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Telling It All

A Story of Women's Social Capital Using a Mixed Methods Approach

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The aim of this article is to demonstrate how quantitative and qualitative methods can be used together in feminist research. Despite an increasing number of texts and journal articles detailing mixed methods research, there are relatively few published reports of its use in feminist study. This article draws on a study conducted in regional Australia, exploring gender and social capital. Through the analysis and interpretation of data derived from a large survey and in-depth interviewing, the author will demonstrate the power of the mixed methods approach to highlight gender inequality. Despite past reluctance of feminists to embrace quantitative methods, the big picture accompanied by the personal story can bring both depth and texture to a study.

Keywords: *mixed methods; feminist methodology; social capital*

Much has been written in the literature concerning the differences in epistemology between positivist and naturalistic forms of inquiry. Indeed, they have been represented as two distinct research paradigms, drawing on different bodies of thought, and using different methods of data collection. Within the paradigm of positivism, established theory drives the empirical focus of inquiry. Alternatively, within the paradigm of naturalism, knowledge is understood to be socially constructed, and theory is generated from getting an “inside” interpretation. The two approaches have been viewed as incompatible, because of their essential epistemological differences.

Despite vigorous support for the incompatibility thesis, there is growing support in the literature for mixed methods approaches (Creswell, 2003; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007; Morgan, 2007; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). Bryman (1988), among others, has argued that differences between the traditions have been exaggerated and the overlaps ignored. Similarly, Epstein, Jayaratne, and Stewart (1991) contended that much of the debate about quantitative and qualitative methods has been “sterile and based on false polarization (p. 89).” Whereas qualitative methods provide for richly textured data, quantitative methods allow for the incorporation of a large number of contextual variables (Epstein et al., 1991). Quantitative data may assist in providing the big picture, but it is the personal story, accompanied by thoughts and feelings, that brings depth and texture to the research study.

The aim of this article is to demonstrate the use of mixed methods in feminist research. Sands (2004) highlighted that although there are many genres of feminist research, feminist research is about women's experiences as gendered subjects and “efforts to understand and meet challenges related to their status as women” (p. 50). Despite an increasing number of texts and journal articles detailing mixed methods research, there are relatively few

published studies that report on its use in feminist study. Drawing on a study of gender and social capital, this article will provide an example of such a mixed methods research approach. Through the interpretation and analysis of the findings of research conducted in regional Australia, the power of the mixed methods approach to highlight gender inequality will be demonstrated. It will be argued that past conceptualization of social capital, and the research drawing on it, has shown only limited sensitivity to gender. The author will provide examples of quantitative data to demonstrate the existence of different social capital profiles for men and women. Stories will also be presented to provide a picture of gender inequality and expectation. The author will conclude by arguing that despite reluctance on the part of feminists to embrace quantitative methods, the big picture accompanied by the personal story can bring both depth and texture to a study.

The Study of Social Capital

A quick search of the concept *social capital* in any database will provide many and varied results. Such a search will provide evidence of the concept's many applications in both scholarly discussion and public debate. In the scholarly literature, the concept has been empirically measured across countries and across disciplines. In Australia, the concept is referred to quite loosely across political viewpoints to advocate policies of government withdrawal, mutual obligation, and community capacity building. It has gained increased prominence in these social policy discussions across all levels of government (Healy & Hampshire, 2002).

All forms of government have operated under the assumption that social capital is eroding. What they differ on is the aspects of contemporary society that undermine social capital. This is hardly surprising given that definitions of social capital tend to be at best vague and often open to interpretation. The literature is dominated by discussions of the different definitions of social capital, different ideological standpoints, and different interpretations. However, most scholars agree that the concept *social capital* describes the norms and networks that enable people to work collectively together to address and resolve problems they face in common (Saunders & Winter, 1999; Stewart-Weeks & Richardson, 1998; Stone & Hughes, 2000). It is concerned with how people trust each other and how they help one another, whether they are acquaintances, friends, family, workmates, fellow committee members, or club members. It is promoted as a social good: People are happier if they ultimately feel they belong to a community and that they are connected in various ways (McMichael & Manderson, 2004).

