Clocks, Calendars, and Couples:

Time and The Rhythms of Relationships

Peter Fraenkel & Skye Wilson
Ackerman Institute for the Family

June, 1998

Chapter for Peggy Papp's edited book on couples.

c:\wp60\time\timechap.v1

Clocks, Calendars, and Couples: Time and The Rhythms of Relationships

Peter Fraenkel & Skye Wilson

Consider the following brief vignettes of couples in therapy. What is a common theme across each of these couples and their difficulties?

Vignette One: Marcia 39, and Fred 38, both academics, had been friends for three years before they became romantically involved four years ago. About two years into this phase of their relationship, Marcia, who wanted to have children, began suggesting that they move in together and think about getting married. Fred responded that he didn't feel ready. He was considering further graduate studies, and couldn't imagine beginning these studies, married life, and a family at the same time. Marcia now argues that it is time for Fred to "grow up," stop being a student, and assume adult responsibilities. She describes anxiety about her "biological clock" ticking -- she worries about age diminishing her ability to conceive a child. Fred, who had in the meantime begun his studies, argues that if having children is so important to Marcia, she should have met someone earlier with whom to start a family, and angrily rejects her implication that he is depriving her of children. The couple is deadlocked: The more Marcia insists on her vision of their future, the more Fred holds to his current plans, each partner infuriating the other.

Vignette Two: Roger, 32, a corporate lawyer, and Tim, 30, an actor and waiter, came to therapy because of what they described as "trust issues." Tim had engaged in a number of casual sexual affairs, all while Roger was working late. Roger was devastated. Tim

states that he loves Roger and is quite committed, but complains that he gets frustrated "waiting around" for Roger to come home from work every night. Roger bitterly counters that he provides the bulk of the couple's financial support, and that if Tim worked a regular job, Tim would be more understanding of the pressures he lives under.

Vignette Three: Bill, a 40-year-old postal investigator, and Mary Lou, 38, an accountant, had been living together for 14 months and were considering marriage, the second for both. They were troubled by the frequency and intensity of their arguments over every aspect of maintaining the house. Bill took much longer to complete chores and "fix-it" tasks, whereas Mary Lou typically started immediately and worked extremely rapidly. Each believed the other's pace reflected the other's lack of commitment to doing a good job: Bill saw Mary Lou's speediness as reflecting an attempt to get things done as quickly as possible, irrespective of the quality of her work; Mary Lou saw Bill as a "tinkerer" who dragged things out because he hated doing them.

Vignette Four: Cecile, 26, and Tom, 27, both from wealthy families and both working for their own family's companies, describe themselves as having a passionate relationship and plan to marry. However, they describe frequent fights about when to go to bed. Cecile likes to take each evening as it comes, going to bed early if she feels like it, staying up late if the spirit moves her. Tom, on the other hand, believes strongly in adhering to a specific bedtime and waking time, and gets extremely tense and irritated when Cecile pushes him to change their bedtime. As the couple talks more, it appears

this difference extends to other areas, such as plans for the weekend: Tom likes to schedule things in advance; Cecile likes a more spontaneous approach. Each attributes the other's preferences to negative personality characteristics: Cecile sees Tom as uptight and "anal"; Tom sees Cecile as irresponsible and "flighty." Cecile wants to "go with the flow"; Tom wants "to take charge of his destiny."

<u>Vignette Five</u>: Tony, 52, a computer salesman, and Theresa, 48, a medical records clerk, are verging on divorce after years of conflict. Most prominent of their disagreements is that Tony has felt trapped by Theresa's insistence, from early in their marriage, that they have dinner seven nights a week with her family. Both are from a traditional Italian-American neighborhood and backgrounds, but they differ on how identified they are with their ethnic traditions. Tony insists that he loves her family and wants to spend time with them, but feels he and Theresa have never established their own family unit as primary. He never wanted to be "just one big happy family" with her parents and siblings. He insists that if they could spend fewer dinners with her family, and "not have it be so regular, so relentless," he'd be fine. Theresa believes that it is important for their children, now teenagers, to know their aging grandparents, and believes that having the dinners occur in a regular routine makes it easier to plan other activities.

Judy and Bert, both in their early thirties, came to therapy because Judy had concerns about the relationship that prevented her from agreeing to get married. She stated that they rarely had an uninterrupted evening together, and she attributed this to Bill's "boundary issues." Asked to elaborate, she noted that Bill wore his beeper at all

times – for a period, until she refused to sleep with him, he even brought it into bed –

and was available to speak with his company at all hours. Bert argued that his job

required him to be on call for emergencies, especially now, during a critical period in the

company's growth. Judy countered that she had spoken to the partners of some of

Bert's work colleagues, and they said they had simply insisted that their partners not

respond to the phone, beeper, or e-mail after a certain hour in the evening. Bert

responded that his role in the company was different (technical support) and required

him to be more accessible. He also feared that if he set any boundaries between himself

and work, he might not be considered for the next promotion. Bert also argued that

Judy's schedule of writing from 11 p.m. until 3 a.m., and waking up at 10 a.m. – long

after he'd gone off to work – was as much to blame for their lack of evenings and

"quality time" as was his phone availability to work.

        We contend that a core issue for all of these couples is how they handle time, and

how they experience each other from the perspective of time. The first couple struggles

with being "out of synch" in terms of what we call their "projected life chronologies" or

"personal time lines" – what they would like to be doing now and how that relates to

their imagined and planned futures. The second couple struggles with one partner (Tim)

feeling less powerful than the other (Roger), and distanced by the other, largely because

the other's work schedule affects the regularity and amount of their time together; Tim

has attempted to redress this power difference and his loneliness by going outside the

relationship for intimacy. The third couple struggles with differences in each partner's

pace or speed of doing things. In the fourth couple, each partner feels quite differently about the need for regularity in schedules, for future planning versus living in the moment – a difference in what we call "time perspective" – and for monitoring how they use time. In the fifth couple, the partners disagree about the allocation of time to extended family versus to their own family unit. And in the sixth couple, an increasingly common piece of communication technology – the pager – has erased one partner's boundary between work and private time, with the result that couple time suffers. In addition, a difference in daily rhythms (one partner staying up late, the other rising early) has all but eliminated time together.

Time is one of the most powerful, and yet largely unrecognized influences on the quality and organization of couples' lives. As we will describe in detail in this chapter, there are many reasons for the contemporary couple therapist to tune in to the temporal aspect of couple's lives and difficulties. For couples in distress, time-related problems -- such as differences in pace, mismatched daily schedules, different preferences for amount of time together versus apart, one partner's annoyance at the other's chronic lateness -- may be one of the explicit reasons they seek therapy. For others, problems in the temporal organization or patterning of their lives may underlie other problems, such as difficulty achieving intimacy, a lack of trust, or poor communication.

For instance, a couple's ineffective problem-solving or negotiating may be due in part to a rhythm of speech characterized by frequent interruptions and long silences; to differences between partners in preferences about how much time to allot to such

conversations; to unrealistic expectations about the speed at which they can resolve

problems; or to placement of problem discussions in an inopportune position in the

sequence of their daily schedule. Similarly, difficulties finding mutually-satisfying leisure

activities may be due largely to a virtual lack of any "down time" because of demanding

work schedules of one or both partners; differences in preferences regarding the pace of

the activity -- a quiet afternoon walk, versus whitewater rafting -- or different ideas

about how much time to devote to the activity on each occasion; different preferences

regarding how to sequence leisure activities with the other activities of the day (for

instance, chores); where to temporally locate leisure activities (one has more energy in

the morning, the other late at night), and how frequently to engage in the activity during

a week.

      As well as being a source of problems, the dimension of time can be a powerful

resource for change. In many cases, by helping couples identify and address the "time

side" of their difficulties and the temporal demands impinging on them from the larger

system, therapists can help partners move from "head-to-head" conflict -- in which

problems are attributed to each other's negative characteristics -- to a "side-by-side"

position in which partners work as a team to overcome a shared challenge.

      We begin by identifying aspects of contemporary life that are increasing

awareness of time as a critical resource for maintaining the quality of intimate relations.

We move next to a general theory of time in couples that is useful in clinical work as a

guide to assessment and treatment. Clinical vignettes will be used to illustrate key

theoretical points. We end with further clinical vignettes that illustrate creative use of time as a resource for change.

<div align="center">THE GROWING AWARENESS OF TIME AND ITS CHALLENGES</div>

Time is ubiquitous: It is a dimension of everything we do and of all our relationships, not only as part of a couple, but as part of a family, alone, with friends and extended family, and in the workplace. Time, therefore, is the basic resource necessary for all relationships to occur. With the advent of advanced telecommunications (telephone, fax, computer), people can sustain a relationship even when separated in space by thousands of miles, as long as they can make time for contact. Conversely, without some allocation of time and coordination in schedules between participants in a relationship, the relationship will end, or suffer dramatically in its quality.

Despite, or maybe because of the "ever-presentness" of time as an element of relationships, social scientists and therapists have paid relatively little attention to how time, in a variety of ways, affects the lives of couples. Yet as we head into the millennium, changing social and economic realities have raised the awareness of both professionals and lay persons about the powerful impact of time on relationships. As has been the case with other resources such as space, money, energy, or a clean environment, awareness of an essential resource and core aspect of life increases when there is (or at least, seems to be) less of it, and this now appears to be the case with time. In fact, some have called time "the most precious resource" (Lagerfeld, 1998, p. 60), the commodity of the 90s (Markman, Stanley, & Blumberg, 1994), and because of

certain trends in our culture, time is likely to become seemingly even more sparse and, therefore more valuable, in the 21st century. Even now there is a growing sense that we have less and less time in which to conduct our complex lives. The notion of "time scarcity" (Pronovost, 1989) or "time famine" (Daly, 1996, Hochschild, 1997) has permeated professional and public discourse (Daly, 1996; Galinsky, 1996), and there are emerging theories to explain this sense of diminished time, the sense of increased time pressures and of a frenetic pace of life, of fragmented, complicated schedules, and other signs of a subjective sense that there is a shortage of time (Daly, 1996; Fraenkel, 1994; Hochschild, 1997).

Although the growing experience of a diminished amount of time critically affects many couples, it is in some sense only the most general or grossest level at which we may understand how time can be a problem for relationships. Even prior to the sense of a time crunch, couples have struggled with issues having to do with time. Categories of time issues that we will discuss in this chapter include those experienced by the vignette couples, and more:

- Differences in pace or tempo between partners

- Differences in their tendencies to focus on the past versus the present or future (time perspective)

- Differences in desired daily and weekly schedules and struggles around who controls the schedule

- Differences in how to allocate and balance time among various activities and relationships (work versus home time, the couple relationship versus friends versus families of origin versus time alone)

- Differences in degree of punctuality

However, we start by outlining some aspects of contemporary life that appear to be leading to a general sense of diminished time for couple and family life. In particular, we devote considerable space to the temporal impact of the work environment on couple relationships, as we believe this will emerge as one of the most salient and challenging areas of difficulty for couples in the new millenium.

The Impact of Work on Couple Time

The contemporary couple therapist must understand the temporal impact of the workplace on couple and family relationships. The precarious balance between work and relationship time; the impact of a fast-paced, hectic work environment on the quality of intimate relationships; and the disjointing effects on partners of different work schedules are some of the most powerful systemic factors at play in relationships (Rowe & Bentley, 1992). Although couples have always had issues centering around work, in the past, problems occurred largely when one partner (typically the male) was unemployed or lost his job. Now, the problems center often around the sense of too much work – what could be called "overemployment": too long hours, too many jobs quilted together to make one viable income, juggling couple time and childcare with the often divergent work schedules of both partners, so on (Presser, 1989).

