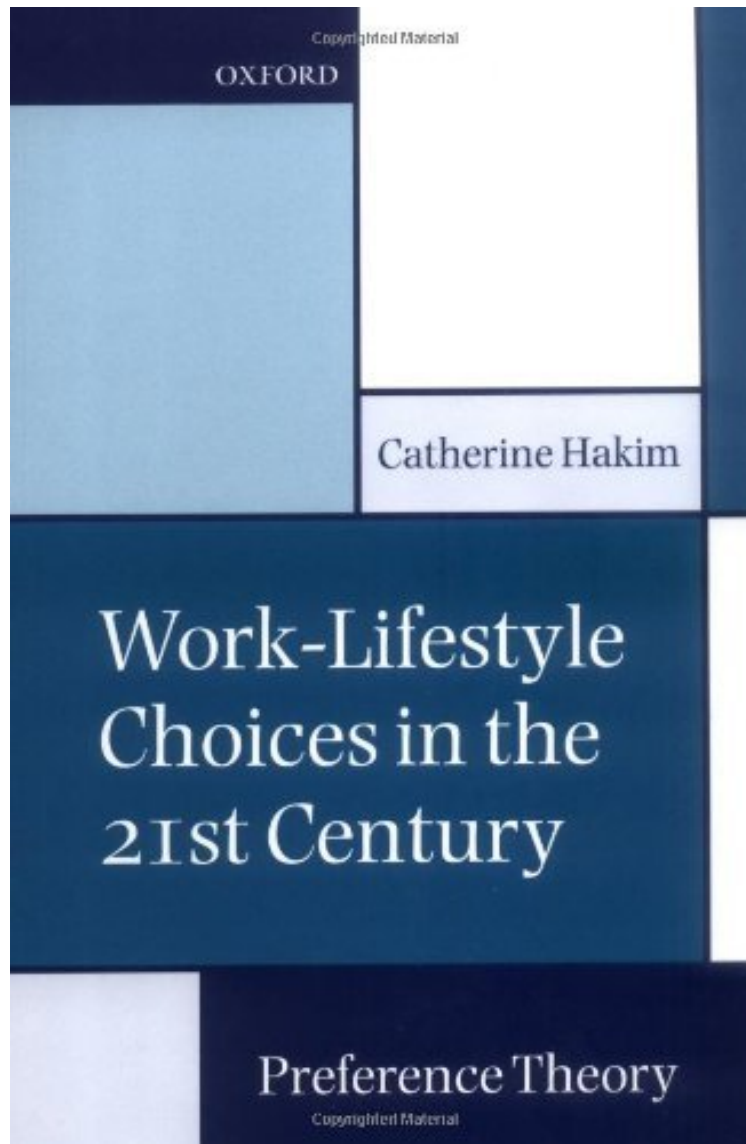


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Work-Lifestyle Choices in the 21st Century: Preference Theory

Catherine Hakim

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Catherine Hakim : Work-Lifestyle Choices in the 21st Century: Preference Theory before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Work-Lifestyle Choices in the 21st Century: Preference Theory:

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Real Choice for WomenBy Bill MuehlenbergCatherine Hakim has written extensively on the subject of women and work. In her newest book she approaches this broad and complex subject by means of what she calls "preference theory". In a nutshell, this theory holds that contemporary western women are not at all united on these issues. Instead, they have a wide variety of preferences, preferences which must

be taken into account by policy-makers. Hakim offers four main tenets of preference theory: First, she says there have been five historical social changes which have led to a new scenario for women and their work choices: a. The 60's contraceptive revolution which gave women control over their fertility. b. The equal opportunities revolution, giving women equal access to the labour market. c. The rise of white-collar work, which tends to be more appealing to women. d. The creation of jobs for secondary work, where career is not the number one priority. e. The rising importance of preferences, choices and lifestyle options in affluent societies. Second, women have many different preferences when it comes to work. In particular, there are three idealised preferences most women have: a. Home centered preferences (about 20% of women). b. Work centered preferences (about 20%). c. Adoptive (a combination of work and home) preferences (about 60%). Third, these different preferences result in conflicts between different types of women. Men, on the other hand, are much more homogenous in their preferences, and thus have an advantage over the heterogeneous women. As a result, for many women, much conflict tends to arise because of these diverse preferences. Fourth, the diversity of women's preferences means that public policy needs to be more diverse, catering to the different needs and desires of women, instead of trying to aim for just one approach. Using this four-fold approach to questions of female work and lifestyle choices, she offers an incisive and thought-provoking analysis which will offer much to all sides of the debate. That is, both conservatives and feminists may need to readjust their agendas, in the light of this growing body of research. One of the major conclusions of this research is that women clearly do not have one view on the issue of work and home, but many. Therefore, social policy should be flexible enough to meet the various preferences women in fact have. Policies should not seek to force women into some predetermined mould. Thus, if some women want to stay at home, and eschew the paid workplace, then government policies should recognise and accept those preferences. Indeed, research seems to indicate that, for various reasons, only a minority of women will want, and will reach, the top positions of power in the workforce. Contrary to much feminist rhetoric, many women prefer either part-time work or no paid work at all. Not every woman is chafing at the bits to flee the home for a life as a career woman. Certainly some are however. So government policy should cater for such divergence of interests and desires. And research makes it clear that this diversity of preferences will remain strong. Thus if governments want to really honour the diversity of women in their choices, they should create policies which maximise choice, and forego coercive policies designed to create a pre-determined end. In this respect Hakim suggests that governments might adopt a kind of home-makers' allowance, available to all women. This should be available to all mothers for three years or more after each birth, irrespective of their employment record. The importance of Hakim's thesis cannot be underestimated. The "one-size-fits-all" approach of many western governments (usually a feminist version of things) to questions of women and work tend to be restrictive and coercive. They just do not take into account the many real differences women have on the issue. Hakim's work shows us that women, like men, are not all of one piece, are not all cut from the same cloth. There is a wide-array of diversity and differences of opinion about the relationships between work, home, family, and other choices. Governments need to respect such diversity. This book is an important contribution to that end.

In this pioneering work, Catherine Hakim presents the "Preference Theory," a new, multi-disciplinary philosophy for explaining and predicting current and future patterns for women choosing between family work and outside employment. It is the first theory developed specifically to explain women's behavior and choices, constituting a major break from male-oriented theorizing in sociology and economics. In fact, this text identifies five major historical changes that are collectively producing a new scenario for women in prosperous, 21st century societies.

An interesting book ... Hakim does focus on an increasingly important issue, which will exercise policy-makers in the years ahead. * Robert Taylor, Financial Times * A compelling book, original in its approach and its theoretical development ... An important contribution of Work-Lifestyle Choices in the 21st Century comes in the consideration Hakim gives to the implications of preference theory for the impact of public policies on women's (and men's) choices about employment, family, and the combination of the two. * Population and Development * About the Author Catherine Hakim, Senior Research Fellow, London School of Economics