As a concept, it has been the subject of different empirical measurement. In Australia alone, several major studies have set out to provide quantitative measurement of social capital (Baum et al., 2000; Onyx & Bullen, 2000; Stone & Hughes, 2002). These large quantitative studies using survey methods have looked for evidence of trust, reciprocity, the exercising of social norms, and participation in social, civic, and community life.

Criticism has been leveled at empirical studies that have measured the extent of participation in associational life, with little consideration for the informal networks to which people belong. This debate raised by Cox (1996) has led to a reexamination of the concept and acknowledgment that there may be different types of social capital that include participation in both informal networks and more formal associations. Putnam (2000) made

the distinction between bonding and bridging forms of social capital. He defined bonding social capital as those networks that encompass strong informal social networks accompanied by strong in-group loyalty. Bonding types of social capital are crucial in generating a shared sense of identity (Onyx, 2001). Bonding types of social capital assist people to “get by.” In contrast, bridging social capital is found in outward-looking networks and includes people across race, gender, and class. This type of social capital brings people together from outside their familial and close networks, to achieve common goals. Bridging forms of social capital are thought to assist in “getting ahead.” This form of social capital is what interested Bourdieu (1986), as it can be used by individuals to foster their position in society. Increasing one’s connections outside personal networks enhances individuals’ opportunities for employment and other forms of social standing.

Although acknowledging that there may be different types of social capital, the research drawing on it has shown limited sensitivity to systematic inequalities associated with gender, race, and class where being civic or caring for others means different things to different people. As Bryson and Mowbray (2005) noted, a very White, middle-class notion of community dominates discussions of social capital. Conflict and exclusion from participation is rarely considered. This lack of consideration is important. Structural inequities of gender, age, and class are very closely related to distribution of civic resources (Norris & Inglehart, 2003). The question that is rarely examined is whether women in particular have access to associational life that brings the returns associated with bridging forms of social capital (Parks-Yancy, DiTomaso, & Post, 2006).

The gender-neutral examination of social capital is concerning, as it fails to consider long-established structural inequalities. Bezanson (2006) explained this by arguing that the most prominent and enthusiastic supporters of the concept tend to be men who are not specialists in family or feminist theory. Studies conducted in the United States and the United Kingdom found evidence that certain types of organizations remain disproportionately male; political parties, sporting clubs, labor unions, and professional groups are examples here (Lowndes, 2000; Norris & Inglehart, 2003; Sapiro 2003). In contrast, other studies have found women’s predominance in unpaid, domestic roles with limited status (Alessandrini, 2003).

These concerns have led academics such as Lowndes (2000) to call for the examination of social capital to focus on different social capital profiles for men and women. The argument made by Lowndes (2000) and Alessandrini (2003) is that women’s caring and community-based responsibilities may constrain their civic and political aspirations.

The present study decided to test out this argument. It sought to explore social capital in two different ways: first, to map the different patterns of participation based on gender, and second, to explore how the role of “mother” alters both the activities women become involved in and the reasons for this.

Combining Methods in Feminist Research

Choosing a research design that best captured the story of women’s social capital required careful consideration. As this study was concerned with drawing attention to the lack of gender focus in studies of social capital and with making more visible women’s

contributions, the researcher was seeking an approach that would be considered valid. Kohler Riessman (1994) contended that feminists have traditionally placed themselves within the postmodern paradigm of research methodology. However, she also believes that there is a growing school of thought that research about a problem may be strengthened when "various kinds of data are brought to bear" (p. X). Similarly, Finch (2004) argued that although feminist research is linked very closely to qualitative forms of inquiry, this link is tenuous and may ultimately disadvantage women. Research that is population based may illuminate issues for women on a broad scale. Despite previous reluctance to use quantitative methods, quantitative and qualitative methods can be used together to give a more powerful voice to women's experiences (Brannen, 1992; Epstein et al., 1991; Oakley, 1999; Shapiro, Setterlund, & Cragg, 2003). Brannen (1992) reassessed previous viewpoints that reject quantitative approaches on the basis that surveys are "imbued with masculinist assumptions" and looked to the new school of thought that believes there is no one feminist methodology; rather, it is more important that the researcher locates herself as feminist within the research process. Brannen argued,

