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Book Reviews

All in the Family: The Private Roots of American Public Policy. By Patricia Strach. Stanford: Stanford University Press. 2007. 267 pp. $50.00 cloth, $19.95 paper.

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In her book, Patricia Strach writes that since 1907 there have been only 72 articles in the top political science journals that have the word "family" in the title. In other words, outside of feminist political theory and gender-related works, the discipline of political science has had a "near aversion" to taking family seriously as a political entity (p. 10). When it has, it has limited the definition of family to the private sphere, and studies have largely focused on family-related policies, such as family leave programs and welfare reform. What is lacking, Strach argues, are the ways family is also used as a tool in policies to achieve numerous nonfamily goals. Indeed, she writes, "Federal policymakers have an unmistakable interest in family, but political scientists do not have a framework for understanding how family is employed in the policy process and with what effect" (p. 2). In the book, she argues that not only is family critical to the everyday functioning of public policies but also she offers a way to understand that role.

Bringing the insights of feminist political theory and gender studies to bear on public policy studies, Strach investigates the different roles that family plays in public policies and examines their effects. To do so, she focuses on how policies are executed – what she calls the "means" of a policy rather than the goals or ends. She explores the rules, requirements, values, assumptions, and presumptions that undergird and define the development of any policy.

In exploring the procedures of a policy, Strach demonstrates that family is a crucial instrument used throughout the policy process that in many ways

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extends the capacity of the state to carry out its duties. She identifies three key ways that actors rely on family in the policy process: 1) Family acts as a criterion of eligibility to determine who qualifies for goods and services. Individuals are eligible for benefits based on certain family structures. 2) Family acts as an administrator that distributes good and services to its members. In other words, family members act like bureaucrats filling out forms. The author explains how housing vouchers and education tax incentives require parents or guardians of adult children to implement policy, just as traditional state or federal workers might. Family becomes an important determinant of the kinds of policies that the state will be able to implement. 3) Finally, family acts as a normative ideal for policy actors to use in order to justify their policy positions. To support her claims, Strach focuses on three different policy arenas that do not immediately seem related to family: immigration, tax policy, and agriculture policy.

This important and innovative book contributes to American politics, public policy, and gender studies. It is clearly written and analytically deep. More specifically to the study of gender and politics, Strach pushes us to consider a kind of gender work that is different from embodied accounts of women in politics, as well as assumptions that family concerns only the private sphere. She explores the ways family is used by state actors as a tool to achieve practical goals, as well as the ways in which the capacity of the American state rests on the capabilities of this so-called private organization. Strach draws from feminist theories that challenge the division between a private sphere of domestic life and the public realm of politics, but shifting focus, she examines how family shapes politics as opposed to how politics shapes the family. Moreover, she contributes to work within feminist political theory in showing the empirical effects of rhetoric about family as a political instrument that have not been previously explored.

Strach also discusses what is at stake in using family as a policy tool. She points out that definitions of family vary across different policy arenas as well as over time. These changes and differences, however, are not always reflected in the policies. One effect is that some families are not eligible for benefits because of outdated notions of family. She shows that all Americans are not guaranteed equal access to benefits; individual benefits go to individuals in particular family units. She thus illustrates that lawmakers' interest in family cannot be dismissed as purely symbolic.

When the ways that Americans live their lives deviates from the expectations of policies, a disjuncture, or what Strach calls a "policy

gap," is created. A gap is a disconnection between how policymakers expect Americans to act and the ways they do act. This disjuncture provides an opening for change. Her claim is that in order to revise or change policies to benefit different populations, the role of the family in the policy must be evaluated. The family-state relationship, rather than the status of individual families, must be placed at the center of political analyses.

While the author offers many insights into new directions in gender and politics and indeed policy studies, there are some areas where she could have expanded on the implications of her arguments. Is there a relationship between the function of the family politically and the roles of gender in public policies and in the state? In addition, I wanted her to say more about why the family is so central. Finally, if the state uses the family in this way, is the family still private in any way? Is there a line between the state and family? What does her work mean for our notions of privacy?

While those not familiar with the public policy literature may find *All in the Family* a bit overwhelming in its theoretical detail, this drawback in no way detracts from the careful work Strach has done to clarify and analyze the ways family is at the heart of the workings of United States public policy.

Constitutional Context: Women and Rights Discourse in Nineteenth-Century America. By Kathleen S. Sullivan. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. 2007. 181 pp. $45.00.

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Kathleen S. Sullivan argues that the common law is a misunderstood and underappreciated aspect of the American legal and political tradition. According to the author, the English common law not only is the original, historical foundation for the U.S. legal system but also serves as a normative model for how law should be reformed. In her view, the common law provides a community-oriented and contextually sensitive approach to legal reform. As such, it can serve as a corrective to the abstract individualism of the liberal approach to legal reform that eventually came to dominate politics in the United States.