

workforce in the 1950s to about 10% by 2010. They then see an opposite change in the behaviour of capital. Rather than just relying on their economic power, corporate interests have taken actively to organisation, through the creation of institutions such as think-tanks, political action groups, websites, broadcasting organisations, and so on. And finally, they do see a shift in the relative strength of the two main political parties, but more in organisational than in legislative power. While the Democrats have neglected their organisation, the Republican Party has turned itself into a mighty and well-oiled machine. The political change that lies behind the sociological redistribution of wealth, then, is political more than economic, and in the political arena in organisational more than legislative power. The authors call it 'the politics of organised combat'.

Corporate organised power works in two ways. First, it makes itself dominant in the arena of discourse, where the ideas are formed that condition formal political combat and from where agendas of legislative politics are more or less decided. Second, it works through the mechanism of mega-expensive politics to make candidates for election and re-election dependent on some form of sponsorship, whereby they must pay attention to the interests of potential givers in addition to those of potential voters. All in all, by the time we get to formal legislative politics, much has already been decided elsewhere about what issues are accepted as salient for public policy and about what ideas are the more influential ones in deciding the direction of decision-making on those issues. There is nothing illegal about this, there is no conspiracy and no preponderance of corruption, only what the authors describe as a process of drift resulting from 'systematic, prolonged failures of government to respond to the shifting realities of a dynamic economy'.

What these authors find is, finally, that

the fruits of economic growth have been stolen from the people because their democracy has been stolen from them. If that is correct, one needs to go on and ask how the people can have allowed that to happen and then what should be done about it. On the first question, the answer lies not in any particular acceptance of inequality in American political culture, but in a citizenry that is poorly informed or ignorant about how public policy is made and how the rules of the game have been changing. While legislative politics is easily visible and therefore attracts the anger of the people, informal politicking behind the scenes, where ideas are formed and agendas decided, is less visible and therefore less exposed to popular scrutiny.

Where *Winner-Take-All-Politics* is less satisfying than might have been hoped, is on the question of what to do. Here, the authors draw a blank and stop short of any plan of reform, be it in public policy or in democratic and constitutional arrangements. Although not spelled out explicitly, the message of this utterly despondent book is that American democracy has declined into being dysfunctional and that there is nothing to be done about it.

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**Brian Powell, Catherine Bolzendahl, Claudia Geist and Lala Carr Steelman (eds.): *Counted Out: Same-Sex Relations and Americans' Definitions of Family***  
A volume in the American Sociological Association's Rose Series in Sociology.  
New York 2010: Russell Sage Foundation, 340 pp.

Unexpectedly, same-sex marriage (SSM) has become one of the central issues in American politics during the last two decades. Unexpectedly, because sexuality is-

issues have never been considered 'appropriate' for mainstream political discussion. Unexpectedly, because during this same time America faced major problems and crises, including economic depressions, international monetary crises, severe budgetary cuts, unprecedented terror attacks, and two endless wars. Unexpectedly, because SSM does not seem to threaten any vital interest of any major political actor, at least not any vital interest in the sense we have learned, and have taught, in political sociology courses. Yet gay marriage continues to loom large in election campaigns in the US and to determine how some people vote. In several states constitutional amendments have been suggested, and in a few of them, passed, just in order to block SSM, an indication of how important the issue is for a great deal of Americans.

*Counted Out* does not explain why this issue has become so important but it offers a lead for the search. The book argues that in order to understand the significance of SSM in American politics one must understand the way Americans think about the family. To answer this question the authors of the book conducted two surveys, in 2003 and 2006, with representative samples of the US population and asked them an array of questions. At the core of their questionnaire the researchers presented 11 household types and asked their respondents whether they considered those types to be a 'family'. The types ranged from the typical family (married wife and husband plus kids) to the case of two housemates who share an apartment and have no romantic or sexual relationships. It included an unmarried heterosexual couple, a gay male couple, and a Lesbian couple (without using the explicit terms), and in each of these cases, one combination included children and the other did not. The responses of 712 respondents in 2003 and 815 in 2006 to these questions provide the information processed, analysed, and interpreted in this book.