By the time couples come to therapy, they may have lost sight of the degree to which larger systems issues of work schedules -- over which they may experience little control --may play a part in their distress. By inquiring about the interface between work time and relationship time, the therapist can help warring partners view their problems as allies in terms of the larger context. The therapist may also need to help partners recognize their right to stand up to the often insidious, unreasonable demands of work, and to assist them to develop joint plans and strategies to "take back the time" for their relationship and their families.

Impact of hours worked. An overall trend toward spending more hours at work has been the single most powerful factor leading to the sense of diminished time for couple and family relationships. Over the past twenty years, across socioeconomic classes, there has been an increase in time devoted to work (Schor, 1991) and a decline in leisure time, resulting in a "time squeeze" (Leete & Schor, 1994). This time squeeze affects partners' time with each other, and for those who are parents, time with children. "Not only are Americans having fewer children than ever before, they are spending less time with the children they have" (Presser, 1989, p. 523). Consider the following facts from the 1992 National Study of the Changing Workforce (Galinsky, Bond, & Friedman, 1993):

♦	About half of workers report working more than a 40-hour week; almost one-fifth report working 50 hours a week or more; and 18% report working more than 5 days per week

•	The phenomenon of overwork appears to affect workers across socioeconomic

class[i]

- By and large, most people prefer not to work as much as they do. For instance, more advantaged workers (white male managers, professionals, and self-employed) hardly appear to be the "masters of their ships": Of those working more than 40 hours a week, 69 percent wanted to work less than a 40-hour week

♦ Compared with those working 40 hours or less, those working longer hours generally report more job autonomy and control over their schedules, but have more demanding and hectic jobs. And the demandingness/hecticness of one's job -- essentially, the <u>pace</u> at which one must get things done, another temporal aspect of life -- is significantly associated with job burnout, negative spillover from job to home, stress, and a sense of one's inability to cope effectively (Lagerfeld, 1998).

- The impact of all this work time on relationships? Simply stated, "The majority of workers do not feel they have enough time with their spouse/partner and/or their children" (Galinsky, 1996, p. 7). And this sense of not enough time with family directly relates to the number of hours worked.[ii]

In another study conducted by the Families and Work Institute (1995), a nationally representative sample of women indicated that their "greatest family concern" was the family not having enough time together -- this despite both men and women defining success at home as having time together with the family. Galinsky (1996) writes, "These

findings provide further evidence that individuals in the U.S. experience a time famine"

(p. 10).

One work-setting innovation to address the difficulty of balancing home and work

reponsibilities has been the creation of flexible work schedules (a.k.a., "flextime"). These

schedules allow workers to vary the time they begin or end work each day. Recent

Department of Labor statistics (Bureau of Labor Statistics, May 1997) indicate an almost

twofold increase in flextime programs, from 15 percent of employees sampled in 1991 to

28 percent in 1997.

However, in her recent book, The Time Bind, Arlie Hochschild (1997) reported on

the results of an extensive study of workers in one U.S. Fortune 500 company, and found

that most workers did not take advantage of programs designed to create more flexible

schedules or to cut down on work hours. Based on interviews, she concluded that

workers usually choose to work longer hours because they prefer to be in the work

environment -- where they are rewarded for their efforts, activities are structured and

organized, and civility and support characterizes relationships -- rather than at home,

where all of these features are often missing.

Although an interesting observation, other data suggest that employees do not

take advantage of these time-oriented programs because of concerns that they might be

perceived as less dedicated and hardworking, and so, more expendable.   Surveys show

that the U.S. is currently experiencing a period of low unemployment but high rates of

layoffs (Bureau of Labor Statistics, May 1997; Lohr, 1996), especially in the middle and

upper-middle classes (Uchitelle & Kleinfield, 1996).[iii]

Not surprisingly, these rates of job instability are affecting workers' sense of job security. Another survey found that, beginning in 1990, there has been a sharp increase in fears of losing one's job, with 46% polled stating that they were "frequently concerned about being laid off (Uchitelle, 1997)." In contrast, during the period 1979 to 1990, no more than 24% voiced this concern.

The growing sense of job insecurity has implications for workers and the amount of time they will put into their jobs, and their willingness to take advantage of flextime arrangements. Galinsky et al. (1993) found those still with a job averaged two hours more work per week than those in companies that had not experienced downsizing. A New York Times survey found 82 percent of workers survey said they would work longer hours, if needed, to keep their jobs (Uchitelle & Kleinfield, 1996). As Daly (1996) argues, "Although a number of corporations created family-friendly work policies in the 1980s and 1990s, they were often policies that were superimposed on a traditional work ethic. For many employees, these policies were occasions for the experience of contradiction: On the one hand, the opportunity to be attentive to family needs was available, and on the other, there was an expectation for continued high performance through long hours and company commitment (especially for those with promotion aspirations)" (p. 215).

An additional interesting fact with implications for worker's sense of job stability, as well as for issues of balancing work and family time, is that, although unemployment rates are down and thousands of new jobs have been created in recent years, nearly 15

percent of those jobs are temporary positions, "a category that barely existed 20 years

ago" (Uchitelle, 1998). (The nation's largest employer is a temporary help agency,

Manpower, Inc., [Uchitelle & Kleinfield, 1996]). This may have major implications for

couples' ability to set temporal boundaries between work and home: With each new

temporary placement, they must renegotiate this boundary, and adjust the rhythms of

family life.

     Likewise, financial pressures drive people to work longer hours, to tolerate a sense

of time pressure, and to choose work time over family time. In the Whirlpool study

(Families and Work Institute, 1995), 92% of employed women reported a sense of time

pressure, 34% described themselves as extremely pressed. Yet asked whether they

would choose more money or more time, more women choose money over time overall,

although this depends on income: Those with higher incomes (more than $50,000) were

more likely to choose time over money than those with lower incomes. "It is only when

money is removed from the equation that many workers report opting for fewer

scheduled work hours" (Galinsky, 1996, p. 15).

Impact of the pace of work. Although the majority consensus among demographers is

that time at work in the U.S. has increased over the past several decades, some argue

that it has actually decreased, with the possible exception of those in managerial and

professional occupations (see review by Lagerfeld, 1998). However, all agree that the

pace of work life has generally increased. As downsizing has reduced the number of

employees in many companies, those left on the job find themselves with more to

accomplish in the same amount of time (Schor, 1991). Hectic, fast-paced jobs create more job burnout and stress, which affect relationships through partners being emotionally tense and physically drained, and so, likely to be more reactive to problems in the relationship. Although problem-solving discussions have probably never been high on the list of preferred ways to spend time with one's partner, the increased intensity of work life may have made such discussions even less appealing. As one couple said in a therapy session, "It's like we have to have one more business meeting, and we've had our fill of these by the end of the work week".

In addition, the speed at which problems are expected to be resolved, and at which communication occurs in the work environment -- aided by a plethora of technological aides -- sets a new and unrealistic standard for couples attempting to resolve emotional and relational problems -- problems that may not yield to a quick discussion and rapidly-developed intervention. The kind of open-ended exploration of one another's beliefs, feelings, perceptions, and past experiences sometimes necessary when partners attempt to get to know one another better, find compromises, and make accommodations to one another takes time, and typically moves at a slower pace than the temporal demands and pace of work allow.

Impact of different work schedules. The challenges posed to couples by the sheer number of work hours of one or both partners, and by the need to "downshift" from the pace of work life to the pace of relationships, are increased by the reality that the daily schedules of both partners often may not coincide. The most dramatic version of this

occurs when one partner works a day shift (including partners whose work is childcare and/or housework, typically daytime activities), and the other works a night shift. Shift workers have long been identified as being at greater risk for relationship and family difficulties (Hoffman, 1987; Voydanoff, 1988; Voydanoff & Kelly, 1984). However, sometimes it is relatively small disjunctions in schedules that separate partners enough so that they share virtually no daily activities together.

For example, in one couple seen in therapy, the husband rose at 5:30 a.m. each day so as to catch a 6:20 a.m. train to the city. His wife, who worked until 9 p.m. each night and often did not get home until 10:30 p.m., rose at 7:00 a.m. By the time she returned -- "wired and ready to talk" -- her husband, having returned home by 8:00 p.m., would typically be winding down and getting ready for bed, or already asleep. Although they spoke over the phone daily, they shared no meals together and essentially no time together during the week. In this case, the temporal dyssynchrony between partners was not huge -- one and a half hours different in the morning, and two and a half hours in the evening -- but it was large enough to place them in two temporally separate lives. Before implementing any other changes in their presenting problem -- a self-described lack of "sexual and emotional intimacy" -- this couple needed to renegotiate and recalibrate the boundary between work and home life that preempted time together and even the possibility of intimacy.

The growth of dual career couples, the subject of another chapter of the present book, has contributed greatly to the increased disjunction in the daily rhythms of

couples and families (Daly, 1996) and the "speed up of work and family life" (Hochschild,

1989, p. 9). According to a recent survey (Bureau of Labor Statistics, March 1997), both

partners work in more than half of all married couples, and over the last few years there

has been a steady increase of dual earner couples, with more than 800,000 more added

to this group in 1995-1997 alone. As the above clinical example demonstrates, when

two persons work outside of the home, and each is "entrained" or scheduled by the

requirements of their workplace, as well as by the commuting times and schedules to

and fro, it often becomes extraordinarily complex to arrange simple acts like

conversation and meals together.[iv]

One positive result of this time disjunction between partners' work schedules is

that fathers are then more available for childcare.[v] However, from the perspective of

family time and couple time together, the increasing disjunction of work schedules

between partners is highly problematic. Even more than many single-earner couples,

dual-earner families are likely to be "time poor" (Crouter & Crowley, 1990, p. 297).

In addition, studies of dual career couples have found partners struggling even

harder than single career couples to keep a boundary between work and home life

(Lewis & Cooper, 1989). Not surprisingly, dual career parents report one of their

challenging issues is that of time management (Lewis & Cooper, 1989).

Impact of commuting. Prior to the advent of mass transportation (trains, buses) and

especially, the personal automobile, most people worked within walking distance (or at

most, a horseride's distance) of their home. As a result of the growth of modern

transportation and the decentralization of metropolitan areas, most people commute to work. One recent survey found that U.S. residents commute an average of 3.6 hours a week (approximately 38 minutes a day), with men commuting longer (an average of 50 minutes a day) than women (Galinsky et al., 1993). Commuting distances have increased dramatically. Between 1983 and 1995, the average commuting distance increased by 36.5%. However, commuting time only increased by 14% -- because commuters are traveling 20% faster (Federal Highway Administration, 1997). Rush hours in urban centers can markedly increase the time needed to commute.

Obviously, commuting adds to the already long work hours away from partner and family. In addition, the need to fit at least some chores and other family responsibilities into the workday has led commute times to be filled with increasingly complex sequences of activity -- a phenomenon known as "trip chaining." Not surprisingly, because women still handle most of the home and childcare responsibilities, women workers are "substantially more likely to link trips and to link multiple trips when they do" than are men -- especially mothers with small children (Rosenbloom, 1998, p. 77). The complex sequencing necessary to carry out "trip chaining" can add to the frantic quality of the day, resulting in exhaustion and stress which may affect the quality of the couple's interaction once they reunite in the evening; and may further contribute to resentments of wives towards husbands in couples where the burdens of trip chaining are unequally distributed.