Moreover there are grounds for arguing that both qualitative and quantitative approaches need to be applied in combination, especially where investigations are carried out on social groups whose material situations and perspectives have been under- or mis-represented in social research. While the qualitative approach may overcome some of the problems of giving a voice and language to such groups, through which they may better express their experiences, the quantitative approach would serve to indicate the extent and patterns of their inequality at particular historical junctures. (p. 22)

The present study is located within the transformative research paradigm. Mertens (2007) argued that the transformative paradigm provides a framework for addressing issues of social justice in the research process. The ontological assumption of the transformative paradigm holds that socially constructed realities are influenced by power and privilege. The transformative paradigm recognizes that "voices of those who are disenfranchised on the basis of gender, race/ethnicity, disability or other characteristic" (Mertens, 2007, p. 214) can be excluded in research. Within this paradigm, mixed methods are preferred to highlight issues of need (quantitative data) and to give voice to these issues (qualitative data). The transformative paradigm with its ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions provides a logical framework for different types of feminist research. Research about women should explore the research question first and remain open to a range of data collection methods to arrive at a better understanding (Oakley, 1999). In the past and more recently, arguments have been made that feminist methodology should bring together both the subjective and objective ways of knowing the world (Rose, 1982; Shapiro et al., 2003). In addition, feminist research that draws on evidence from a variety of sources is more likely to be seen as valid and reliable and is thus more likely to be heard in the policy arena (Shapiro et al., 2003).

Advantages and disadvantages inherent in both approaches should be recognized. With large quantitative research, women's voices as an oppressed group have remained unheard (Oakley, 1999). With qualitative research, problems with poor representation and a tendency to overgeneralize need to be highlighted. A mixed methods approach can alleviate some of these inherent problems. As the literature concerned with mixed methods continues to grow,

there are numerous studies demonstrating the power of both breadth and depth in studies of complex social issues.

The majority of research studies undertaken about social capital have primarily used quantitative techniques, and there was a need to find a different approach that included multiple ways of knowing. Back in 1998, Cox called for an increase in studies that combine research methods. This present study is thus different from many other studies of social capital. In the present study, a mixed methods approach was taken to best understand the research problem, with the intent of capturing the best of both qualitative and quantitative methodology (Creswell, 2003). Capturing women's social capital, and the complexities associated with this, led the researcher to want to examine it from different angles (Darlington & Scott, 2002). Thus, both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection were used in a sequential study that had two distinct phases.

Present Study

The present study makes a unique contribution to the mixed methods literature, examining its use in feminist research. There are several key texts that provide a solid discussion of the history of mixed methods research and its application in social sciences (Brewer & Hunter, 2006; Bryman, 1988; Creswell, 2003; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Greene & Caracelli, 1997; Mertens, 2007; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998, 2003). Journals such as *Quality & Quantity* and *Journal of Mixed Methods Research* are committed to publishing a range of mixed methods studies. Despite these publications and an extensive search in many and varied journals, there are very few published studies that combine a feminist approach with a mixed methods approach. Finch (2004) argued that research that uses an approach other than qualitative to address feminist questions remains underdeveloped (p. 64).

This study was conducted in a regional city in Australia. Prior to commencing the study, the researcher's research experience had been with qualitative forms of inquiry. Despite this, the researcher determined that a large representative sample of data was required to generalize to the population. For instance, the researcher determined that the survey method would be the best method for identifying whether men and women had different social capital profiles. However, only qualitative methods could illuminate the stories behind these profiles.

The study used an explanatory sequential design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). Extensive data collection occurred in both stages of the study. This led to intensive data analysis at two different stages of the research process. Padgett (1998) discussed the temptation to revert to a dominant-less-dominant design, compromising both data collection and data analysis in one of the methods. Equal time was spent on Stage 1 and Stage 2 of the research process.

A survey method was chosen for Stage 1 of the study. This enabled the researcher to describe; explore; and, to some extent, explain aspects of the differences between men and women on social, community, and civic participation within the sample.

