live today". In other words, these are systems of specialized or technical knowledge. But, as Giddens notes, these systems are not necessarily confined to areas of technical knowledge such as engineering and science. Rather, they also "extend to social relations themselves and to the intimacies of



the self” such as doctors, councilors, and therapists (Giddens 1991: 18). However, as we have also seen, this term can be extended to include many of the outsourcing services who take on intimate affairs. For example, personal shoppers are supposed to be experts in the area of consumption and can thus be recruited to find ‘good’ goods (e.g. fashionable clothes, the perfect gift, etc.). Similarly, wedding planners promote themselves as experts in the area of weddings and all of the choices that one can make in planning this event, and can thus be employed to help deliver the ‘perfect’ wedding. The same is true for personal organizers in the area of organization, personal chefs in the area of cooking, and personal concierges in a variety of everyday and not-so-everyday tasks.

Of course, there is no guarantee that with the use of expert systems that the ‘correct’ choices will be made: experts can be just as wrong as anyone else and thus expert systems are not free of risk (again there is no final authority with *the* correct choice). Moreover, the individual can also be held accountable for their choice in a specific expert and can thus receive positive or negative sanctions accordingly (e.g. an individual can be held accountable for his/her choice of a ‘bad’ wedding planner). Giddens characterizes this as a situation in which there are no “super-experts” or final authorities who can be consulted on which experts to consult (Giddens 1994: 87). In some cases, this risk in selecting experts has prompted the creation of expert systems of expert systems as a means of reducing the risk involved in their selection (e.g. guides that evaluate various wedding planners as a kind of meta-expert system), though, here again there are no guarantees in terms of the outcomes of this and the individual is again ultimately responsible for his/her choice of a meta-expert. Nevertheless, the outsourcing of life matters to expert systems (or meta-experts) is one strategy available to try and

protect oneself from the increasing accountability and risk that the individualism and individual choice inherent in reflexive modernity implies.

This raises an important question however: given that these are by and large everyday affairs, and in principle things that individuals and families could do for themselves (and have done so historically), how does one become an expert in them and what benefits does this expertise deliver to those who employ these systems. In terms of the former, it should be kept in mind that expertise is a relative term in the sense that it is not that these experts have knowledge that is inherently inaccessible to non-experts in the manner of say divine knowledge. Rather, people become experts through the accumulation of specialized knowledge in a particular area of life that surpasses what the layperson has. Thus,

[a]n expert is any individual who can successfully lay claim to either specific skills or types of knowledge which the layperson does not possess. 'Expert' and 'layperson' have to be understood as contextually relative terms. There are many layers of expertise and what counts in any given situation where expert and layperson confront one another is *an imbalance in skills or information* in which – for a given field of action – makes one an 'authority' in relation to the other. (Giddens 1994: 84 – emphasis added).

Thus, it is an “imbalance in skill or information” that makes one an expert and one not, and it has been by accumulating specialized knowledge in particular areas of intimate life above and beyond that of what the common person has that many of the organizations and industries that take on intimate affairs have been able to create a market for themselves. That is, it has been in being able to use specialized knowledge to deliver

outcomes above and beyond that of what a particular individual could expect to do on his/her own in a relatively timely fashion that is a direct benefit of using these expert systems. Thus, personal chefs can be used for delivering gourmet food, birthday party planners used for providing elaborate events, and personal organizers used for setting up a well-ordered home to name but a few possibilities.

Of course, this is not always a neutral process. That is, when intimate affairs are disembedded from tradition and made into a reflexive project, they are opened to other influences and logics. In some cases, this takes the shape of using intimate affairs as a weapon of *distinction* (Bourdieu 1984 [1979]), – i.e. markers that some people or groups of people apart from others. Thus some intimate affairs, particularly those of weddings and parties, have become virtual arms races in terms of who can throw the most extravagant event possible. And here, expert systems are used to help accomplish this distinction by help plan and coordinate these types of events.

