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The Unfinished Revolution: Coming of Age in a New Era of Gender, Work, and Family

By Kathleen Gerson



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The Unfinished Revolution: Coming of Age in a New Era of Gender, Work, and Family By Kathleen Gerson

In the controversial public debate over modern American families, the vast changes in family life--the rise of single, two-paycheck, and same-sex parents--have often been blamed for declining morality and unhappy children. Drawing upon pioneering research with the children of the gender revolution, Kathleen Gerson reveals that it is not a lack of "family values," but rigid social and economic forces that make it difficult to have a vibrant and committed family and work life.

Despite the entrance of women into the workforce and the blurring of once clearly defined gender boundaries, men and women live in a world where the demands of balancing parenting and work, autonomy and commitment, time and money are left largely unresolved. Gerson finds that while an overwhelming majority of young men and women see an egalitarian balance within committed relationships as the ideal, today's social and economic realities remain based on conventional--and now obsolete--distinctions between breadwinning and caretaking. In this equity vacuum, men and women develop conflicting strategies, with women stressing self-reliance and men seeking a new traditionalism.

With compassion for all perspectives, Gerson argues that whether one decides to give in to traditionally imbalanced relationships or to avoid marriage altogether, these approaches are second-best responses, not personal preferences or inherent attributes, and they will shift if new options can be created to help people achieve their egalitarian aspirations. *The Unfinished Revolution* offers clear recommendations for the kinds of workplace and community changes that would best bring about a more egalitarian family life--a new flexibility at work and at home that benefits families, encourages a thriving economy, and helps women and men integrate love and work.

Praise for the Hardcover:

"Over the past three decades, social change has blown apart the old-fashioned ideal of the nuclear family--and Gerson has set out to map where the pieces have landed."

--*New York Post*

"Valuable for the abundance and candor of the testimony from this unmoored generation pioneering through radically altered conceptions of personal and

professional life."

--*Publishers Weekly*

"This is not a battle that can be won with legal challenges or legislation. Yes, it would undoubtedly be greatly aided by the passage of major social policies such as universal child care. But at its core, this is a fight that plays out within homes and between partners. And as Gerson's research makes clear, the fight has not changed all that dramatically in the past 30 years." --*The American Prospect*

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Gerson (*No Man's Land*), a sociology professor at New York University, refers to those adults born after the women's movement of the 1970s as the children of the gender revolution. They are more likely than their predecessors to have experienced parents divorcing, a mother working outside the home, being raised by a single parent or living with a stepparent. How do such changes affect their expectations for intimate relationships? Gerson attempts to answer this question with life history interviews with 120 men and women living in the New York area. Although her nonrepresentative sample does not lend itself to statistical analysis, it provides a revealing look at a generation of reflective young adults struggling to construct a meaningful life in largely uncharted waters, uncertain, even skeptical, about the possibility of juggling career ambitions and romantic commitment. The author urges flexibility and forging innovative pathways. Even if the soft data is disappointing, the book is valuable for the abundance and candor of the testimony from this unmoored generation pioneering through radically altered conceptions of personal and professional life.

(Dec.)

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Review

"Preachers, pundits, and politicians blather endlessly about family values, traditional marriage, and child-rearing, but no one with real authority has asked the kids themselves what works best-until now. The brilliant social scientist Kathleen Gerson revolutionizes a stale debate with her breakthrough research on how adult children view their upbringing and what that means for their futures-and ours. Gerson provides definitive evidence that families with flexible gender strategies meet social and economic challenges far better than those with rigid gender roles, who are often unable to sustain secure homes when confronted by financial or marital crises." --Leslie Bennetts, author of *The Feminine Mistake*

"Gerson's *Unfinished Revolution* is the most important book on issues of work and family balance since Hochschild's *Second Shift*. Vividly portraying how family change has impacted the hopes, dreams, and possibilities for future generations, this book effectively transforms the terms of the debate on the American family today." --Sharon Hays, Barbra Streisand Professor in Contemporary Gender Studies and Professor of Sociology, University of Southern California

"Kathleen Gerson's *Unfinished Revolution* is an elegant and powerful account of the gender and family revolution that has transformed our society and politics, viewed through the young adults who have lived through these transforming decades. While politics seeks to freeze and distort and polarize the change, Gerson shows a textured, flexible, uncertain and shifting reality that challenges all our assumptions. Her book helps us understand this Obama generation, tolerant of the diverse choices now facing men and women and families and hoping politics can transcend old formulas and lines." --Stanley Greenberg, author of *The Two Americas*

"A compassionate, insightful study of how young men and women struggle to reconcile their desires for partnered commitment and personal autonomy with the realities of today's work and family trends. Gerson shows us why most, despite ambivalence and stress, do not want to return to the family patterns of the past--and suggests how we can help them move forward." --Stephanie Coontz, author of *Marriage, a History*

"The third installment in a classic trilogy exploring the changing relations between work, family, and gender, *The Unfinished Revolution* vividly examines the interaction between social structure, biography, and history. Gerson's analysis is theoretically sophisticated and remarkably complex. Most significant, she finds that 'traditional' families do not necessarily provide children with a better environment than single-parent or dual-earner ones, and that the most important feature of successful families appears to be their ability to cope with change in a flexible manner." --Eviatar Zerubavel, Board of Governors Professor of Sociology, Rutgers University

"Following her earlier pathbreaking studies of gender, Kathleen Gerson now takes us into an illuminating exploration of the 'children of the gender revolution.' A virtuoso interviewer, Gerson discovers young women and men struggling to reconcile their ideals of flexible and egalitarian intimate relations with persistent structural and cultural constraints. With style and brio *The Unfinished Revolution* offers revealing and often surprising insights into the present and future of American families." --Viviana A. Zelizer, Lloyd Cotsen '50 Professor of Sociology, Princeton University

"This is not a battle that can be won with legal challenges or legislation. Yes, it would undoubtedly be greatly aided by the passage of major social policies such as universal child care. But at its core, this is a fight that plays out within homes and between partners. And as Gerson's research makes clear, the fight has not changed all that dramatically in the past 30 years." --*The American Prospect*

"A new powerful account of how children of the gender revolution are reshaping family, work and gender in America.... Gerson revolutionizes a stale debate looking at family changes in an unconventional way.... A very fascinating book." --*Sociologica*

"Kathleen Gerson's *Unfinished Revolution* marks a major conceptual advance by depicting families as pathways, rather than static structural forms." --*Contemporary Sociology*

"Carefully researched and lucidly written.... An important contribution to the intertwined research literatures on family, work, and gender. Written in an elegant and accessible style, with extensive use of interview quotations, the book is appropriate for both undergraduate and graduate courses." --*Gender and Society*

About the Author

Kathleen Gerson is Professor of Sociology and Collegiate Professor of Arts and Science at New York University. The author of *No Man's Land: Men's Changing Commitments to Family and Work* and *Hard Choices: How Women Decide about Work, Career, and Motherhood*, she frequently contributes to such media as *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Washington Post*, National Public Radio, and CNN.

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That reserve can make you to feel relax. This book *The Unfinished Revolution: Coming of Age in a New Era*

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