In the second stage, the study focused on exploring, from the viewpoint of women, their processes of interacting in their social, community, and civic worlds and how they felt about their lives and the activities in which they became involved. The researcher was

interested in describing aspects of their lives, based on their telling of their experiences. Thus, the participant became the expert, and the data generated were qualitative.

Greene, Caracelli, and Graham (1989) identified five reasons for conducting mixed methods studies: triangulation, complementarity, development, initiation, and expansion. In this present study, the aim of complementarity provided the justification for the mixed methods approach. When the aim is to complement findings, the researcher is seeking elaboration, enhancement, illustration, and clarification from the results of one method with those of the other. The findings of the first stage illustrated some complexities in the data. Women demonstrated a different pattern of participation in social and community and to a lesser extent, civic activities. This was particularly the case for women aged between 29 and 49 years. The researcher was seeking an extended and deeper view of this difference. One of the criticisms leveled at research that produces only quantitative data is that the data can become overinterpreted. Here was the advantage of complementarity; the qualitative study elaborated on and enhanced some of the results from the quantitative study. The qualitative study also provided vivid illustrations of some of the results found in Stage 1.

The present study had several limitations. Social capital has been measured and conceptualized in several different ways. The researcher set out to find a measure of social capital that could be easily adapted to the nonmetropolitan context and that made a distinction between informal and formal types of participation. This was particularly important, as the researcher was attempting to highlight the range of activities that women became involved in, not just those that occur within the public eye. The first stage of the study thus used a measure developed by the South Australian Community Research Unit (Baum et al., 2000). In using this, the researcher acknowledges the other valuable tools that have since been developed, which focus on family social capital (Hughes & Stone, 2003) and different types of networks (Onyx & Bullen, 2000).

In the second stage of the study, the researcher chose to follow up on a subsample of women between the ages of 29 and 49 years. In doing so, the researcher also acknowledges that it would have been beneficial to conduct in-depth interviews with a subsample of men. Although motherhood changed women's participation, the quantitative data indicated that this was also true to a lesser extent for men. Similarly, women 29 and younger and 50 and older were excluded from the interviews. Both groups may have provided some useful comparative data. The scope and size of the research prevented further subsamples to be explored.

Research Questions

There were two clear research questions driving the study:

Research Question 1: Do men and women have different social capital profiles?

Research Question 2: Why do women participate more in social and community activities than in civic activities?

Methods

The researcher used sequential mixed methods sampling (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). Participants were selected sequentially through probability and purposive sampling strategies.

Stage 1: Participants

Simple random sampling was the method chosen for determining the sample. To compensate for the poor response rate to self-administered surveys and reduce sampling error, a large sample was chosen. Because of new privacy legislation, the researcher was unable to select names and addresses from the electoral roll. The questionnaire went out to 4,000 households, randomly selected from a database of residential addresses provided by the local government authority. Replies were received from 1,431 residents (a response rate of 35%). Of these, 403 were male (28.8%) and 998 were female (71.2%). Women are therefore disproportionately represented in the survey. The mean age of respondents was 48.7 years. More than 32% of the respondents worked full-time, 21% worked part-time, 17% were engaged in home duties, 4% were students, 3% were permanently unable to work, 18.5% were retired, 2% were unemployed, and the rest were "other." Of those who were working, the mean working hours was 41.5 for men and 31.1 for women. Almost two thirds of the respondents reported that they lived in households as a couple or a couple with children. Lone-parent households made up 7.1% of the sample. Respondents were asked to identify their highest level of education completed. Those with no formal schooling totaled 0.4%, 5.9% had primary school as their highest level of education, 40.2% had secondary school, 14.3% had a Technical and Further Education (TAFE) qualification, 13.5% had trade, 27.8% had a university and/or higher degree, with the rest "other."

It should be noted that the study's focus was squarely on adults and social capital, thus only people aged 18 and older were invited to complete the questionnaire. Members of the sample were sent a cover letter explaining the study's purpose and usefulness, and describing how the respondent was selected. Respondents were also sent an additional form seeking an expression of interest in participating in the second stage of the study.

