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Book Review: Hard Choices: How Women Decide About Work, Career, and Motherhood. by Kathleen Gerson.

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to be supreme" (emphasis added). In Jacobsohn's subtler elaboration, Our Original "constitutional principles," and nothing but those principles, "*define us as a people*" (emphasis added).

This exaltation of the Constitution above the People seems to me not a faithful restatement but a radical inversion of Our "tradition" *ab urbe condita*—and I mean the first three words of *Our Constitution* and more: such an inversion contradicts the precept essential to republican government in general, that in the Republic the "supreme," "definitive," and "originating" political authority resides with the People. Nothing in Our late eighteenth century Founding compromised this article of faith. Indeed, James Wilson (one of Macedo's, and Jacobsohn's, and my preferred *Patres*) pleaded for Us never to forget that "the people are superior to our constitutions." And the Original provision for amending the Constitution—avowedly one of George Washington's favorite parts of the document—bore official witness to this faith by institutionalizing it. Thus, Jacobsohn's avowed distaste for the amendment provision would seem a curious but characteristic renunciation of the Faith of Our Fathers—in Us.

Ultimately, then, Macedo and Jacobsohn, despite their salutary reaffirmations, leave me with qualms that their historicist libertarianism would relinquish too much of what is indispensable in Our republican patrimony—Our faith in Ourselves.

**HARD CHOICES: HOW WOMEN DECIDE ABOUT WORK, CAREER, AND MOTHERHOOD.** By Kathleen Gerson.<sup>1</sup> Berkeley, Ca.: University of California Press. 1985. Pp. xix, 312. Paper, \$9.95.

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This is a study of the life histories of a group of women who were young adults in the late 1970s. As the subtitle indicates, the purpose of the research was to trace the processes underlying divergent patterns in the careers, marriage, and motherhood of these women, living during a period of accelerated social change.

The theoretical thrust of the study is presented in opposition to some current theories of gender: "social-structural coercion" and early childhood socialization. Professor Kathleen Gerson claims

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that both of these theories tend "to focus almost exclusively on forces beyond women's ultimate control."<sup>3</sup>

Thus, proponents of the "structural coercion" model see patriarchy and capitalism as causes of women's oppression. Professor Gerson replies (wisely, I think) that patriarchy is a descriptive term which explains nothing about the *causes* of male domination. The literature on capitalism and gender inequality is, of course, voluminous, but here again the author points out correctly that "[g]ender inequality not only emerged well before the development of capitalism; it also transcends economic and political variations among industrial nations. . . . There are . . . too many instances of women's subordination in noncapitalist contexts to make the capitalist system per se the single most compelling cause of women's inferior position."

Having rejected the "structural coercion" theories, Gerson turns to differential socialization of the sexes as a possible explanation of gender inequality. I might note parenthetically that the fluctuating popularity of the socialization theory provides interesting material for a sociologist of knowledge. In the early stages of the women's movement differential socialization was strongly emphasized—no doubt as a political weapon against the prevalent doctrine of inherent female deficiencies. With the passage of time one noted a muting of references to socialization in feminist writings. (Perhaps feminists came to realize that the notion that personality is rigidly fixed in childhood could be used to justify discrimination against women.) Still more recently another wave of feminist thought revived the concept of differential socialization of the sexes—this time, however, with the emphasis on the superiority of women in emotional range, empathy, and the like.

Gerson contrasts her own orientation with the concepts of "role strain" and "role conflict" that allegedly refer to a "static" structural arrangement to which an individual must adjust. She is far too cursory in her dismissal of a considerable literature since the 1940s that treats women's "role strains" and "role conflicts" as rooted in structural and cultural inconsistencies and as social problems potentially remediable through social reorganization.

There are other lacunae in her review of the "structural coercion" and socialization models of explaining gender. For one thing, socialization does not end with early childhood, the period that Gerson discusses. But a more adequate exposition would not alter

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3. She dismisses biological theories of gender traits in a footnote, noting that they do not have much support among sociologists and are not relevant to a study of variations among women.

her basic contention. These models, after all, are theoretical abstractions that were not intended to, and do not, fully explain the course of individual development.

