Democracy in the Kitchen

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- Department of Psychology

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Abstract

From the post-war period, with its emphasis on expanding educational possibilities for all children, to equal opportunities in the 1970s and 80s, the prevailing notion has been that "natural" mothering would produce "normal" children, fit for the new democratic age. These ideas have become commonsense ones, but at what cost to the lives of women? The authors explore these effects by examining a study of four-year-olds with their mothers, and in doing so, they tell us a different story about the divides of class and gender and consequent social inequalities. The authors argue that, although ideas from developmental psychology are held to be progressive, they serve to support the view that there is something wrong with working-class mothering which could be put right by making it more middle-class. But nor is the middle-class home one of happy normality: in both classes, women are differently, but oppressively, regulated. In this book, the authors call for a new feminist engagement with class and gender socialization to constitute a new politics of difference.

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In 1959, in another example of the powerful connotations of domesticity, the American kitchen burst forth from containment to go on the road. Conflicting ideas of the domestic and the democratic were epitomized in 1959 at the Moscow Kitchen Debate during the height of the Cold War. So ended the debate, with the kitchen epitomizing conflicting philosophies of democracy vs. communism, choice vs. conformity, and their inversions. As Ellen Lupton observes, “Although the built environment is designed largely by men, much of it’s constructed with female consumers in mind; design thus contributes to the ‘making’ of modern woman” (12). To understand the political intersection of women and the kitchen, one can examine its history, as well as its storytellers. Museum of Australian Democracy: in Old Parliament House. How our democracy is and how it could be. Australia21: an independent research organisation focusing on real-world problems, sometimes called “wicked,” facing Australia. Sydney Alliance: a diverse coalition using community organising to make Sydney a better place to live. newDemocracy Foundation: innovating in how we do democracy in Australia. Living Room Conversations: Open your ears. CAPaD values the kitchen table conversation (KTC) method as a way to connect Canberrans through community-based, self-managing conversations. We believe that many people hosting and participating in KTCs will help create the pre-conditions for people to desire and be able to join in participatory democracy. In general, citizens in democratic countries with persistent poverty are more susceptible to the appeals of antidemocratic demagogues who promise simple and immediate solutions to their country’s economic problems. Accordingly, widespread economic prosperity in a country greatly increases the chances that democratic government will succeed, whereas widespread poverty greatly increases the chances that it will fail. Political culture. In most older European and English-speaking democracies, political authority inheres in the central government, which is constitutionally authorized to determine the limited powers, as well as the geographic boundaries, of subnational associations such as states and regions.