However, as we have seen, many other of these services are simply used to allow one to live a life of one's own. But, it could also be that the degree of one's ability to live a life of one's own, even if added by outside forces, itself provides a measure of social distinction in the contemporary world. Giddens (1994: 76) has already noted how the ability to decide matters in the social world is a matter of stratification: “[t]he opening-out of social life to decision-making...should not be identified *ipso facto* with pluralism; it is also a medium of power and of stratification” (emphasis in original). In this sense outsourcing can be a vehicle for this type of stratification not only by being a resource for making ‘better’ decisions through accessing various expert systems, but also, by allowing things that would take time and energy away from their efforts to be given to others to

perform. In either case, the nature of intimate outsourcing remains: it is still a biographical solution for systemic contradictions.

These, I want to argue, are the major ways that developments characterized by the process of reflexive modernization that both allow for, and promote, the outsourcing of intimate affairs. Disembedding and individualization play a major role in this process, though, other factors (e.g. dependency on the labor market, expert systems, etc.) have significance influence as well. And, because of these insights this theory's ability to place this type of outsourcing within an overall context, that I argue that reflexive modernization is the best tool for accounting for the outsourcing of intimate affairs. However, it also provides a context in which to place many of the theoretical insights regarding the issue of the outsourcing of intimate affairs highlighted in the last chapter.

### *Integrating Insights from the Alternative Theories of Intimate Outsourcing*

In terms of encroachment perspectives, as was alluded to above, reflexive modernization highlights two factors that this theoretical orientation misses, while also preserving its central highlight – i.e. that businesses now have the intimate sphere in their sights as part of the commodity frontier. But part what this perspective misses is how the intimate sphere has come to be opened up to the market in the first place. That is, it overlooks how it came to be that the intimate sphere was first cleared of cultural notions that saw the family and intimate relations as something independent of the market. As I argued above, the wave of individualization that accompanied the shift to second

modernity acts as this clearing force making permissible the transfer of intimate affairs to the market.

Secondly, encroachment theories, as the name implies, look at the penetration of the market into intimate affairs only as something that comes to them from the outside. This metaphor is captured beautifully in Habermas' language of colonization. However, in the last section we saw how an ego-centered worldview that is favored by the individualization of second modernity can act to make outsourcing some aspects of the intimate sphere desirable in the sense that they can allow one to concentrate on one's wants and/or interests. Thus, outsourcing may not only be a situation of colonization, but one of invitation as well as individuals and families actively seek to outsource aspects of the intimate sphere.

However, the theory of reflexive modernization theory also highlights how individualized lives and living a life of one's own is heavily dependent on the market, though, this is normally framed in terms of one's dependency on the labor market. But as we have seen, with this increased dependency on the labor market has come an increased dependence on the market more generally as outsourcing services are used to help support one's time in the labor market. Encroachment theories highlight how these marketized forms of support have come into existence.

Much the same can be said of the theories of rationality explored in the last chapter. While they highlight the potential dangers involved when a means-end rationality can come to displace more affectual forms of social action (e.g. choosing the most efficient way to handle one's intimate affairs can lead to disenchantment), what they fail to account for is how the space of the intimate sphere has come to be opened up to

this logic in the first place. Again, I would argue that it is the individualization and the increased ability to choose how to live a life of one's own that has made the intimate sphere vulnerable to logics other than affectual action. Of course, the use of this kind of logic (and marketized forms of support for that matter) in the intimate sphere is not necessarily inimical to it. As we have seen, by using this logic and the outsourcing services that are now available, it is sometimes possible to outsource intimate affairs in order to preserve time and energy for the intimate sphere (e.g. outsourcing household chores so a family can spend the weekend together). The danger in this, however, is that there are no natural boundaries in place for where this kind of logic, or where the services that take on intimate affairs, should stop and without limits being placed on these processes, in the act of trying to outsource intimate affairs to preserve the intimate sphere, one could empty the very thing that one was trying to protect.

Parsons' theory is important in this regard because he, unlike Durkheim, attempted to spell out in detail what exactly the limits to social differentiation are, and should be, when it comes to processes of functional differentiation (i.e. what 'functions of the family' should not be lost to other social institutions). However, as we have seen, the functions that Parsons saw as constituting the 'core' of the family (e.g. childcare and socialization) have, nevertheless, become things that one can transfer to the market if one wishes. Thus, despite spelling out the limit to where social differentiation should end, this process has moved beyond this point. In part, this is because Parsons placed certain restrictions on this process that seem not to have held over time. In particular, he saw social differentiation ending at gender roles with men specializing in instrumental affairs by entering the world of work, and women in expressive functions by staying home and

caring for family members. And though coming at this issue from a very different angle, Becker too saw that the family should be structured around specialized gender roles with women staying at home and men going off to work. In this regard both Parsons and Becker have failed to appreciate the extent to which individualization has opened these roles to variation so that, while they might still have some cache in specific social circles, they have lessened their overall normative power in structuring the lives of men and women. This, in turn, has made the distribution of family functions both more possible and, in some cases at least, necessary.

