



The Outsourced Self: What Happens When We Pay Others to Live Our Lives for Us

By Arlie Russell Hochschild



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A Publishers Weekly Best Book of the Year

From the famed author of the bestselling *The Second Shift* and *The Time Bind*, a pathbreaking look at the transformation of private life in our for-profit world

The family has long been a haven in a heartless world, the one place immune to market forces and economic calculations, where the personal, the private, and the emotional hold sway. Yet as Arlie Russell Hochschild shows in *The Outsourced Self*, that is no longer the case: everything that was once part of private life—love, friendship, child rearing—is being transformed into packaged expertise to be sold back to confused, harried Americans.

Drawing on hundreds of interviews and original research, Hochschild follows the incursions of the market into every stage of intimate life. From dating services that train you to be the CEO of your love life to wedding planners who create a couple's "personal narrative"; from nameologists (who help you name your child) to wantologists (who help you name your goals); from commercial surrogate farms in India to hired mourners who will scatter your loved one's ashes in the ocean of your choice—Hochschild reveals a world in which the most intuitive and emotional of human acts have become work for hire.

Sharp and clear-eyed, Hochschild is full of sympathy for overstressed, outsourcing Americans, even as she warns of the market's threat to the personal realm they are striving so hard to preserve.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Amazon Exclusive: Barbara Ehrenreich Reviews *The Outsourced Self*
Barbara Ehrenreich is the best-selling author of *Nickel and Dimed*.



It's a rare and brilliant book that helps us see ordinary life in a whole new way. Take the business of children's birthday parties. When my children were little, I'd put on their parties myself--making the cake, setting up the party games, presiding over the subsequent chaos, and cleaning up the mess. Forty years later, my daughter arranges for "professionals" to create and manage her children's parties. The nationwide chain called The Little Gym, for example, runs a 90 minute party for \$225, including invitations, paper goods, and leadership by a "qualified birthday leader plus an assistant." Parents watch the whole thing from the sidelines.

As Arlie Russell Hochschild shows, birthday parties are only one way we've "outsourced" our personal lives. We might seek on-line match-making companies to find a mate, paid relationship advisors to navigate the dating process, wedding planners if the process is successful, perhaps a surrogate mother to bear the children, then child-raising experts to advise on parenting issues--not to mention special consultants to arrange care for the older generation. In other words, that vast and impersonal entity--the market--is penetrating our most intimate relationships and managing the great turning points in our lives. Those who can afford to pay them are increasingly dependent on outside "experts," "coaches," and of course "birthday leaders."

Is this the dystopian outcome dreaded by social scientists since the 19th century? Or is it a rational adjustment to a busy and complex world where no one has time to make their own party favors? Hochschild is definitely drawn to the old, self-reliant, ways represented by her own grandparents, but she is a sociologist, not a scold. *The Outsourced Self* goes on to explore the ways people manage to redraw the lines between public and private and maintain a modicum of autonomy. I won't say Hochschild will "make" you think: She's such a keen observer and delightful writer that she makes it fun to think. --Barbara Ehrenreich

From [Booklist](#)

In her best-selling books *The Time Bind* (1997) and *The Second Shift* (1989), Hochschild examined how working mothers and two-income families balanced their home lives with the demands of holding down a career. Here she takes a look at personal life in the Internet age, where the trend is to reach for market services to fulfill needs traditionally met by family, friends, and the community. From online dating services to RentAFriend.com, where members pay \$24.95 a month to review prospective “friends,” our basic capacity to develop personal relationships is being commoditized and outsourced. Hochschild examines the effect of market forces on marriage, child rearing, counseling, caregiving, and even death, where large, national funeral homes are supplanting traditional, local funeral parlors with a more consumer-based approach. This is a thoughtful exercise in taking stock of the aspects of life that get devalued in a culture that promotes the belief that “the market can do no wrong.” --David Siegfried

Review

“Incisive, provocative, and often downright entertaining...It used to take a village, but these days it takes a full-service mall, much of it in cyberspace. Finding a mate, planning a wedding, potty-training a child, or being a better father--once intuitive, ordinary tasks involving family, friends, and neighbors--now require the services of paid experts, trainers, and a plethora of coaches, such as Internet dating coach Evan Katz, aka e-Cyrano, or Family360, which teaches executives to “invest time and attention in ‘high leverage’ family activities.” *?Publishers Weekly (Starred Review)*

“What happens to us as we outsource more and more of our personal--even intimate--tasks to paid “coaches,” caretakers, companions, event planners and third world surrogate mothers? It takes a social thinker of great stature and scope to tackle this question, and a writer of immense charm to make the answer riveting. Arlie Hochschild is both, and this may be her best book ever.” *?Barbara Ehrenreich*

“The nation's leading sociologist of daily life has turned her razor-sharp eye to rapid advance of the commodity frontier. Exposing both extreme (love coaches, wantologists) and ordinary (elder care, party planners) cases, Hochschild has produced a brilliant, compelling, and hard-to-put-down account of the expansion of market logic and its effects on our culture. This book deserves the country's attention.” *?Juliet Schor, author of Plenitude: The New Economics of True Wealth*

“What have we given up, Arlie Hochschild worries, when we start paying experts for our most intimate activities? Taking us into a fascinating tour of love coaches, wedding planners, surrogate mothers and more, Hochschild offers her own compelling and controversial answers. Another triumph from this masterful social analyst and a gift to her legion of readers.” *?Viviana Zelizer, author of The Purchase of Intimacy*

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Mamie Contreras:

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