For an increasing number of long distance couples, the commute to and from

work requires living apart some or much of the time. Work may require partners to live in separate cities, states, or countries for months or years, seeing each other only on weekends or even less frequently. These couples often "live in different temporal worlds with relatively low levels of intersection" (Daly, 1996, p. 34), creating great challenges to sustaining a sense of closeness and a shared life. Recent census reports indicate a growth of these commuter relationships, from 1.45 million in 1990 to 2.1 million in 1996.[vi]

Impact of business travel. The globalization of the world's economy, made possible in large part by the advent of rapid forms of communication technology that instantaneously transmit information across time zones, has led to the growing cohort of so-called Frequent Business Travelers. "The 'borderless economy' we hear trumpeted so often means that today's businessmen and women have to live everywhere at once, and the speed of global communications means that they can be anywhere tomorrow" (Iyer, 1998, p. 38). These F.B.T.s spend a significant proportion of their time far away from home -- often working in several countries in as many days. Although for some, the work may be exciting, and the potential for national or international travel may initially seem a glamorous job perk, many soon tire of the grind and accompanying separation from partners and children (Rayner, 1998). As one international consultant on his way to Moscow said, "I love the work and I'm excited about going to Moscow...But I dread the evenings. I honestly do. Missing my family. Never feeling comfortable. Still, this is my business and my choice" (Rayner, 1998, p. 44). Another executive, a divorced mother of

a 10-year old daughter, noted, "The rhythm is what I miss. I liken it to piano lessons. If you don't practice everyday, you can't get ahead, you get out of the rhythm. There are some things that require constant attention. Children, especially. And friendship. That has to be worked on. I no longer make friends, because I'm constantly jerked in and out of my life...Whatever I do, my life feels all turned around, as if I can't focus on what really matters to me" (Rayner, 1998, p. 44).

Numerous relationship problems can result when one or both partners regularly travel for business. Most obviously, such travel drastically reduces the amount of time partners have for each other. As seen above, it also may limit or entirely eliminate a sense of temporal regularity or rhythmicity in their lives together -- rhythms of time apart versus together, rhythms of sharing household chores, and so on. In addition, the transitions of the traveling partner's departures and returns can be extremely stressful (Rayner, 1998) -- emotionally, through the repeated separations and reunifications; and logistically, in terms of the need to center the couple's life (meals, sleep schedules, sex, socializing, family time) around these transitions, as well as due to transitioning back and forth from a two-partner or two-parent to a one-partner/one-parent household.

Frequent business travel may also bring stress on the relationship because the traveler frequently comes home ill or psychologically distressed.[vii] In addition to the relationship stress that accompanies acute or chronic disorders, travelers who come home sick are not fully available to engage in the pleasures of relationship, or to pick up their end of the slack of household responsibilities. "Study after study shows that now

that we can get from Hong Kong to New York in 14 hours, instead of 21 days, we're not

using those extra 20 days for doing something useful; we're just moving back and forth

more, and recovering from the flights" (Iyer, 1998, p. 38).

Gender differences in work-family pressures. Although the challenge of balancing work,

relationship, and family is experienced by both men and women, data show that women

continue to shoulder more of the burden of temporal complexity than do men

(Hochschild, 1989). For instance, although men in dual career couples provide more

childcare than men who are the sole providers, women remain by far the primary

caregivers, whether they also work or not (Galinsky et al., 1993). Regarding the division

of household responsibilities: in couples in which women contribute at least 50% of the

family income, men did more cooking but less household repairs than in couples in

which women contribute less than 50% income. As noted above, women also do much

more home- and childcare-related "trip chaining" on their commutes to and from work

than do men. Interestingly, the gender inequity in handling childcare and household

responsibilities has not changed for couples in the younger, post-feminist-revolution

generation (Galinsky et al., 1993). Also, it is interesting to note that when women work

nonday shifts, the reason most frequently cited is the need to balance childcare or care

for other family members (for instance, elderly parents, to be discussed shortly).

Thirteen percent of women cited this as the reason for working nonday shifts, as

opposed to 3 percent of men.

      With the current increase in home-based work for both men and women (Rowe &

Bentley, 1992), it is interesting to ask whether the typical gender split around work versus childcare and household responsibilities is more equitable for home-based workers. Data suggest that, once again, home-based working women in single-parent and two-parent families carry out more of these family responsibilities than do home-based working men. Additionally, home-based working women are less likely to have a separate work space than are men, make less money, and do more restructuring of their time than do men (Rowe & Bentley, 1992).

As our review indicates, men directly face certain work-related time problems more than do women: most notably, they are more likely to be Frequent Business Travelers, and have generally longer commutes. However, it could be argued that these commuting problems create equal problems for men and women, as they are likely to result in even more of a gender split regarding child and home care. Clearly, although both men and women struggle and suffer with balancing work and couple/family life, working women, especially women with children, have more to balance than do men.

Summary: The Impact of Work on Relationship Time. In sum, long hours, the often frenetic pace of work life, complex, often mismatched work schedules, increased commuting times, prolonged periods of physical separation for work purposes, and the rise of business travel have had a major impact on partners' amount and quality of time together, creating new challenges for couples in how they get "in synch" so as to sustain intimacy and shared enjoyment, raise families, solve problems, and build a life together.

In addition, the continued imbalance between men and women in the division of labor around childcare and the household can be exacerbated by the temporal pressures of work. Thus, when contemporary couples present in therapy with complaints of feeling distant, a flammable style of discussing problems, sexual difficulties, and other common complaints, it is now critical that the therapist inquire about the temporal patterns of work, as these constitute one of the most powerful contextual forces that gives form to their relationship.

The Impact of Technology on Couple Time

Over the past 20 years, the rapid development and availability of communication and information technology has had powerful effects on couples, families, and their time (Silverstone, 1993). First, computers provide a powerful, stimulating source of activities that more often separate partners than bring them together. Despite advertisements depicting partners, or a parent and a child cozily interacting together with a computer, most computer-based activities are solitary in nature. In fact, with online services providing e-mail and chat rooms, the partner on the computer is often more deeply engrossed with someone sitting at another computer hundreds or even thousands of miles away than with his or her partner in the next room. Although we are not aware of any reliable statistics on this phenomenon, our clinical experiences over the past few years and those of many colleagues testify to an explosion of "cyberspace affairs" -- some of which remain "virtual," and others of which lead to actual physical encounters. While some couples may use email to connect with each other during time apart, for

those in which commitment has flagged in at least one partner, the computer provides a

ready medium to connect with others. In short, time that could be spent in face-to-face

contact is increasingly spent with at least one partner facing a computer screen -- while

the other partner is often engrossed with another screen, such as the television.

Second, the advent of home-based personal computers and laptops, e-mail, and

facsimile machines has essentially erased the physical boundary between home and the

workplace. These machines and services have given a whole new meaning to "taking

work home from the office." Although professionals have long brought home paperwork

to read over or complete, the new technologies now make it possible (and so, often

implicitly demand) to send your completed work back to the office electronically, and

allow a virtually endless stream of new work to enter the home. As a result, the only

boundary left between work and home (and so, the couple's relationship) is the <u>temporal</u>

<u>boundary</u> set by one or both partners -- that is, the decision to stop working after a

certain time of the day, or for certain periods of the day (e.g., dinner time). The

challenge of establishing and maintaining this temporal boundary is that -- unlike the

physical distance between the office and the home -- it is essentially arbitrary, and based

on a choice. When faced with a pressing deadline or crisis at work, or when things are

getting difficult in the relationship for other reasons, it becomes relatively easy to

suspend the temporal boundary, go online, and get back to work.

Not that leaving the home guarantees a clearer boundary between one's

relationship time and work. Cellular phones and beepers keep the worker constantly

linked to the workplace, accessible at any time. With such complete communication linkage to work, the worker is forced to negotiate time limits with the workplace in a manner that ten years ago couldn't be conceived. And the Frequent Business Travelers described earlier are no more free from this linkage than those who remain on the ground, near the worksite. "Travel used to hold out the promise of time to relax, to chill, maybe even to do some creative thinking. Now (encroached upon by cell phones, sky phones, laptops), business is relentless..." (Rayner, 1998, p. 46). This constant interaction with the worksite gives F.B.T.s no down time -- with the result that despite days or weeks apart from their partners, they may feel an urgent need for noninteractive time alone once they return home, resulting in further time deprivation for the couple.

Third, the speed at which information/communication technologies operate provides both a real sense of acceleration and compression of time, as well as a powerful metaphor of speed as good and progressive, and slowness as old and retrograde. The sense of acceleration results simply from operating the new technologies -- with which massive amounts of data can be "processed" almost instantaneously -- as well as from the new norms these technologies create for the speed at which we are expected to respond to incoming communications (Daly, 1996; Shaw, 1994). Pressed to respond immediately to e-mail, cell phone, beeper, and faxes, partners often find their relationship time interrupted or postponed. The case of Judy and Bert, presented at the beginning of this chapter, is a typical example of the problems that arise at the interface of technology and relationships. As Daly (1996) writes, "...although computers and

telecommunication networks offer more flexibility in when information is accessed or transmitted, they do demand greater diligence when individuals are called on to respond" (p. 36).

As a metaphor, technological acceleration has led to "an intolerance for waiting and a desire for immediate results and gratification" (Daly, 1996, p. 34). This standard of immediate gratification may contribute to the growing popularity of books and magazine articles that feature checklists and rules to guide rapid selection of prospective mates (c.f., The Rules, Fein & Schneider, 1995), and to the advent of the current phrase, "Dump him (her)" -- a phrase used by the twenty-something set to suggest to a friend that they quickly move on to the next romantic prospect once problems arise with the current one. As the flow of information and wide access to alternatives speeds up, the temporal norms of "courting" (itself a quaint, out-of-date phrase that connotes slowly seducing or getting to know a prospective mate) are changing. In this speeded-up world, lost are the pleasures of slowly getting to know the other as a prelude to the first sexual encounter (Kierkegaard, 1843/1946; Kundera, 1995).

In addition, with our speedy telecommunications providing instant access to a wide variety of information, consumer goods, entertainment, and services, one or both partners can become increasingly preoccupied with acquiring the new and updating the old. Aside from taking away time from the relationship in favor of rampant consumerism, this increased emphasis on "the new" and on "upgrading" may work metaphorically on people's attitudes towards relationships. As Daly (1996) writes in a

comment on Lyotard's (1984) and other authors' work on the "post-modern condition",

acceleration leads to "a heightened 'temporariness' of values, things, and relationships.

More specifically, in a 'throwaway society' people are willing to throw away not only

produced goods but also values, lifestyles, stable relationships, attachments to people,

and received ways of doing and being (Harvey, 1989). In families there is a reduced

sense of trust and commitment over the generations, with family relationships being

much more disposable and temporary (Urry, 1994)" (pp. 34-35).

The acceleration of information exchange in the culture at large is also manifested

in the explosion over the last 10 years of books and television shows in which strangers

immediately reveal their most private experiences (Imber-Black, 1998). As information

technologies lead people to expect more from others faster, their temporal expectations

(for intimacy, self-revelation, commitment) may put such pressure on the flow and

development of relationships that, coupled with the decreased amount of time available

for relationships because of work schedules and other commitments, relationships are

incubated in a temporal pressure cooker that does not allow partners to get to know

each other well before making a lifelong commitment. This may contribute to two

recent marital phenomena -- so-called "starter marriages," in which people in their

twenties marry and divorce within two or three years (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1992;

Fischer, 1992), without children or other binding commitments; and the increased

practice of cohabiting prior to marriage, which might be seen as the only way to

counteract the speeded-up pace of life surrounding courtship (Bumpass & Sweet, 1989).

The sense of acceleration in the society at large also presents new challenges to couples as they attempt to "downshift" from the fast-paced life of work, commuting, and technology-based communication to the pace of human relationships. Probably at no time does this shift seem as dramatic as when a couple has their first child. Infants operate largely on biologically determined sleep-wake cycles, and require more sustained and slower-paced attention as they develop their attachments to the primary caregivers.

As children grow older, they are socialized to pick up the pace, and often, the plethora of after-school activities, intertwined with parents complex work schedules, results in an even more frenetic daily schedule. "Family calendars that are filled with work, lessons, and appointments create angst about 'fitting it all in'. The dominant discourse of current social time patterns is a discourse of 'crisis' that rests on the notion of an ever-increasing acceleration of time (Pasero, 1994)" (as referenced in Daly, 1996, p. 14). The struggle of partners to slow the pace enough to connect with each other, and for parents, to connect with their children, may be one of the major challenges of our era.