Against this theoretical background Professor Gerson presents her contrasting developmental approach to women's lives, with its more voluntaristic view of human action. As she puts it,

childhood experiences provide the context in which personal conflicts are formed, but they do not determine how, or if, these conflicts will be resolved in adulthood. Because women tend to be reared with a number of ambiguous expectations . . . the relevant question becomes why a woman chooses to affirm one value, norm, or goal over another. To answer this question, we must look at how people's motives, goals, and capacities develop as they move through a series of life stages . . .

The women Gerson interviewed were selected from recent enrollees at a community college in a working-class community and from the lists of alumnae of a four-year university in the San Francisco Bay area. The women (all white) fell between the ages of twenty-seven and thirty-seven, with an average age of thirty-one, at the time of the research in 1978 and 1979. The total number of interviews was sixty-three, representing eighty-eight percent of approached women.

The research method was one of open-ended interviews following a detailed interview schedule included in the appendix. The strategy was to discern and compare several distinct developmental patterns from childhood to the time of the interview. Some women began with a childhood orientation toward a traditional pattern but in time veered away from domesticity. Others followed the opposite course of declining career aspirations and a turn toward full-time homemaking. Still others sustained their childhood orientation. Childlessness and a combination of work with motherhood were other life-styles covered by the interviews.

Change toward career commitment was associated with instability in male-female relationships, dissatisfaction with domesticity, felt economic deprivation, and expanded work place opportunities.

By contrast, the events that pushed originally nontraditional women "off their expected tracks" were a greater commitment to traditional marriages, blocked work opportunities, and greater satisfaction with their economic situation. In the face of blocked mobility in the work place, the pull of domesticity became stronger.

In comparison with these "changers," women who remained on the track of their early expectations were not simply playing out patterns instilled in childhood. They had been shielded from exposure to specific events that triggered change in other groups. Stabil-

ity, as the author astutely observes, is no less problematic than change.

The section on childless women and "reluctant mothers" (those planning to have children despite a strong ambivalence) also illuminates underlying processes. For example, the male partners of the childless women, far from pressing women to have children, were unwilling to become involved in childrearing. In contrast to the reluctant mothers, the childless women discounted the potential costs of childlessness resulting in loneliness later in life.

The discovery of these different trajectories strengthens the author's claim that change is the dominant theme in the lives of women facing current ambiguities and dilemmas. As the author puts it: "Women's decisions for or against motherhood and for or against committed work . . . develop out of a negotiated process whereby they confront and respond to constraints and opportunities, often unanticipated, encountered over the course of their lives." This is not to say that these decisionmakers are necessarily rational, or aware of the social roots of seemingly random events confronting them, or indeed of all the consequences of their choices.

Gerson concludes that childhood models and experiences are poor predictors of ultimate outcomes. This is a useful antithesis to other authors' overemphasis on childhood experiences. But now we need a synthesis. To cite only one example, a recent study of women undergraduates (confirming some earlier studies) revealed that career-committed students tended to come in disproportionate numbers from families with conflicted parental relationships.<sup>4</sup> Childhood experiences cannot be ruled out as important independent variables in other cited differences. For example, the author's finding that childless career women (in contrast to "reluctant mothers") tended to discount the potential costs of childlessness in feelings of guilt or loneliness is a finding that whets our curiosity without satisfying it. Further analysis might have revealed differences in socialization.

These are, however, minor flaws in a unique and insightful book. The very prevalence of shifting patterns through stages of life demonstrates that childhood socialization and the familiar stereotypes of "feminine personality" are not the potent predictors of adult choices that we sometimes assume them to be. Even when her explanations of different trajectories are not wholly adequate, Gerson's analysis will help to shape the direction of future research.

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4. M. KOMAROVSKY, *WOMEN IN COLLEGE: SHAPING NEW FEMININE IDENTITIES* 110 (1985).