Chapters 2–5 summarise the main findings. Based on how the respondents classified the various household structures (either as 'family' or not), Chapter 2 reaches the conclusion that there are three distinct views of the family in the US: (1) the exclusionists, who consider only a legally married wife and husband and their kids to be a family; (2) the moderates, who consider all arrangements where kids are involved to be a family; and (3) the inclusionists, for whom any two people who live together and share the functions of family are 'a family', no matter what the legal status of their relationship is or what sex they are. According to the findings, over the three years between the first survey and the second, 2003–2006, the inclusionists increased from one-quarter to almost one-third, while the exclusionists declined from 45% to 38%. This is a significant change over such a short period, and one might suspect that it was merely an artefact. The authors were suspicious themselves and therefore conducted several analyses that supported their findings. They thus offer the thesis that the intensified discussion on sexuality in general, and SSM in particular, brought sexuality to the fore and pushed many people to think over issues that had not been salient on their agenda before. If their thesis is correct, as I believe it is, this case provides strong support for theories of the power of mass media and their influence, at least on several public issues.

Chapter 3 deals with the arguments given by the respondents to justify their decisions about what combinations constitute a family. The surveys included many open questions that allowed the researchers to gain some understanding of the way people think about the family. They show that exclusionists rely upon religious and biblical arguments to justify their decisions and treat marriage as a sacred union. Inclusionists emphasise the expressive and instrumental functions of the relationship between the partners, and it is therefore

not important for them whether the couple involved is married or not or what sex the spouses are. Finally, moderates are ambivalent. They have reservations about same-sex relationships, but they understand that such relationships involve commitment, love, and the mutual support of the partners. Their ambivalence is solved by the presence of children, which persuades them that a same-sex household is indeed 'a family'. The open questions allowed the researchers a glimpse into the reasoning behind respondents' choices, and the answers to those open questions are the flesh on the bones of the quantitative analysis. Yet without in-depth interviewing it is difficult to really understand the way people think about families. A trail-blazing book about 'Americans' definitions of family' could have benefited from a few dozen in-depth interviews in which respondents would have been asked to explain more extensively their views, decisions, doubts, and reasons.

Chapter 4 presents the routine sociological work of determining which social categories are associated with the different attitudes towards the family. The inclusionist view is more frequent among women, who are more likely to be persuaded by the emotional ties between same-sex partners. Younger cohorts have more exposure to gays and lesbians, both personally and through the mass media, and are therefore also more likely to be inclusionists, but interestingly, baby boomers born in the 1950s are more open than both their preceding and subsequent cohorts. It is not surprising that people with higher education, respondents who grew up in non-traditional families, singles, and cohabitants were more likely to be inclusionists than less educated respondents, those who grew up in 'regular' families, and those who were or are married. Race does not count much, perhaps because of the countervailing effects of religion on the one hand and the unique structure of African American fam-

ilies and their experience of prejudice and discrimination on the other hand. More than one-half of urban folks are inclusionists, whereas in rural areas the inclusionists make up just about one-third. The South is the most exclusionist, whereas liberal inclusionists are more common on both coasts, and between 2003 and 2006 the midwest moved more towards inclusionism. As found in many previous studies, knowing gay people as friends and family members boosts support for SSM.

Chapter 5 is interesting because it asks how people account for one's sexuality, as well as for many other personal traits. The way people explain to themselves the causes of their and others' personality, whether they assign it to genetics, parental teaching, the social environment, God, or luck, is another topic missing from most studies on public opinion, although it is important for understanding the formation of political views. In the case of sexual orientation the study shows that people who attribute it to factors beyond human control, either genes or God, tend to be inclusionists, while those who think sexuality is shaped by parents and the social environment are mostly exclusionists. This is not surprising either, although one may wonder what came first. Does a negative attitude towards gays lead to a view that their sexuality is the result of human behaviour and not something natural beyond human control, or is it this view that leads to a negative evaluation of same-sex relationships? The study of respondents' accounts of sexuality provides another example of the impact of the mass media. Over the three years between the two surveys, there was a shift towards genetic causation among respondents, which has been the prevalent view in the mass media. At the same time there was no change in the way people explained other personal traits, thus indicating that the difference in regard to sexuality was not an artefact of biased sampling. The only exception was a change in the

way respondents accounted for obesity, but this change was in the opposite direction: fewer people in 2006, relative to 2003, attributed obesity to genetics, and more to parental behaviour, reflecting, once again, the popular view on obesity in the mass media. Thus the changes in people's accounts of both sexuality and obesity provide another nice illustration of the power of public debates to shape the way people frame various issues.