Other Factors that Affect Couple Time

Three other increasingly common features of contemporary family life that create new time challenges for couples are multiple caretaking responsibilities, divorced and remarried families, and the growth of bicultural relationships.

Multiple caretaking responsibilities. With an increasing number of persons living well into their 70s, 80s, and 90s, the children of these older adults are often placed in a position of caring for their parents even as they raise families of their own (Miller, 1981; Neal, Chapman, Ingersoll-Dayton, & Emlen, 1993)[viii]. According to Daly (1996), "an analysis of the current research indicates approximately one quarter to one third of employees provide care to an elderly person, that most (72%) adult children caring for parents are women, and that almost half of these caregivers were parents to children under the age of 18 living in their household (Neal et al., 1993)" (p. 196). As members of the older generation age, they may acquire chronic illnesses, housing difficulties, and money shortages, all of which their children may be required to assist with. Along with the need to allocate financial and sometimes space resources to meet these needs, adult children often feel an increased time crunch in tending to their parents. Daly writes, "The greatest impact of trying to manage caregiving responsibilities, paid work, family, and personal roles is with respect to time: Caregivers report that they have less time and energy available for meeting the demands of any of their roles -- for work, caregiving, or themselves (Scharlach, 1994)" (p. 196).

As we noted earlier, that women shoulder the bulk of caregiving both for their children and the elder parents -- irrespective of whether they work or not -- provides an additional source of potential conflict within couple relationships. Resentments may build as women's work lives may more often be affected by the competing demands of caretaking than are men's (Scharlach, 1994); and because they may feel that they have

little or no free time, responding constantly to the needs of others (Henderson & Allen, 1991).

<u>Divorced and remarried families</u>. Couples in which one or more partner has been previously married and/or had children find themselves juggling time with their children from the previous marriage, children from the current relationship, and sometimes, their partner's children from a previous marriage, along with the usual struggles of balancing work and home time, time together as a couple versus time alone, etc. (Daly, 1996). Another chapter in the present book (Katz) describes the special challenges of divorced and remarried couples.

<u>Growth of bicultural relationships</u>. As the world increasingly becomes a global community, there is a growing number of couple relationships formed of partners from different cultural, racial, and ethnic backgrounds (for review, see chapter by Esther Perel in this book). Given that different cultures often embody quite different beliefs about time and patterns of pace, scheduling, punctuality, time perspective, and time allocation (Daly, 1996; Hall, 1983; Levine, 1997), partners emerging from their respective cultures may bring with them certain temporal expectations that clash with one another. In some cases, the conflicts that emerge reflect stereotyped differences between cultures: in others, the differences between partners contradict stereotypes. As in all work with culture and couples, therapists working with temporal problems in bicultural couples need to use general assumptions as no more than a starting point from which to explore the nature of each partner's understanding of and identification with his or her culture(s)

of origin. Two examples illustrate this point.

One couple seen in therapy, whose temporal struggles fit stereotyped differences between their cultures in how time was viewed, included an African (Kenyan) male and an Anglo (British ex-patriate) female. The female partner was quite future oriented, and was concerned with monitoring how the couple used its time and whether present activities were adequately linked to achieving future goals. For instance, she preferred leisure activities in which the couple "learned something" and gradually built expertise in an area of interest. Her husband much more advocated living in the moment, described a more fatalistic view of time ("Why worry about the future? Things just take care of themselves."), and enjoyed leisure activities that immersed the couple in "here-and-now" pleasures, without thought of what these would achieve.

Another couple's temporal difficulties violated cultural stereotypes. The male was Italian-American, third generation, while the female was first-generation German. Their conflicts centered around her chronic lateness to appointments and airline flights. The husband noted (wth frustration) that he couldn't understand how his wife was always so late, because he always thought Germans valued punctuality. He noted further that her parents and siblings appeared to share her tendency toward lateness, which further puzzled him. He noted that, if anything, Italians were supposed to be the "laid-back" ones about time. As they explored the family of origin roots of each of their beliefs and practices regarding punctuality, both realized that their families had developed their respective practices around punctuality as part of distinguishing themselves from the

stereotypes about their cultural groups. Her parents, who were children during the Nazi era, were deeply ashamed of much that was German, especially the "uptightness," orderliness, and efficiency that they saw linked to the extermination of the Jews. One salient manifestation of this orderliness was the German emphasis on punctuality, so the parents, and then their children, made it a practice always to be a bit late and to reject worrying about being one time. The husband's immigrant grandparents, who had humble beginnings in working class professions, had started businesses that built considerable family fortunes. One family tradition, especially drawn from the paternal grandparents, was to be on time for everything, and to view those who were late as "peasants." Understanding the family of origin roots of their beliefs and habits around punctuality brought each partner greater empathy for the other, and allowed the couple the freedom to begin to build their own family traditions, that blended the best from each of their backgrounds.

Summary: Impact of Contemporary Factors on Couple Time

We have reviewed key aspects of the contemporary social and economic context that create special temporal problems for couples in the 1990s, and that will continue to do so into the 21st century: the various pressures and complexities brought on by the intensified work environment, by technology, by the need to take care simultaneously of the younger and older generations, by the high rates of divorce and remarriage, and by the growth of bicultural couples. Although we can safely assume that couples have struggled with time issues in all eras of human history, the time pressures experienced

by contemporary couples, and that are likely to increase in the new millennium, may have intensified the degree to which couples have issues that involve time. As Daly (1996) writes, "Not only has time become more precious, but it has become more contentious...As both women and men struggle for a sense of balance in both public and private domains, issues of entitlement to personal time, commitment to work and family, and access to traditional privileges boil to the surface" (p. 144).

We now turn to a more general theory for understanding and intervening in the temporal struggles of couples.

A THEORY OF TIME IN COUPLE RELATIONSHIPS

It is critical, especially in the early phase of exploring a dimension of couple life, to articulate a theory that can guide formal research, clinical assessment, and development of clinical interventions. The initial theory is then revised and refined based on its degree of usefulness to researchers and clinicians in "capturing" experiences in the lives of couples. The theory we present in this chapter, described in detail in previous publications (Fraenkel, 1994, 1996) has been guiding aspects of our clinical practice and research for the past several years, and is the basis for ongoing research in the Ackerman Institute's Study on Time, Work, Technology, and the Family. We present it here still as a theory in evolution, and welcome readers' comments and suggestions. We will intersperse short clinical vignettes to illustrate key premises of the theory. Some of these vignettes will also demonstrate therapeutic interventions around time problems.

Premise One: Time Affects and is Affected by Couple Satisfaction

The first key premise in this theory is that how couples evolve, organize, and experience the temporal dimension of their lives can greatly affect their overall satisfaction with the relationship. In another words, time matters to couples. The patterning of the couple's life in terms of time is important to their sense of couplehood. Such temporal elements as the degree of similarity between partners in pace or tempo of their actions; the preferences each holds for amount of time together or apart, or amount of time spent in work versus in relationship activities, or with extended family versus alone; the degree of match between each partner in terms of where they see themselves now and where they see their lives going over the next year, five years, ten years; whether both partners enjoy focusing on and planning for the future, or living for the present, or reflecting on the past, or whether each partner has a <u>different</u> dominant time perspective focus; all of these and other aspects of a life lived in time can create harmony or difficulty for the couple.

A sub-premise is that the relationship between time patterns and couple satisfaction is bidirectional and often recursive. For some couples, problems in coordinating schedules, synchronizing paces, allocation of time, and the like may lead to distress; for other couples, distress due to other reasons may lead partners to change their schedules so that they have little time together, may lead to frequent arguments about how to spend time, and so on. And as time problems continue, they may exacerbate other problems, and vice-versa.

<u>Premise Two: The Meaning of the Temporal Pattern is More Important than the Pattern</u>

Itself

The second premise is that there is not one single, or simple, temporal pattern that correlates best with couple harmony or disharmony. People are complex, and couples, therefore, even more so. What is more important than the objective, quantifiable pattern of time allocation, pace differences between partners, and so on is the meanings partners attribute to these patterns (Fraenkel, 1994; Daly, 1996). Our ongoing qualitative research and clinical experience argues against simple hypotheses, such as that partners whose daily patterns on the inactivity-activity (sleep-wake) cycle do not match are likely to experience less martial adjustment than couples in which the partners are well matched (Adams & Cromwell, 1978; Darnley, 1981; Larson, Crane, & Smith, 1991). A high degree of temporal coordination between partners may characterize highly satisfied couples as well as highly distressed couples, depending upon the degree to which this coordination embodies the preferences of each partner (especially in regards to degree of closeness and equity in power, described more below).

Consider a couple with a highly synchronized daily schedule -- they get up together, leave the house together, drive together to and from work, talk on the phone two or three times together during the day, spend almost all their recreational time together, eat dinner together at night, and go to sleep together. Sounds like a happy couple, right? Viewed simply from the perspective of the schedule of their routines, this would appear to be so. However, consider a couple in which the husband is extremely

controlling, mistrustful, and perhaps even physically intimidating or abusive. He may demand this high degree of temporal synchrony with his wife, which the wife violates at her peril. In fact, research on couples in which there is violence indicates that a significant percentage of these couples have such highly synchronized schedules, enforced by the husband (see Jacobson & Gottman, 1998). This example dramatically illustrates the need to probe the meaning and evolution of couples' schedules.

It is also important to note that a high degree of coordination between partner schedules does not in itself mean that they share much time together. Two partners' schedules may be extremely regular, on their own and in relationship to each other. However, this coordination may bring the partners together (for waking and bedtimes, meals, and so on), or may be a perfectly choreographed dance of distance: If one partner wakes up and leaves for work while the other sleeps, and returns home and goes to bed before the returns, this couple may be perfectly synchronized and yet never see each other. Understanding the temporal life of couples means conducting a detailed inquiry about the actual patterns, their impact on the couple, and the meanings these patterns hold for each partner.

Two other short vignettes further illustrate how the meaning attributed to time patterns is more important than the actual pattern itself. Rick and Elaine, a couple in their early 30s, both have demanding jobs in finance. One of the only areas of conflict between them -- but one that threatens to end their relationship -- is Rick's aggravation when Elaine is late. She frequently comes home late from the office -- on average, one

hour later than the time she indicates when she calls him, already running one to two hours late. Elaine states that she is frequently overwhelmed with work, finds it better to stay and complete a task rather than leave it half done for tomorrow, and agrees that it is hard for her to set limits at work. Her attempts to respond to Rick's upset by getting home earlier have not worked.

In tracing the theme of time in both of their families, it became clear that for Rick, punctuality was one of the only ways in which he experienced a sense of "normalcy" and "regularity" (his words) in his family. His mother had a severe bipolar illness, which made her mood (and therefore, the mood of the family) quite unpredictable. Rick's access to his mother for caretaking was likewise unpredictable. His father's attempts to control his wife's behavior during these episodes often involved high levels of verbal intimidation, which was extremely upsetting to Rick. However, the one "rule" that the whole family, including his mother, adhered to readily -- whether in or out of an episode -- was that of the need to be on time -- for family meals, getting out the door for family trips, and so on. Likewise, being on time was the one area of family life that Rick's father monitored and guided without intimidation. Thus, regularity in punctuality represented an aspect of family life that Rick could count on amidst the turmoil, and it was an oasis from the high levels of negative affect that otherwise characterized the family.

For Elaine, being late was the one way she felt she could exercise some degree of control and independence from her family. She described herself as the "good child" in her family, studious and responsible, while her brother had school and drug problems.