In a certain sense, it has also made the decision to outsource specific aspects of the intimate sphere a 'rational' choice in the sense that, by transferring these affairs to others this allows both members of a family to work and thereby generate more economic utility than would be the case if one person stayed home; this despite the economic costs associated with outsourcing. Thus, even if we do not assume that individuals are utility maximizers but rather are simply utility interested (i.e. they are concerned with their economic state and consider the economics of their decisions), we can see that under current circumstances outsourcing-in-order-to-work is in many ways an economically rational decision that many individuals and families are choosing to follow. What reflexive modernization shows, and what rational choice theory in general cannot, is how conditions that have made this decision more rational have come to be.

Inglehart's and Lesthaeghe's work on changes in values stands in a similar relation to the theory of reflexive modernization: though they document how Western values have changed and link this to certain developments (e.g. changes in demographic patterns), what these theories lack is an account of the socio-structural changes that have

helped promote and reinforce these value systems. As has been seen, the theory of reflexive modernization provides such an account. Nevertheless, all of these theories highlight the growing importance of individualism in Western societies and, as we have seen, this has been a crucial driver in the outsourcing of intimate affairs.

If Inglehart and Lesthaeghe have been important in highlighting a change in values, Coser on the one hand, and Glazer and Ritzer on the other, have been important for highlighting changes that have taken place in the world of work. Coser is important for showing how and why the traditional servant role is incompatible with the modern conditions of work, and is thus fading into obsolescence. However, more than this, his work is important for highlighting how, if domestic affairs were to continue to be given to others to perform, this transfer would take shape. In other words, he highlights what more 'modern' occupations that take on intimate affairs will look like (e.g. being more specialized and more contractual in nature). In showing the obsolescence of one occupational role, Coser detailed much of what the future of other occupational roles that take on intimate affairs would be.

Glazer and Ritzer have been important in showing how and why businesses, in an attempt to increase their profits, will push work from the private sphere onto the intimate sphere. So while it is true that the outsourcing of intimate affairs is in many ways the exact opposite of the "work transfers" that Glazer and Ritzer highlight, it is also true that many new businesses have sprung up in the recent past in order to take on this work that other businesses have pushed onto consumers. Of course, these new businesses do not do this work for free and, thus, have found a profitable market for themselves by doing what other businesses no longer will.



In many ways Benston and other Marxist feminists called for a work transfer of their own. However, in this case work would not be moved from the intimate sphere to the private, but rather to collectivist structures where this work could be socialized. For these thinkers, a transfer of this sort is a necessary precondition for the liberation of women. But Benston also posited that there was a possibility that, albeit in a limited form, a liberation of women could take place under the existing capitalistic conditions. There were many reasons why Benston felt that this possibility would not eventuate (e.g. businesses reap the benefits of unpaid labor that women perform in social reproduction; the economy may not be big enough to include women; the facilities needed to take on intimate affairs is limited) but, as we have seen, these factors have proven not to be strong enough to stop this possibility from becoming an actuality. In this sense, the partial liberation of women and the transfer of intimate affairs has come not through a process of socialization, but rather one of privatization. As both private and privatized, the outsourcing of intimate affairs represents for all the parties involved in this process a biographical solution to systemic conditions.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion and Discussion

The overarching goal of this dissertation has been to show the utility of using reflexive modernization theory to understand the outsourcing of intimate affairs. In particular, I argue that intimate outsourcing can be seen as resulting from two processes that stand at the heart of reflexive modernization: the disembedding of the social world and the concomitant wave of individualization that has accompanied it. In terms of the former, the outsourcing of intimate affairs can be seen as both a reflection of the general disembedding of the social world associated with second modernity and as an action that promotes this type of activity by “lifting out” social relations from their local contexts of interaction and restructuring them, in Giddens’ (1991: 21) terms, “across indefinite spans of time-space”. Similarly, individualization can be seen as promoting this type of activity not only by making decisions to disembed these types of activities permissible (i.e. by making them open to individual choice), but also by promoting a focus on one’s “core” self where any “peripheral” activities that take time and energy away from this self can become something to be divested of. Given that many intimate affairs are time-consuming, if not burdensome, and can even be seen as taking away time and energy from the intimate sphere itself, these become prime activities that one may be willing to hand over to others to perform. As we have seen, many individuals and families have chosen this option and outsourcing their intimate affairs.