Chapters 6 and 7 chart Americans' views on two other issues that are not directly related to SSM but also reflect people's views about the appropriate roles of women and men, namely, custody of children and the change of women's surnames after marriage. Respondents who have conservative definitions of the family tend also to think that boys should be in the father's custody (regarding girls, a huge majority think that mothers should have custody of girls) and to support women's taking on the husband's surname. Not being politicised like SSM, the questions of with whom children should stay after their parents separate and whether women should change their family names have barely been studied by social scientists, and *Counted Out* is a welcome addition to the literature. It may also serve as a model for other studies of public opinion that examine too narrowly the specific questions at hand and neglect to survey what individuals think about basic social concepts that underlie the perceptions and conceptualisation of political views. Concerning custody and name change, the authors of *Counted Out* argue reasonably that the fact that these two issues are not part of the partisan political debate makes it possible to study how individuals conceive of gendered roles outside the context of well-publicised, polarised debates. The findings corroborate their argument that the American public might be divided into conservatives, moderates, and liberals in regard to gender, family, and sexuality issues.

There is no doubt that *Counted Out* is an important addition to the research on family, American culture, and American politics. Studying what Americans think about a variety of topics that have never been studied before gives us a great deal of material to contemplate. Furthermore, Powell and his associates give us another lead. Several times along the journey they make a comparison between current Americans' attitudes towards same-sex couples and attitudes towards interracial couples in the not so distant past of the 1970s. More than merely a point of reference, they show similar distributions of the American populace's attitudes towards these two topics. For example, they notice that in the two cases opposition came from older individuals, from rural areas, and from the South. This similarity is one of the reasons they predict that more and more Americans will adopt inclusionist views as time passes. They cautiously anticipate that resistance to same-sex marriage will disappear the same way that the idea that people from different races should not be allowed to marry has vanished. In their opinion, the realisation that this is the inevitable trend is one reason that opponents of SSM fight very hard to block such reforms by passing constitutional amendments. This hypothesis is not so plausible. Activists who are deeply motivated by their ideology rarely admit that their vision is not what other people *really* want and will therefore be enacted by persuasion without having to resort to the political trickery of constitutional amendments. The latter were more likely needed, from their point of view, due to the court rulings that established SSM not through direct legislation but rather through a novel interpretation of constitutional tenets and the law. Opponents to SSM considered such rulings wrong and sought to stop the pro-SSM interpretation through constitutional changes.

The authors do not hide their sympathy for SSM and more than once give prac-

tical advice based on their findings on how to conduct campaigns to legalise gay marriage. Their sympathy is also evident in their hope that SSM will become a regular and legitimate option in American life the same way that interracial marriage has become accepted. There is nothing wrong in taking a position on such an issue; on the contrary, sociologists should aspire to be objective in the way they conduct their research, but they cannot pretend to be neutral on issues that involve their fundamental beliefs in equality and freedom. Yet the question is whether a researcher's values and sympathies do not prevent her from understanding important aspects of the studied issues. For researchers who believe in the right of Lesbians and gays to get married, as Powell and his associates clearly do, it is hard to see resistance to gay and interracial marriage as anything other than a relic of old-fashioned, misconceived ideologies, to be overcome by the liberating powers coming out of more advanced, big urban centres, backed by young people with a college education. Do they not underestimate the power of deep religious feelings and well-entrenched homophobia?

Powell et al. explain quite persuasively why the demography of resistance and support in SSM bodes well for SSM, and yet it is hard to reconcile their optimism with, for instance, the huge support for DOMA just fifteen years ago. DOMA, the Defense of Family Act, designed to block the constitutionally-required recognition of gay marriage in one state by other states and by the Federal Government (signed by President Clinton on 21 September 1996, now under legal challenge), passed the US Senate and the House of Representatives with vast margins (84–15 and 342–67, respectively). Twelve years later, in 2008, after the surveys analysed in *Counted Out* had been conducted, Proposition 8 in California, to introduce into the state constitution the statement that 'only marriage between

a man and a woman is valid or recognized in California', passed in November 2008 with 52% of public support (like DOMA, it is under legal challenge as well). Does this vote negate *Counted Out*? Not necessarily. Egan and Sherrill [2009], who analysed the votes on Proposition 8, reached similar conclusions to those of Powell et al., citing quite a substantial rise in support for gay marriage in California after 2000 (the year of the vote on Proposition 22, a state ban on the recognition of same-sex marriages, approved by a 61 to 39 margin).

*Counted Out*, or more generally, the political sociology of sexuality, deserves more attention than is commonly given to issues related to sexual minorities. Beyond the specific issues related to the interests, action, and status of such minorities, their special experiences present us with new phenomena and unique developments that may help us in expanding our models and theories. If Powell et al. are right, then we have an interesting case in which public opinion changes very quickly while political action is based on what is going soon to be outmoded assumptions about voters' attitudes. How is such a schism formed and what are its consequences? *Counted Out* stops short of answering these questions, but its intensive and elaborate data give us a place to start.

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