She went into business ambivalently, largely at the urging of her father. Now she frequently found herself overwhelmed and unhappy at her work, yet feeling that she had to show her family and herself that she could master the profession. As we explored the meaning of "lateness" for her, it emerged with two facets: First, being late coming home from work demonstrated to "everyone" (mostly herself and her internalized parents) that she was working as hard as she could, was beyond reproach -- and nonverbally was her way of saying, "don't ask one more thing from me". Second, being late nonverbally stated, "You can't control me".

The session with Rick in which we discussed the meaning of time in his family occurred one one evening when Elaine was running so late that she entirely missed the appointment. In fact, it was her lateness to the session that led him to return to this topic, which the couple had spoken about in the first session. In the following week, Rick arrived on time, and Elaine again was late, not arriving until a half hour later. Asked how he felt about Elaine's lateness this week and this evening, Rick seemed genuinely relaxed about it. He noted that throughout the week, he found himself accepting Elaine's lateness without upset -- more just a longing that she would come home so that they could spend time together. Asked what he thought led to the dramatic shift, he said that understanding the family of origin basis of his own intense reaction to her lateness, and hearing what lateness meant to Elaine, had completely changed his perspective. Two weeks later (in the first session that Elaine came to on time -- she was never late to sessions after this), both partners noted that they were no longer struggling about time.

Both reported that Elaine continued to come home late, but not as often, or as late.

Asked to explain the change, Elaine commented, "I've got to confess, I think for me it

was a power thing -- the more he asked me to be on time, the more I was late. Now

that Rick isn't bugging me about being late, I'm on time."

Thus, for this couple, understanding the meanings of the time pattern for each

partner had more impact on relieving their tensions about it than actually changing the

pattern; and the change in meaning led to a shift in the day-to-day interactions around

time that actually led to a shift in Elaine's behavior.

A second vignette that illustrates the importance of the meaning of time patterns

rather than the quantifiable patterns themselves centers on the issue of pace differences.

 For Bill and Mary-Lou, one of the couples presented at the beginning of this chapter,

the differences in their respective paces of completing household chores represented to

each of them that the other did not care enough to do a good job. However, in other

areas of their lives, their pace differences worked to enhance the relationship and each

partner's appreciation of the other. For instance, on vacations, Mary-Lou benefited from

Bill's predilection to take it "slow and easy", so that they always began and ended their

trips with some "down time" by a lake or beach. Concomitantly, Bill enjoyed that Mary-

Lou's tendency to seek faster-paced activities led them to do things like take a high

speed boat trip, go on rides at an amusement park, and visit three museums in a day (a

practice they called "speed-viewing"). Once I (as the therapist) pointed out the

fundamental differences in their paces and how these in some ways worked for them

and in other ways caused conflict, the couple had a wider frame with which to understand their relationship and to anticipate, explain, and resolve problems.

<u>Premise Three: Temporal Difficulties Readily Reveal Problems with Closeness and Power</u>

The third key premise of the theory is that how a couple evolves their daily, weekly, and yearly rhythms, and handles time issues more generally, reflects much about their issues and preferences regarding closeness/connectedness, and power. Therefore, hearing from couples their narratives about how their rhythms and time patterns evolved over time, who had the most to say about the form of these patterns, and each partner's degree of satisfaction with these patterns, is a quick way for the therapist to obtain a sense of how each partner feels about the degree of closeness and degree of power-sharing between them.

The above example of Rick and Elaine illustrates how struggles around closeness and power emerge in the dimension of time. The problems of another couple, Mike and Laura, also illustrate this point well. Mike, an international lawyer, travels for business at least twice a month. When in town, his daily schedule is erratic, dependent on the demands of clients for meetings, dinners, emergency phone calls, and so on. In contrast, Laura, a magazine designer, has a regular schedule: At work by 8:00 a.m., home by 6:00 p.m. As a result, each day Laura asks Mike, "When will you be home?" Mike becomes anxious at this question, knowing that the answer he gives in the morning may need to be changed by the afternoon. Laura has become increasingly frustrated with Mike and his unpredictable schedule, as it keeps them from being able to make definite plans

about dinner, social engagements, and the like. In addition, at times when she speaks to him (often by cell phone) when he is out of town or in town but with clients, and he sounds happy, she finds herself feeling angry and resentful, as she believes that if they are going to be apart because of his business, he should at least be unhappy about it. In turn, Mike finds Laura's attitude selfish and unreasonable, and feels he can be unhappy that they're apart while at the same time happy that business is going well -- especially, he notes, because he provides the bulk of their income. The conflict around the temporal irregularity of Mike's schedule has become one of the major issues preventing Mike from proposing marriage.

As we explored this issue in therapy, it emerged that Laura felt Mike held all the control in this relationship. For her, his erratic schedule and her need to wait on him if they were to have time together represented both a symbol of his greater control, as well as the most salient actual example of his greater power. She also perceived Mike to have greater control because of his significantly higher salary and more prestigious career. For his part, Mike acknowledged how his higher salary seemed to give him more power in the relationship, and could see how Laura felt he had more control of their time together and daily rhythms. However, he emphasized that, despite his powerful career, he usually did not feel in control of his schedule, either. He explained how his clients and their often last-minute demands forced him to bend his preferred schedule to their needs. He noted that he felt Laura often confused his happiness that things were going well with work, with her belief that he completely enjoyed his work life. He spoke with

much emotion of feeling torn on a daily basis between his work/career demands (the fulfillment of which he saw as tied to their financial well-being and future), and his wish to have a more relaxed and temporally regular life, with plenty of time with Laura and the family they hoped to have one day.

Before launching into attempts to solve their temporal problem, I asked each to reflect back on what had attracted each to the other when they first met. In addition to the physical intellectual attraction each held for the other, Mike noted that he had dated other "high-powered lawyer and business types", who had schedules similar to his, and found these relationships unappealing in the end, because "between the two of us, we could never seem to see each other long enough to develop the relationship". Work always seemed to win over relationship time. Mike found Laura's "normal" work day and her balance between career and other aspects of life extremely appealing -- a balance he aspired to but never seemed able to achieve. For her part, Laura found Mike's career intensity and travel initially exciting, and it helped her focus on building her career, which had been stagnated at the time she met him. She also acknowledged that she liked the financial security and lifestyle that his career brought with it. However, now she realized that his work life was better viewed "from a distance", now that the quality of her life was directly tied to it.

I suggested that we attempt to find ways to make small but significant changes in the balance between work and couple time so that they could preserve the appealing aspects of each other's approach to work, but in a way that their daily rhythms might

become less of a power issue and provide a more satisfactory amount of time together.

As a first step, Mike acknowledged that, although he felt torn about work versus couple

time, work always won out. He recognized the message this sent to Laura about what he

seemed to value most. At the same time, Laura acknowledged that Mike was more

beholden to the whims of his clients than she had realized, and saw how difficult it might

be for him to set limits. Nevertheless, Mike saw that only he, and not Laura, could take

the first steps to rectify this problem. As a start, he committed to one planned evening

together a week, that he would keep no matter what. As it turned out, in the first week

of this experiment, a client flew into town and wanted a dinner meeting that very night;

Mike held his ground, explaining that he had social commitments for that evening, and

was surprised to find that the client suggested lunch the next day instead. Laura felt

extremely gratified by Mike's taking a stand against his work demands. Within a few

weeks, Mike had added a second "work off-limits" evening for time with Laura. For

those weeks when Mike was traveling, the couple arranged to have a regular morning

and nightly phone call. Over the weeks of adapting these ideas, the night calls -- initially

designed just as times to talk -- became intense sexual encounters as well. Several

weeks after initiating these temporal strategies, both partners reported feeling much

closer and more at ease, and viewed time no longer as a power struggle.   Premise

Four: Temporal Patterns have Multiple Determinants

Although we have emphasized the importance of eliciting from the couple the

history of the evolution of their temporal patterns and difficulties, we do not thereby

mean to imply that couples (or individual partners) have total choice and control over how their time is arranged. One couple's temporal patterns may be the result of deliberate decisions or actions by partners, whereas other couples may experience themselves as having simply "fallen into" their particular patterns. In instances where one partner believes the other has total control over his or her schedule and can change it at will -- in the above example of Mike and Laura, for instance -- it is often therapeutic to identify the ways in which that person's schedule is tied to other temporal forces partially or entirely beyond his or her control. As we noted in an earlier section of this chapter, the increased time demands and pace of work life in the 1990s, coupled with the often intrusive, time-consuming home-based work technologies -- has had a major impact on many couples: identifying these realistic pressures, while at the same time empowering the worker to find ways to take back some degree of control over his or her schedule, can lower the tensions between partners, especially when one partner believes the other has total control over his or her time.

Another important determinant of temporal aspects of life is biological and health factors. When one partner develops a medical condition such as a chronic illness or suffers a debilitating injury due to an accident, the temporal demands of the condition can radically reshape the pace of life (usually, slowing things down), as well as the daily schedules and time allocation of the couple. Gonzalez, Steinglass, and Reiss (1989) have noted that the lives of couples and families with a chronically ill member often become centered on that members' medical care. From a temporal perspective, this means that

the rhythm of couple or family life may be structured largely by the need to attend to the ill member. Serious psychiatric disorders -- for instance, major depression or bipolar disorder -- may temporally pattern the life of a couple or family in ways similar to physical conditions. Given the overall increased life expectancy for the population in the country and many "developed" countries around the world, there is a higher likelihood that at least one partner will live long enough to develop an age-related chronic condition. And as we noted earlier, aging parents provide another potentially time-intensive caretaking responsibility for adult children, especially women.

Another influence on a couple's ability to structure their time, particularly relevant for poor couples, is heightened involvement and dependency on social service agencies and other public institutions that to a large degree administer their lives. In our current study of time issues for unemployed homeless families living in shelters in the South Bronx, we have heard repeatedly of the frustrations couples experience in having to dedicate hours per week to waiting in line for appointments with welfare workers, parole officers, and housing officials. In addition, in some shelters, the strict and relatively early nightly curfew (11:00 p.m.) imposed on residents forces them inside their small units, which are crowded and hot. If a couple is experiencing distress, this enforced closeness can at times escalate tensions, as partners cannot avail themselves of the adaptive option of getting some space from each other during an argument.

In addition to factors that may affect fairly directly the temporal patterns of couples lives, other factors, such as culture and family-of-origin, may contribute belief

systems that affect the preferences and the range of options partners consider when they create the temporal patterns of their lives. In one couple I worked with in Kenya, the female partner, Grace, was a black African and the male partner, Richard, was a black African-American. He described feeling continually frustrated with his partner's seeming indifference towards the future: She never seemed to worry about insuring that they had health insurance, or that they put money away for the future. She explained that in her culture, the focus was on the present, and that fate and "God's will" would take care of things in the future. For her part, she was continually irritated with Richard's attempts to plan everything out in advance. Interestingly, they were Christians, and had met in the church, yet they interpreted their faith differently when it came to beliefs about time. As noted, Grace put her trust in God to determine the future, whereas Richard believed "God only helps those who help themselves." For Richard, who had come to Kenya in part to connect with his African roots, the stark difference in their orientation to time was one of the key experiences that led him frequently to remark, "I've realized now that I'm more Western and American than I am African."

Cecile and Tom, a white upper-middle class couple mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, struggled with similar differences, and understood their perspectives as rooted partly in their ethnic cultures and partly as specific to their particular families-of-origin. Remember that Cecile liked to let time flow and to invite spontaneity, whereas Tom believed in making every minute count. Both had come from wealthy families, but with a difference: Cecile's father was a "self-made man" from a humble Italian-American

background (his parents had immigrated to the U.S.), and so money was "new" for the

family. In contrast, Tom came from a WASP family with many generations in the U.S.,

and the family money had been made by a great grandfather. Cecile's parents, having

suffered hardships and constraints while the father built his business, wanted to see

Cecile enjoy life in a way that they couldn't at her age, and encouraged her to spend

money -- and time -- freely. On the other hand, because of the long history of wealth in

Tom's family, the value was on not taking this wealth for granted -- and one key way to

do this was not to take advantage of the money by "frittering away" time. Tom's family

believed in industriousness, and Tom was under great pressure from his family to prove

that he could be a responsible, serious person, "not a spoiled brat," as he often called

Cecile.