But this dissertation also clarifies a number of issues that surround the outsourcing of intimate affairs. First, it shows how outsourcing, a term that came to prominence in the business world, can, if defined in a certain manner, be applied to what

I refer to as intimate affairs, i.e. those activities that are necessary to reproduce what Habermas (1991 [1962]: 46-47) calls the intimate sphere. As it relates to the affairs of the intimate sphere, outsourcing can be defined as the transfer of intimate tasks historically or normatively seen as being performed within the family and by family members to formal commercial establishments located outside of the family. This definition is useful to the literature in this area because it helps to establish what is and is not outsourcing in terms intimate affairs (e.g. the use of time-saving appliances such as microwave ovens, while convenient, is not an example of outsourcing) while still capturing the heart of what is meant by outsourcing when it is used in the businesses world – i.e. a practice that sees goods or services once performed in-house transferred to outside businesses.

This dissertation also highlights what is new and/or historically unique about outsourcing. Some of what is new relates to the fact that past practices involving the transfer of intimate affairs that were quite popular prior to World War II, but which faded in their popularity during, and in some case after, the 1950's, have recently seen a comeback in their use in the recent past. These “resurgent” practices include the use of food sources away from the home and the use of domestic servants/housekeepers. However, part of what is new with this trend relates to how many new outsourcing practices have recently been developed. These “emergent” practices include the use of personal chefs, personal concierges, pet waste management companies, remembrance services, and the home delivery of groceries to name but a few. But whether resurgent or emergent in nature, we have seen how more and more individuals and families are employing outsourcing services to help in the performance of their intimate affairs.

But this dissertation also shows that, in comparison to past transfers of intimate affairs, with outsourcing there is also a wider array of activities that can be transferred. To take one example, though commercialized greeting cards have been available for well over 100 years and can be thought of as representing an early form of intimate outsourcing in the sense that bought cards replaced the need to make them by hand, until recently it was still the responsibility of the person giving the card to remember when to send it and to inscribe it him/herself. Today a number of companies have been formed that have commercialized these aspects of the greeting card by offering not only to remember when to send the card, but to write the inscription on it as well. In this sense, these companies have extended the number of intimate outsourcing options found in this industry.

I also show in this dissertation that, in addition to these more quantitative dimensions, there are also a number of qualitative elements to outsourcing that distinguish it from past practices involving the transfer of intimate affairs. Particularly, there have been changes in *how* these activities are being transferred, *to whom* these activities are being transferred to, and *in what context* these transfers take place. In terms of the former, one of the unique elements is that, with outsourcing, these transfers are increasingly taking place along purely commercialized lines. That is, these services are provided in a way that tends not to be mixed with personal or social relationships as was common in the past (e.g. a servant who was seen as being a member of the family in colonial times). Rather, many outsourcing services involve only a simple contractual relation between a client and a service provider.

Another unique aspect of outsourcing in comparison to past practices relates to whom these affairs are transferred to: in the past, though these types of affairs tended to be transferred to others, they were commonly given over to informal sources such as friends, neighbors, or relatives. And though the use of such informal sources is not absent, today more and more of these transfers are going to more formal sources in the form of commercial establishments. Moreover, the occupations that take on these types of affairs are tending to formalizing their operations in one of two ways: either by attempting to professionalize their occupation or industry (or at least give the appearance of professionalism) by, for example, establishing professional organizations, or by rationalizing their operations such as standardizing what workers will do and how they will do it.