The impact of these differing belief systems on the couple's day-to-day

orientation to time was profound, and led to great tension -- not only around the degree

of flexibility versus regularity each wanted for their bedtimes, but in all of the couple's

activities. Predictably, Tom took the role of anxiously checking his watch to make sure

they were on time when they were going to social engagements; when on trips,

vacations, or just spending a Sunday together, would periodically express his frustration

that they were "wasting time"; while Cecile took the role of telling him to relax, and of

looking for serendipitous moments or opportunities to extend their trips in unplanned

ways. Therapy was effective in reducing the extreme, tension-provoking level of this

polarized complementary pattern, largely through exploring the roots of their different

beliefs, substituting empathy for disdain about each other's point of view, and recognizing that they had probably chosen each other to supplement and balance their own perspective. Eventually, they were able to find useful and acceptable compromises, in which Cecile came to appreciate more the value of structured time and Tom could loosen up and let time flow more.

It is important to note that, as in any systematic approach to identifying the nature of couples' problems, a focus on time does not exclude or substitute for other, complementary explanations. In other words, we are not suggesting that all couple problems should now be understood as only centering around time issues. Rather, we suggest that time is an underappreciated dimension of problems, and that by adding a focus on the temporal challenges and patterns of couples' lives, we can amplify the usefulness of existing systemic clinical approaches that understand couple problems as due to circular sequences, structural issues of closeness and hierarchy, intergenerational patterns and loyalty binds, constraining narratives, and so on (Fraenkel, 1996).

A Framework for Thinking About Time Problems in Couples

Although the scientific literature on time and social relationships is still relatively small, already a wide variety of time concepts have been proposed (Adam, 1990; Daly, 1996; McGrath & Kelley, 1986; Nowotony, 1994). The taxonomy or organizational framework proposed here, and described in detail elsewhere (Fraenkel, 1994), is based on a review of time-related literatures in biology (chronobiology), the social sciences, family systems theory, as well as on concepts drawn from music theory. It is a relatively

simple framework designed to assist clinicians to discern the variety of types of difficulties couples encounter with time in the events of their lives, and provides a language for talking about these issues. Again, like the theory of time in couples proposed here, we view this taxonomy as open to revision.

There are three main components to the framework: Types of events, temporal attributes, and temporal unit size. In addition, there are beliefs about time, which we call "temporal ideation." These are discussed in turn below.

Type of event. "Type of event" refers to whether an event occurs repeatedly in the life of the couple (recursive events), or occurs only once (Breunlin & Schwartz, 1986). Repeated events can be further subdivided into those that occur repeatedly at regular times, versus those that repeat at irregular times. Recursive events that involve a patterned sequence that occurs at regular, predictable intervals, and at regular clock or calendar times, are referred to as "rhythms" (Chapple, 1980; McGrath & Kelley, 1986; Moore-Ede et al., 1982; Webster's, 1976).

In couples, joint rhythms involve patterns of action and inaction -- distributed between partners -- that occur in a particular sequence at regular intervals and at regular times, and in which the component actions follow one another at a particular pace and ratio of durations. Examples of couple rhythms abound in most couples' lives: for instance, morning routines that involve roughly the same actions each day (waking, showering, eating, paper reading, reviewing the plan for the day, caretaking of kids and pets), each of which over time tends to occur for approximately the same duration

(length of time) day after day, in the same sequence (one person showers as the other gets coffee going, the first to shower then fixes breakfast while the other showers, etc). Sometimes couples are unaware of having a rhythm such as a morning routine until it is disrupted: For instance, when one partner needs to get off to work earlier than usual, or one has a broken arm and takes longer to shower, etc.

Time-related problems can occur in both recursive/repeated and one-time events. As an example of a one-time problem, consider a couple in which once, and only once, one partner kept the other waiting for hours after promising to finish work and get home for dinner. Or in which one partner rushed the other through what was supposed to be a leisurely weekend day trip. It is likely that, if these are unusual events, the couple will notice them immediately, attend to them and make resolutions to avoid them in the future. In other cases, the one-time event reveals preferences about the use of time that one or both partners has kept hidden until the event: For instance, the late partner might angrily announce how frustrated she's been with having to get home at a certain hour, even when she has a pressing project at work. These revelations then may spur the couple to discuss their time-centered expectations, hopefully in ways that lead to greater mutual understanding and, if necessary, change.

With repeated events -- much more commonly represented in the problems that couples bring to therapy -- the issues can be manifold. One partner may not like the degree of responsibility that she or he must shoulder to insure that the mutual rhythm occurs at all (e.g., the morning routine, weekly nights out, monthly visits to in-laws). As

in the case of Rick and Laura, one partner may be frustrated with the lack of a

predictable daily rhythm of time apart versus time together, or with daily meals, or

bedtimes (think of Cecile and Tom), or with leisure time spent together. In such cases,

the solution may center around partners negotiating a rhythm that suits both of their

needs and takes account of other constraints on their time.

Conversely, one or both partners may complain that certain repeated events occur

all too predictably -- where the rhythmicity of the act makes it feel routine, mechanical,

boring. A good example of this for many couples is how their sexual life becomes

restricted to the same time each week, and how the act itself moves predictably from

familiar forms (and durations) of foreplay to coitus. In such instances, the solution may

center around "shaking up" the rhythm, introducing temporal novelty.

The important point here is that sometimes when couples complain about aspects

of their lives, it initially appears that the solutions will need to involve finding new

activities (e.g., changing their sexual repertoire, finding new ways to communicate,

developing new recreational activities or ways of expressing tenderness) to substitute for

the old, unsatisfying ones. However, when one listens with time in mind, a whole other

set of options for pattern change reveals itself, options that are often less difficult for

couples to enact: Namely, changing the degree of rhythmicity of the acts, rather than

changing the acts themselves. In other words, often couples agree on what they want to

do, but may disagree on how often or regularly, in what sequence, at what pace, and so

on.

<u>Temporal Attributes</u>. The term "temporal attributes" refers to the five main temporal

facets of any act or event:

· 	position of occurrence -- when something happens in clock or calendar time

· 	duration -- the length of time the activity/event happens

· 	pace or tempo -- the speed at which the activity/event occurs

· 	frequency -- how often something occurs in a specified period (day, week, month,

	year, lifetime)

· 	sequence -- the placement of the activity/event in terms of what comes before

	and what comes after, as well as the order of the component parts of the

	activity/event

For those readers who think visually, <u>Figure 1</u> graphically depicts these temporal

attributes (plus rhythm) as facets of any activity, like facets of a semi-precious stone.

That is, any activity -- whether a one-time event, a repeated but irregular/arrhythmic

event, or a regularly occurring, rhythmic event -- occurs at a certain time of day and in a

certain place in the calendar, occurs for a particular length of time, occurs at a certain

speed or tempo, with a certain degree of frequency, and in a particular place in the

sequence of the ongoing flow of events in couples' lives. Problems may occur in any

one or more of these temporal attributes.

Take sex for example: One or both partners may be unhappy with the time of day

that they typically have sex (clock time), or the day of the week (calendar time); with the

length of time of their sexual encounters, or with the relative length of time of foreplay

versus coitus; with the pace or tempo of movements during sex ("Ow! You move too fast! Slow down!" or "Why are you taking soooo long to come?"); with the frequency of sex (just think of the classic scene from Woody Allen's Annie Hall: she's complaining to her psychiatrist how often they have sex -- "three times a week!" while at the same time, he's complaining to his psychiatrist how infrequently they have sex -- "three times a week!"); and with the sequence of sex in the context of their other activities (for instance, one likes to get the household chores done before relaxing and having sex, while the other wants to have sex, then take on the chores).

Couple problems can center around just one of these temporal facets, or may involve two or more facets at once. For instance, one partner may get irritated with how quickly or slowly the other walks in the street ("Slow down! It's not a race!" or "Will you please hurry up?!"). Or, a partner may be troubled by how often the other wants to visit in-laws (frequency), as well as that the visits always occur on the weekends (position of occurrence in calendar time), are too long (duration), that "nothing seems to happen when we go there" (pace), and that the partner refuses ever to vary from the schedule (rhythmicity).

Temporal Unit Size. The notion of temporal unit size simply means that time problems can occur in extremely short activities (lasting microseconds to seconds), in medium length activities (lasting from a few minutes up to a day, or 24 hours), and in activities whose durations are from days to weeks to months to years. We refer to these three levels as the micro, molar, and macro levels, respectively. (These three levels roughly

parallel three levels of time patterns in biological systems, including the human body [Moore-Ede et al., 1982; Pittendrigh, 1972]). For example: at the micro level, two partners may speak at very different paces, so that even in the second-to-second exchange of dialogue, their rhythms seem off and interrupt clear communication. At the molar level (the level that encompasses most activities conducted during the day), partners can have conflict around different paces of walking, eating, driving, cleaning, and so on. And at the macro level, couples may argue about the pace at which they are moving towards achieving life goals such as getting married, having children, buying a home, establishing some degree of financial security, and so on. Table 1 presents examples of each of the temporal attributes at each of the temporal unit sizes.

Once again, sometimes couples have temporal difficulties only at one level of activity (micro, molar, or macro). In other cases, couples may have difficulty at more than one level; and sometimes, problems at one level reflect literally or metaphorically problems at another level. For example, in the case of Mike and Laura mentioned earlier, Mike's arrhythmic daily schedule meant that Laura was always waiting for him to tell her when he'd be available for couple time. On the macro level, Laura was the one pressing for marriage, while Mike still felt unsure and wanted to wait to see if they could "work things out" better before he made this commitment. Thus, on both the day-to-day and life-as-a-whole levels, Laura waited for Mike, which infuriated her and often led her to explode angrily (which led him further to be reluctant to marry). A major insight for this couple came when the therapist noted this parallel, and how Mike's daily unpredictability

constantly reminded Laura of the power difference between them and of how she was waiting for him to make the "big decision" about their future together. Change on one level (more predictability in terms of the daily schedule of when they came back together at the end of the day) lessened the tension each experienced about the larger, macro decision of when to get married.

Temporal Ideation. Throughout this chapter, we have emphasized the therapeutic value of exploring partners' beliefs and preferences about aspects of time that are sources of conflict. However, there are three types of ideas about time that are worth emphasizing, as they come up fairly frequently as areas of difficulty for couples.

Partners, like cultures (Kluckhohn & Strodbeck, 1961; Levine, 1997) may differ in their time perspective -- their orientation to past, present, or future. Past-oriented people may enjoy reminiscing, keeping in touch with old friends (and sometimes past partners), going back to familiar vacations spots, and may also be good at cataloguing in memory both the highlights and the darker moments in the couple's life. Present-oriented people focus more on the here-and-now, enjoy trying new things and keeping up with the latest trends, like to spend money now rather than saving, and like to "let the past go." Future-oriented people use the present to plan for and achieve goals; present-moment pleasures may be put off in the service of achieving those goals. They may have little patience for those who focus on past, and may disdain those who "fritter away" the present on experiences that do not serve a larger end.   Conflict can erupt for couples in which partners have different time perspectives.

For example, one couple requested marital therapy to discuss "lifestyle issues." Despite sensing that they communicated and solved problems well, the partners reported that they had never been able to agree on certain issues -- foremost among them, how much money to put aside for retirement. The wife wanted to put aside a much larger proportion of the husband's earnings, whereas he argued that they should enjoy the money now and worry about retirement later. Their differences around this and other lifestyle issues (for instance, whether to spontaneously invite friends over for dinner or plan such meals well in advance) appeared to be rooted in a difference in time perspective -- the husband more present-oriented, the wife more future-oriented.