There are also differences in the spatial, social, and emotional contexts in which outsourcing takes place in comparison to past practices. In terms of the former, while intimate affairs have been transferred to others in the past, such transfers tended to take place within the home (e.g. the transfer of intimate affairs to domestic servants who lived in the house in which they worked). With outsourcing many affairs are transferred to locations outside of the home to be performed as in the case of daycare, kiddie cabs, and remembrance services. That is, in some cases at least, these transfers involve a spatial separation between the outsourcer and the outsourcee that was not common in the past. In this regard, outsourcing can be seen as a specific example of the more general process of distancing that Giddens (1990) sees as characterizing late modernity.

However, in other cases a spatial separation occurs between outsourcer and outsourcee, though, this time it is not the result of intimate affairs being transferred to

locations outside of the home. Rather, in this case it is the outsourcers who are not at home when their affairs are being performed by others as, for example, when a personal chef works in the kitchen of his/her client who is not home at the time. This situation of a client-free working environment is a very different social context than was largely the case in the past such as when servants lived with their employers or were, at the very least, heavily monitored by them while they worked.

Also, the emotional environment of the family has changed so that meaning associated with the transfer of intimate affairs is different than it was in the past. That is, today the family is defined culturally around the notion of intimacy and is seen as both being defined and held together by emotional bonds of love and support (Coontz 2006; Giddens 1991, 1992; Gottlieb 1993: 248). This conception of the family has prompted some (e.g. Hochschild [2005]; Jackson [2002]) to look at contemporary outsourcing practices and to explore their possible emotional consequences.

But beyond just showing how the concept of outsourcing can be applied to intimate affairs, that this type of outsourcing is increasing, and that it has unique features in comparison to past practices where intimate affairs were transferred to others, this dissertation also places this type of outsourcing within a theoretical context. And while other works have tried to do this before, or can be extended in such a way to do so, I show that each of these alternative theories of outsourcing has a number of limitations to it in being able to account for this phenomenon. In particular, a central deficit to all of the alternative theories is that they fail to place intimate outsourcing within a broad enough context. That is, these theories tend to be able only to highlight one or a few aspects of this trend that, while insightful, leave many dimensions of it unexplained (e.g.

encroachment theories, while highlighting how businesses are seeking to capitalize on intimate affairs, fail to explain how it is that individuals or families come to desire such services while rational choice theories, while providing at least a potential explanation for why individuals and families choose to use such services, fail to account for the situations that make outsourcing a 'rational' choice in the first place). The theory of reflexive modernization offers such a context within which to place this development, as well as a means for integrating many of the particular insights of alternative theories. This, coupled with the insights this theory can offer into intimate outsourcing on its own, is again why I argue that the theory of reflexive modernization theory has great utility in explaining this phenomenon.

But despite the many ways in which this type of outsourcing can be accounted for by the theory of reflexive modernization, and the fact that this theory provides a broad context from which to understand this type of outsourcing, this perspective, nevertheless, have a number of limitations when it comes illuminating this issue of intimate outsourcing. One limitation is that, though Beck noted that the individualism promoted by second modernity required, as opposed to the *primary* ties of traditionalism, a dependency on a number of *secondary* institutions such as the labor market, the state, the educational system, etc., (Beck 1992: 131), what Beck and other reflexive modernization theorists have failed to realize is the extent to which actually living a life of one's own requires the help of a number of *tertiary* services. That is, what the outsourcing of intimate affairs shows is the extent to which, under current circumstances, living an individualized life requires not only the institutional help of social structures, but also the direct help of others who can take on at least some of the tasks necessary to support and

maintain the intimate sphere. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002: 101-118) realize that such affairs can be demanding and are a source of conflict in relationships, and that the requirement that it be the women who perform the bulk of these affairs can limit an individualized life-project. And so while Beck and Beck-Gernsheim note the possibility of “displac[ing] or delegate[ing]” these activities to others as a means of alleviating this situation, they only do so in passing (ibid. 112). As we have seen, many are turning this possibility into an actuality and in this way are becoming increasingly dependent on a number of services that Beck and other reflexive modernization theorists seem not to have appreciated.

This situation raises another important issue missed by the reflexive modernization theorists: the question of what kind of life is made available to those who make the individualized existence of others possible. In other words, what kind of life is afforded to those who make “a life of one’s own” possible for others. Hints of this have been given in other literatures. Wrigley (1999), for example, has explored the use of nannies by middle class couples and the dynamics involved between employers and employees in this type of work. What she found was that nannies are often exploited in ways that are both subtle (e.g. parents not respecting how a nanny does her work because she comes from a different culture) and not so subtle (e.g. employers not paying their workers what they are owed). Parrenas (2001) found that the Filipina domestic workers that she studied experienced a number of powerful “dislocations” in pursuing this type of work, not the least of which is the fact that these women must leave their own families a world away in order to care for the families of others.<sup>57</sup> This situation has prompted

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<sup>57</sup> Other dislocations include the fact that these women are only partial citizens in the places that they work, that these women experience contradictory class mobility as the move from middle class positions in the



Hochschild (2000) to raise the question of whether a 'surplus value' is being created in the world of care; i.e. "something [that is] skimmed off the [globally] poor for the benefit of the [globally] rich".<sup>58</sup> More generally, these works suggest the possibility that today there might be a more global face to the various types of exploitation that have tended to be endemic to the history of domestic work.

But as other works (e.g. Meagher 1997; Bickham Mendez 1998; Ehrenreich 2002) have shown, an increasing amount of this type of work is taking place in corporatized and/or rationalized environment. And while these types of working environments might afford some liberties not found in older forms of domestic employment (e.g. company regulations can protect workers from unreasonable demands by clients), new means of controlling workers can also be found (e.g. standardized procedures for cleaning a house that limit a workers' discretion and autonomy). Such measures of control are also found in another prominent area of outsourcing: the fast-food industry. As both Leidner (1993) and Ritzer (2004) have shown, the working environment in the fast-food industry for frontline employees is very structured and highly rationalized. And while Leidner (1993) found that the routines imposed in this industry may have some benefits to workers (e.g. they can be used as a means of protecting the self in the face of rude or annoying customers) and may even be desired by some workers (some workers like just going through the motions in their work with little else being required of them), both she and Ritzer (2004) have found that highly rationalized environments tend to dehumanize those

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Philippines to lower class ones in the U.S., and that these workers are never full integrated into the existing migrant community (Parrenas 2001).

<sup>58</sup> Parrenas (2001: 74) for her part, links this transfer of care from the Third World to the First to the reproduction of global inequalities: "By spurring economic development [in the First World], the international transfer of caretaking retains the inequalities of the global market economy. The low wages of migrant domestic workers increase the production activities of the receiving nation, but the economic growth of the Philippine economy is for the most part limited and dependent on the foreign currency provided by their low wages"

who work in them. This is an important issue to note since, as Bittman et al. (1999: 264) point out, though the use of domestic workers is an on-going and important form of intimate outsourcing, and one that has tended to grab much of the attention in this area, in terms of sheer numbers food service workers are the number one form of employment in the intimate outsourcing industries. Thus, to not look at these kinds of workers is to overlook one of the most significant occupational groups involved in this type of work, while not looking at the working lives of those who take on the intimate affairs in general is to overlook a significant aspect of how 'a life of one's own' is achieved in everyday life.

Another issue that intimate outsourcing highlights in regards to reflexive modernization theory is how, in the absence of any movements to socialize intimate affairs in a manner similar to what Benston (1969) and other Marxist feminists posited, individualism and the market tend to reinforce one another in this area of life. That is, individualism first tends to make everyone, including women, dependent on the labor market as a means of sustaining themselves. However, this level of dependency on the labor market tends to drain resources that have historically been used to help support the intimate sphere. For example, internal to the family, a dependency on work tends to pull a significant amount of the time and energy that women have historically devoted to this sphere of life away from it. But externally the situation is much the same: once an area where informal sources of support could be found (e.g. in the form of help from friends and neighbors), as more and more people are required to work in order to make a living the market soaks up a large number these resources as well. The result is that the only place to turn for support in sustaining the intimate sphere is formal resources located

outside of the family. And since the state has does not, by and large, fill this role, the market has been the prime, if only, mechanism of support available to individuals and families when it comes to their intimate affairs.

In one sense this means that the market, by taking on many intimate affairs, has become the primary factor in facilitating the overall dependency on work that has accompanied the individualization of second modernity. However, the market also does more than this: as we have seen, it is also the main facilitator in allowing one to live a life of one's own more generally by allowing one to transfer one's 'peripheral' affairs to it. Thus, the individualization of second modernity both supports and is supported by the market in a way that Beck appears to have underappreciated.