Time valuation is another key area of temporal ideas around which couples may struggle. Partners may differ in their beliefs and feelings about how important time is -- how important it is to be aware of (and attempt to control) the flow of time, to structure time, and to coordinate couple activities in time. One partner may be more concerned that the other about the use of time or adherence to temporal agreements -- for instance, about being punctual -- and may play a monitoring function for the couple (Kantor and Lehr, 1975). Rick and Elaine, described earlier, struggled over differences in the meaning of punctuality; and Tom and Cecile had differences of belief about the importance of enjoying the flow of time versus making every minute count.

Differences in partners' projected life chronologies or personal time lines was the problem that caused great difficulty for Marcia and Fred, the couple described in the first vignette at the beginning of this chapter. Again, the term "projected life chronologies"

refers to the individual's plans for the future -- when she or he hopes to achieve certain life goals, in what sequence, how quickly, and the degree to which she or he sees current activities as promoting or blocking these goals. The issue of matching or synchronizing each partner's personal life chronologies has increasingly become a challenge for couples in the '90s, with both men and women educated and in the work force, attempting to juggle careers, relationship, and family time, and with the feminist legacy that men's career are not automatically assumed to be more important than women's. Another reason more couples seem to be facing this temporal challenge is that the average of people getting married for the first time has increased (Bumpass & Sweet, 1989). As a result, partners may be more set in their goals and individual lives, and further along their chosen trajectories when they meet and marry, making it more difficult for them to compromise.

TIME AND COUPLES THERAPY

The purpose of this chapter is to provide therapists with a language and a way of thinking about time as an issue for couples that has largely gone unrecognized. Along the way, we have provided a number of vignettes to illustrate how identifying the temporal side of a couple's difficulties, and exploring the meanings partner's bring to time issues, can set the stage for greater mutual empathy, and pattern change. We do not believe that therapists need entirely new sets of practices or techniques to work with time issues: Rather, in work with couples and time, our most common tools have been tried and true ones: detailed identification of here-and-now patterns and themes;

exploration of the links between current patterns and sensitivities, and experiences and beliefs based in family-of-origin and culture-of-origin; and collaborative problem-solving that allows couples to construct and experience new realities (Fraenkel, 1994, 1996, 1997; see also Papp & Imber-Black, 1996, for an approach to couple therapy that exemplifies our ways of working). A major purpose of our current research -- in which we interview couples and families about the types of issues they have had with time and the approaches they have found successful in solving them -- is to develop new approaches to intervention that are based not on theory or therapist expertise, but on what has actually worked for couples.

We also do not believe that time is always a problematic issue for a couple, or always the main issue. Rather, our central point has been to highlight ways in which time can be an issue, and the value of addressing it directly in therapy. In fact, one of the key benefits we have found to doing so is that by identifying shared time pressures as a source of stress, or by noting the possibility of partners holding equally valid but different points of view about time, or by normalizing pace differences, and so on, partners often move from a "head-to-head", blaming position, to a "side-by-side" position in which the shared challenge is time. The effect of this shift is similar to that of the "externalizing" practices of some forms of narrative therapy (White & Epston, 1990).

However, over the years, we have developed and experimented with some time-centered interventions. Our interventions include both ideas meant to shift how the couple views time and themselves in time, and practices that directly manipulate the

dimension of time for the couple's benefit.

Three Myths about Time

One idea we suggest to couples, both in individual therapy sessions and in workshops, is the notion of "three myths" that interfere with coping successfully with time pressures: The myth of spontaneity, of infinite perfectibility, and of total control.

· The Myth of Spontaneity

This is the notion that, no matter how mismatched partners' schedules are, or how hectic and overstuffed are their lives with work and other extra-relationship involvements, fun, pleasure, sex, and other couple activities should somehow just "happen" spontaneously. We suggest instead that couple time needs to be scheduled. One idea many couples have found useful is the seemingly paradoxical notion of "scheduling unscheduled time," or "scheduling spontaneity." In
 this way, time is clearly partitioned for couple activities, but the nature of those activities can be created on the spot, or one partner can surprise the other with an activity, rather than having everything planned out.

· The Myth of Infinite Perfectibility

Another maladaptive myth is the notion that the couple – and each partner in it – can "have it all" – do all of their customary activities, work just as hard as ever, and still find more time for each other. Couples who think this way typically try to solve their time problems mathematically or organizationally – approaching the problem of "no time" as a time management puzzle, which can be solved through increasingly complex

sequencing of activities. Sometimes, one or both partners will attempt to use a time management computer program to solve the problem; of course, the time required to learn the program takes away even more time from the couple, and generally does not solve the problem.

Instead, we suggest that couples need to make choices and set priorities. This involves partners thinking individually and talking together about what their core values are, what they want in their lives, and what they can do with less of, or without. This is simple to say, and not so simple to do; yet this kind of "soul-searching" and prioritizing is critical when partners experience themselves as too busy for one another.

For many people in contemporary Western society in this Information Age, particularly those in the middle to and upper classes, the last few decades of relative economic prosperity, coupled with generally high levels of education, the broader culture's emphasis on "self-actualization," exposure to a wide range of possible careers and leisure opportunities, and the relentless marketing of these possibilities through a wide variety of media, have led to a phenomenon we think of as "experience greed." Experience greed, a preoccupation with all the alternative paths one could take in one's life and the experiences one could seek, makes it difficult to select and develop just one (or a few!). Rather, many people seem to try to fit as much as possible into the time available, and end up frazzled as they run from one activity to the other. Lagerfeld (1998), commenting on the time woes of the baby boomer generation, writes, "Its members are now reaching the point in their lives when conflicting demands on their

time are at a maximum – their careers (and thus their hours at work) are peaking, their

children are young. They also have sophisticated palates for leisure...Entering middle

age, moreover, they are facing the reality that time is not on their side; it is running out.

There may not be enough left to fulfill every hope for family, career, and for play and

travel and fun. No wonder time seems short" (p. 61). This "overstuffing" of life appears

to increase exponentially for economically-advantaged couples once they have children,

taking them to a variety of lessons and activities meant to give them the best chance to

develop all of their native talents (Lagerfeld, 1998; see also, Daly, 1996, for a discussion

of this point).

Experience greed may lead people not only to overstuff their time away from

work, but for some, may also drive decisions about how much work to take on.

Although for many, job insecurity, competition, employer expectations, and financial

concerns may motivate overwork, for some, work may be viewed as the best route to

self-actualization, preferable to and more predictable than time spent with one's partner

or children (Hochschild, 1997; Lagerfeld, 1998). For such persons, it may be difficult after

a while to distinguish between opportunity and obligation (what they want to do versus

what they have to do).

In sum, while we believe much of the time pressure couples face today results

from work and other factors over which they have less immediate control, some of the

time pressures are self-imposed, and require choices between a variety of excellent

opportunities. Couples may need to give up on the fantasy of somehow having a life in

which limitless careers, all desired leisure activities, raising children, romance and a great sex life, and plenty of "down time" are delicately yet perfectly balanced, if they are to reduce the sense of time pressure and experience the creative, serendipitous, social pleasures of idleness, about which philosopher Bertrand Russell wrote over half a century ago.

·   The Myth of Total Control

In a sense, this belief underlies the notion of infinite perfectibility. It is the belief that couples (and their constituent partners) are completely in charge of their destinies, and that if their lives are frustrating, it is all their fault. This belief is based on a lack of recognition of the power of the variety of systemic forces that shape their lives, and so, their time. We suggest that couples laboring under this belief engage in a variety of exercises designed to increase their awareness of the forces that control their actual time, as well as their beliefs about and experiences of time. Once aware of these systemic factors, couples are better positioned to take action to change them, or can choose to "go with the flow."

The "Four As" of Coping with Time

To help couples organize their approach to time-based problems, we use the acronym of four As: Awareness, Affirming and Altering, and Activism. The first step is to become aware of the role that time may play in the couple's difficulties, and as we suggested above, to become aware of the various systemic forces that affect their time. The second and third steps involve affirming the patterns that work for them, and

altering the patterns that don't. And when the problem patterns are greatly affected by outside forces (work schedules, other family or social obligations), developing a plan to address those forces as best they can. Below we describe some time-centered practices that assist couples to build time awareness, as well as to affirm and alter patterns.

Building Time Awareness

Aside from highlighting the theme of time, using the theory described above to introduce a language for describing the particular types of problems experienced by the couple, and inviting an open conversation about partners' temporal concerns and preferences, therapists can suggest to couples a number of activities that may enhance their awareness of time issues in their relationship.

The time collage. Messages about time pervade the media (features and advertisements in magazines, newspapers, T.V., radio, billboards, and the internet), the arts, the work place, religious institutions, and so on. Many of these messages convey beliefs about the best way to use free time, the need to be more efficient (in order to be smart, competitive, powerful), and the possibility of "having it all" (contributing to the power of the myth of perfectibility). Some of these messages contradict one another -- one may spend the week exposed to messages that encourage one to work harder and faster, and then hear in a religious setting about the need to spend more time with family or in spiritual pursuits.

In order to become more fully aware of the beliefs about time that surround them in their daily worlds, and the degree to which these reflect, influence, or differ from their

own beliefs and behavior, it can be useful for each partner to spend a week recording all

of the messages they hear and observe about time. The messages can be recorded

simply as written notes, or for those who think more visually, advertisements, article titles

and the like can be assembled in a collage form. Those more aurally inclined can

assemble audio clips from music, radio, and T.V. Each partner can also jot a note about

his or her position on each belief. The collages can be organized in terms of themes,

such as messages that encourage speeding up and those that encourage slowing down.

At the end of the week, or throughout the week as they are assembling their collages,

the partners can engage in a dialogue about the power of these beliefs in their lives, and

begin to plan how to loosen the grip of beliefs that they find constraining and

impoverishing.

The time pies. This exercise helps partners begin a conversation about how they view

the allocation of time to various activities in their lives, and how they would most like to

divide their time. Have the partners draw two identical large circles on 8½ by 11 paper.

Label the first circle Actual Time, and the second Ideal Time. Now, ask the couple to

decide on a category of activity – for instance, the time spent in work versus nonwork

activities (leisure, couple/family time); social time (including time spent alone as a couple

versus as a couple with children versus with extended family versus with friends versus

each partner alone); and so on. Usually, the relevant category has emerged in previous

discussions about the couple's time problems. Now, working independently on their

own pies, have each partner divide the first pie in terms of the amount/percentage of

time actually devoted to each activity within the category (in a day, week, month –

whatever unit of time makes sense). Next, have the partners use the second pie to

indicate their ideal preferences for how to divide time between these activities. Have the

partners compare their first pies, and encourage them to discuss ways in which their

estimates of how time is actually divided concurred or differed, and if different, to

explore reasons why this might be so. Then, in similar fashion, have them compare and

discuss their ideal time allocations. Discussion of ideals and preferences about how to

spend time can often be usefully informed by locating the family- or culture-of-origin

roots of these preferences. Finally, have the partners discuss ways they might combine

their preferences and compromise as needed.

Time lines: Projected life chronologies. As we noted above, partners often agree on

major goals for their lives, but disagree about when they want to achieve them. To assist

couples to identify possible differences in their projected life chronologies, have each the

partner draw a time line on a piece of 8½ by 11 inch paper (turned on its side – if more

space is needed, connect two or even three pieces). Have the partners standardize the

correspondence between inches and years (for example, a half inch equals one year).

Have them label the left-hand side of the time line "Now" (and write the current date),

and label the right-hand end of the time line "Death." (Alternatively, the partners might

choose to use their time lines to show their entire lives, from birth to death – the

advantage of this approach is that it allows partners to visualize what they have already

achieved up to this point, including meeting their partner.) Now have them write on the

time line all the goals they have for their lives, and when they hope to achieve them. Then have them compare time lines and begin a discussion about how their lines converge and differ, and, if they wish to, what they can do to bring them more into alignment. However, be forewarned that in our clinical experience, differences in personal life chronologies is one of the most challenging time-related problems; in some cases, as couple partners more clearly identify discrepancies in their projected futures, they may decide to end the relationship.