On a different front, Lash (2003: 52) also appears to have underestimated the significance of his statement that second modernity is characterized by "*a generalized outsourcing*" (emphasis in original). As we have seen, for Lash, "outsourcing" is, at least in a loose sense of the term, a form of distantiation where certain activities and entities (e.g. the family) are becoming more and more dispersed spatially in contemporary times. As we have seen, with the outsourcing of intimate affairs such a spatial dispersal has, in some cases at least, occurred (i.e. there is a spatial separation between the outsourcers and outsourcees of these affairs). But outsourcing, at least as it is defined here, involves more than just a process of distantiation (and sometimes it need not involve a this at all). Rather, it involves the transfer intimate affairs once perform within a family by family members to formal commercial establishments located outside it. But even when using this definition of outsourcing, Lash's statement still holds true: when it comes to intimate affairs, under the conditions of second modernity a generalized process of outsourcing is

occurring with more and more intimate activities being given over to the market to be performed.

Lastly, Beck (1992), was quite optimistic of the potential for reflexive modernization to be a liberating force in society. In particular, he was optimistic of “the *generalization* of political action” (Beck op cit. 195 – emphasis in original) found in second modernity where all areas of life are opened to the decision making capabilities of human being. This means that there is a movement in “the establishment of democratic rights...in the direction of *concrete* democracy” where everything from such diverse spheres as science, the environment, human nature, the family, gender roles, etc., can be governed and shaped in a self-chosen direction (ibid. emphasis in original). That is, these areas of life can now be seen as being reflexively ordered and thus not under the providence of factors external to decisions of men and women (e.g. they are not subject to ‘fate’).

However, as Beck (ibid. 232) also notes, “[t]he ‘auxiliary government of the private sphere’ can change the conditions of how people live together *here and now*, without proposed laws and resolutions, and is doing so, as the rapidly increasing variety of shifting modes of living illustrates” (emphasis in original). In many respects, this is what can be seen as happening with the outsourcing of intimate affairs as the ‘auxiliary government of the private sphere’ shapes both the conditions fueling the need to outsource in the first place and by supplying the resources necessary for it to happen. However, this shift in the mode of living is largely disconnected from any larger, self-conscious political project. That is, while we may be seeing, at least for those who can afford it, more *concrete freedom* when it comes to their intimate affairs in the sense that

some have a greater ability to structure their affairs in the manner that they wish than was the case in the past, such actions are not necessarily democratic in nature and take place, by and large, in the absence of any overarching democratic movement. Thus, while the intimate sphere may have been “opened up” to greater arrays of individual decision, it has not necessarily followed that a political project of the intimate sphere on a generalized scale has accompanied this process.

That this is occurring seems to highlight a point that Knorr Cetina (2001: 523) detected in her work on post-social relations but which Beck seems to have missed. That is that there has been a “loss of a social imagination...[and a] slow erosion of the belief in salvation by society”. The fact that the outsourcing of intimate affairs has taken place without a political movement accompanying it seems to reinforce this point: the social seems to hold no place in our imaginations and, thus, when it comes to issues of the intimate sphere, it cannot save. This is not to say that social forces and social processes are no longer operative. Rather, it is to say that the responsibility for dealing with these types of issues has shifted in the direction of the individual. Of course, Beck realized this when he said that “[u]nder these conditions, how one lives becomes the *biographical solution of systemic contradictions*” (Beck 1992: 137 – emphasis in original). But Beck, at least in his more optimistic moments, was also hopeful that this individualization of responsibility would in turn produce a responsibility for individualization in general. That is, it was hoped that when individuals were forced to take a greater levels of control over their lives they would see the ways in which their actions positively and negatively affected the lives of other individuals and that when the latter occurred, this would spur individuals to change their actions for the benefit of all. This, however, assumes that

individuals will transform their biographical focus into a social awareness. Given the lack of political action accompanying the outsourcing of intimate affairs, it seems that this level of awareness has yet to develop at least in this area of life. In contrast, it seems that individuals and families have concentrated on finding their own means to addressing the systemic issues that they face, and these solutions have, by and large, been furnished by the 'auxiliary government of the private sphere'. Whether or not this will always be the case is an issue that only time will tell. In the meantime, one can wonder if those who outsource their intimate affairs in order to try and preserve the intimate sphere are emptying the very thing that they are trying to save.

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