The Life Pace Questionnaire. The Life Pace Questionnaire (LPQ; Fraenkel, 1989) is a 43-item inventory that asks partners to rate how quickly or slowly they conduct a wide range of daily activities, including walking, talking, eating, showering, responding to phone messages, and so on. It also asks partners to rate the degree of match they experience with their partner on pace, and their level of comfort with the degree of match. Preliminary data suggests that degree of satisfaction/dissatisfaction with life pace match is highly correlated with overall relationship satisfaction. Having partners compare their responses to the LPQ item by item can serve as a structured exercise to locate problematic pace differences, which is the first step in understanding, adjusting or accommodating to these differences.

Affirming Existing Patterns

As is common in couple and family therapy today, we always attempt to assist couples to locate not only their problems, but also their strengths: in this case, those temporal patterns and rhythms that work for them. Often, we find time-pressed couples

have hidden resources of time that only need to be drawn forth and put to work more effectively.

Sacred time. One of the ideas we suggest is that of considering overlooked, underutilized, existing time together as "sacred." For instance, Judy and Bert – remember, he went to bed and rose early, she wrote late into the night – actually had two hours each evening together (8 p.m. - 10 p.m.) that they rarely used as couple time. By highlighting this time as their "sacred time" together, they were able to increase their sense of connection markedly in one week. Once they had set aside this time for themselves, each was better able to accommodate the other's different bed and wake times.

One key to "sacred time" is to set a clear boundary between couple-related activities and other activities. For Judy and Bert, this meant a commitment on Bert's part to turn off his pager and not answer work-related phone calls during their time together.

Establishing rhythms. Like creating "sacred time," establishing rhythms involves taking what couples already do and reorganizing it so that it becomes more built into their lives. We have observed that even the most time-starved couples have fun time together, but because these events occur sporadically and haphazardly, the couple senses that they never have couple time. By creating daily, weekly, or monthly rhythms of couple time, this time is woven more clearly into the fabric of their lives: It becomes something they can count on in their futures, and look back to in their memories. By regularizing or rhythmicizing couple time, its occurrence becomes more automatic, and

so, less likely that one or the other partner will forget to preserve the time. In fact, having rhythms of small amounts of time together (for instance, a rhythm of coming together at the end of each day, or the once-a-week date) may be more important in creating couple cohesion than having large amounts of time together (for instance, that big once-a-year vacation) that occurs sporadically.

For instance, Ingrid and Tom had become quite alienated from one another because their time together was so unpredictable, and because they engaged in major power struggles over time together. During the week, Tom, a corporate lawyer, would frequently be late for dinner appointments or post-dinner evening plans with Ingrid, a graphics designer, because he would receive last-minute emergency calls from a client, or dinners with clients would extend beyond the scheduled time. Ingrid understood somewhat the pressures of his work, but still resented waiting for Tom and having plans disrupted. Tom shared her frustration, stating that during the week, he felt like "a slave of the next meeting, like my time is not my own; I'm ruled by the watch." To make up for the lack of Tom's availability during the week, Ingrid usually set up plans for the weekend that began at 9:30 a.m. Tom frequently balked at these plans, feeling again that his time was not his own, which left Ingrid feeling angry and rejected.

The first step that helped relieve tension for this couple was to identify how little Tom believed he could control his work schedule, and how frustrated he felt about it. To Ingrid, he had always tried to portray himself as "in control" of his work, because he didn't want her to worry about him: yet this potrayal left Ingrid to believe that he

preferred to be at business dinners than with her. He assured her that this was not the case. In turn, Ingrid spoke of how she felt totally responsible for making sure they had some fun together, and that this was why she tried to schedule activities all weekend -- not, as Tom had believed, to get revenge for his being so unpredictable all week. The therapist suggested that despite each one's best efforts, they had gotten into a struggle in which Ingrid felt controlled by Tom's schedule all week, and Tom felt controlled by Ingrid's schedule on the weekend. Both laughed and said this was exactly right.

Following this formulation, the couple worked on developing a predictable rhythm of together time. Tom reviewed his work schedule from the last month, and realized that Wednesday nights were usually free. He resolved to "institutionalize" this, and to "take a small stand" against his work by refusing meetings on those evenings. For the weekends, the couple decided to use the therapist's idea of scheduling unscheduled time (see above) on Saturday mornings, giving Tom a chance to "take the watch off" and "float" for a while, and at the same time, both agreed to begin scheduled activities at 1:00 p.m., which allowed Ingrid to know when Tom would be available.

Altering Patterns

There are an infinite number of ways couples can alter problematic temporal patterns, or create new ones. Here we will describe two interventions we frequently use to help busy couples connect more often during the day: the "decompression chamber," and the "sixty second pleasure points."

The decompression chamber. This intervention is described in detail elsewhere

(Fraenkel, 1998a). For couples, the transition between being apart during the work day and together in the evening can be a source of tension and misunderstanding. Each partner may have different preferences for a sequence of activities in which they unwind from the day and reconnect with each other. One partner may wish to engage first in solitary activities (a shower, reading the paper, exercising) before engaging in conversation or other couple activities; the other may prefer immediate joint activities. When these needs are not clearly communicated and synchronized with the other partner, each can feel controlled or rejected. This exercise assists couples to negotiate this challenging transition.

First, suggest that this is a stressful transition for many couples. Introduce the notion of the "decompression chamber" as a metaphor for creating a period of time at the end of the day in which both partners' preferences for both joint and solitary activities are combined into a more complex but mutually-satisfying sequence. Use Figure 2 to pictorially demonstrate what happens in this transition. Elicit the preferences of each partner, have them create a joint sequence and write it down, and suggest that they experiment with it over the next week.

The sixty second pleasure points.   This intervention, also described in detail elsewhere (Fraenkel, 1998b), uses the malleable, subjective aspect of time perception to create a sense of greater couple connection with a relatively small investment of actual (chronological) time. Ask the partners to think of all of the fun, pleasurable, and/or sensual activities they could do with each other, in which each activity lasts only sixty

seconds or less. Ideas collected from couples over the years have included a kiss, a hug, a foot (hand, neck) massage, feeding each other something, a quick dance, smelling a flower, saying a prayer together, looking at a sunset, telling a joke, reading a poem, tussling each other's hair, tickling, whispering sweet nothings, dressing the cat (!), stroking each other with a velvet mitt, and talking about what to do for fun when there's more time. Ask the couple to include in the list both activities that they can do when physically together as well as things they can do when physically apart (through use of the phone, e-mail, fax – putting technology to work for the relationship!).

The first benefit of this exercise is that the partners immediately sees there is a wide range of fun activities they can do even when quite pressed for time. In the next part of the exercise, ask the partners to imagine making six of these "sixty second pleasure points" happen over the course of a day: for instance, two in the morning, one during the day while they're apart, and three in the evening. Use of a diagram such as that depicted in Figure 3 emphasizes the distribution of the points across the day. Now, ask the partners if either of them, as children, ever had a coloring book with dots, often with numbers next to the dots (virtually everyone has had such a coloring book); then ask them what they did with these dots – invariably, the answer is, "Connected them." Suggest that, just as they connected the dots in the coloring book, their minds will automatically, without effort, connect the "dots" of the sixty second pleasure points, and that as a result, the six minutes or less of time devoted to these activities will create a sense of increased connection and pleasure that far exceeds the time invested.

It is important to emphasize to couples that this technique is not meant to take the place of more extensive time together. But couples find it a helpful tool to enhance their sense of connection over the course of a day, and as a way to cope with exceptionally busy times when more extensive together time is not possible.

Activism

It is fitting that we end this chapter with the notion of "time activism." We predict that the time pressures resulting from overwork, exacerbated by the presence of work-related technology in the home, will reach such a crisis point in the 21st century that it will become the theme around which persons across classes join together to reshape the culture of work, and possibly also the consumerist culture that contributes to people's willingness to work so much (Schor, 1991). As systemically-oriented therapists, we may play a role in encouraging not only individual couples, but communities of couples and families to join together to talk about their experiences and frustrations with the time pressures they face, and to generate solutions that may include taking a stand against companies that subtly encourage ever greater permeability of the boundary between work and home. If the statistics are correct about who is working so hard, the hopeful thing about such a movement would be that, unlike union disputes that typically pitch the working class against management, this movement would include a healthy representation of managers, and maybe even some overworked corporation heads.

Endnotes

---

i. By and large, those working long hours are "advantaged"-- white (49%), male (59%, versus 34% of women), married to a nonworking partners (55%), are managers, professionals, or self-employed, and have higher educational levels and hourly earnings than those working less hours. However, as opposed to those working more <u>hours per day</u>, those working more than <u>five days per week</u> tend to be male, self-employed, with <u>lower</u> levels of education and <u>lower</u> earnings (Galinsky, Bond, & Friedman, 1993).

ii. Of those who work more than 40 hours, 58% said they wanted more time with their partners, compared to 42% of those working 40 hours or less. Likewise, 64% of those working more than five days a week indicated they wanted more time with their partners, compared to 47% of those working five days or less. And of those working more than 40 hours per week, 74% wished for more time with their children (Galinsky, Bond, & Friedman, 1993).

iii. Department of Labor statistics (Bureau of Labor Statistics, May 1997) show that from 1993 to 1995, 8.2 percent of the labor force, or 10.1 million people, lost their jobs involuntarily. This is at a much higher rate than from 1987 to 1989, which was a time of equal unemployment, in which only 5.7 percent, or 6.7 million people, lost their jobs. Likewise, a 1996 New York Times survey of American households (Lohr, 1996) found that three-quarters have had a family member, friend, relative, or neighbor who had lost a job since 1980. Interestingly, a New York Times analysis of Department of Labor data shows that the greatest number of those losing their jobs were earning at least $50,000 a year -- indicating that the problems of layoffs as a source of unemployment is largely a problem for the middle and upper-middle class (Uchitelle & Kleinfield, 1996).

iv. Recent data from the Current Population Survey (Bureau of Labor Statistics, May 1997), show that 12 percent of mothers and 18.3 percent of fathers worked regular nonday (evening or night) or rotating shifts. Other data (Presser, 1989) suggest that couples in which both partners work often have nonoverlapping work schedules – especially couples with young children.

v. Recent data from the U.S. Bureau of the Census (1997) show 25 percent of fathers in married couples with preschoolers provide childcare while their wives are working, and 19 percent of fathers were the primary caregivers. This is particularly true for fathers who work evening or night shifts: They were almost twice as likely as men who work day shifts to take care of their preschool children (26% versus 13%). However, there is an

important class difference: Poor fathers were almost twice as likely to provide childcare as were nonpoor fathers (43% versus 24%).

vi. Data are not assembled exclusively on "commuter marriages," but the Census Bureau tracks the number of households in which a spouse is absent from the home for reasons such as employment or armed forces service. The increase from 1990 to 1996 quoted above (from 1.45 million to 2.1 million) is believed to be most likely due to an increase in commuter relationships (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1996).

vii.   A recent World Bank study of its employees found that frequent travelers made significantly more claims for health benefits, and were more likely to become ill, injured (back injuries were 80% higher for male travelers than for male nontravelers), and to experience range of psychological problems, including anxiety and depression (Alexander, 1998).

viii. There are currently 22.4 million caregiving households for the elderly. These caregiving responsibilities result in 10 percent of workers giving up work, and 11 percent taking a leave of absence. Of those who continue to work, 49 percent of caregivers change daily work schedules because of these caregiving responsibilities – coming to work late, leaving early, or taking off time during the day (National Alliance for Caregiving & American Association of Retired Persons, 1997).