Stage 2: Subsample

All participants were recruited as a result of the first stage of the research. Those participants who were interested in being interviewed for the second stage signed the agreement form sent with the initial questionnaire. This meant that forms were returned from both men and women. As this form was returned to the researcher separately from their questionnaire to ensure confidentiality, the researcher could not match up the survey results with any one respondent or with any demographic information.

Seventy-five women responded by filling in and signing their form. Those who had expressed an interest in being interviewed were posted an information sheet and an informed consent form. The researcher decided on a cluster random sampling technique. In cluster random sampling, "already formed groups of individuals within the population are selected as sampling units" (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998, p. 75). The researcher contacted by phone those who had returned the informed consent form explaining the purpose of the study and its interest in women between the ages of 29 and 49 years. Those who did not fit the criteria for the sample were excluded. The researcher had determined initially on a quota sample of 6 participants, thus the first 6 participants who met the criteria and were willing to be interviewed were chosen. This sample grew until the researcher felt comfortable that saturation had been achieved.

The final sample comprised 12 participants. There were an equal number of participants aged 29 to 39 years and 39 to 49 years. Similar to the broader sample, 4 participants worked in a full-time paid capacity, 6 participants worked in a part-time paid capacity, and 2 participants provided full-time home duties. Three of the 12 women were sole parents, a figure higher than that of the broader sample. The participants' level of education was also higher than that of the broader sample. Two of the participants had completed secondary education, 1 participant held a TAFE diploma, 6 participants had gone on to complete a university degree, and 2 participants had completed the equivalent of a master's degree.

Procedures

Quantitative data. The study's initial theory testing required data from a large representative sample to generalize to the population. By using a survey as a form of data collection, the researcher was able to describe; explore; and, to some extent, explain aspects of social, community, and civic participation within the sample. The survey was cross-sectional, with data collected at one point in time.

In Australia, instruments have been developed to measure social capital in different communities (Baum et al., 2000; Onyx & Bullen, 2000; Stone & Hughes, 2002). It is important to note that the measurement of social capital is not uniform, as academics search for different forms of measurement. Approval was granted by the South Australian Community Health Research Unit to draw on a survey instrument developed to measure social capital and health in Adelaide. This instrument was chosen for a number of methodological reasons. The validity of the instrument had already been demonstrated (Baum et al., 2000). This instrument was developed using a combination of preexisting measures and some measures specifically developed for the Adelaide study. The survey instrument was sufficiently sensitive to gender issues, particularly its focus on caring and the amount of hours devoted to caring for children. The researcher particularly favored the distinction made between those activities that were of a social nature and those that were conducted on behalf of the civic or community good.

Respondents were asked how often they had been involved in different activities. As in the Adelaide study, this survey measured levels of participation by the number of activities in which individuals were involved. A key distinction is made here between social, community, and civic participation. Social participation embodies those activities performed in a company such as visiting friends, going to the cinema, and going to a party. Civic activities are performed for a different reason, usually to promote the civic or community good. Community participation embodies those activities that have a mixture of social and civic activities, such as being involved in a service club and involvement in child-related activities. Items that are contained in each participation category are outlined in Table 1. To ensure reliability, these scales of participation were drawn from the Adelaide study (Baum et al., 2000). These scales were developed "through a process of discussion between the research team that was informed by their knowledge of the literature of participation and the measurement of social capital" (Baum et al., 2000, p. 417).

Data were analyzed using the computer software package Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS). A series of measures was used to provide scope for a thorough testing of the hypotheses that men and women would have different social capital profiles.

Table 1
Items Contained in Each Participation Category

Social participation—informal (3 items)

If the respondent had done any of the following activities:

Visited family or had family visit, visited friends or had friends visit, visited neighbors or had neighbors visit.

Social participation—in public spaces (4 items)

If the respondent had done any of the following activities:

Been to a cafe or restaurant, been to a social club, been to the cinema or theater, been to a party or dance.

Social participation—group activities (6 items)

If the respondent had done any of the following activities:

Played sport, been to the gym or exercise class, been involved in a hobby group, been involved in a self-help or support group, singing/acting/musician in a group, gone to a class.

Civic participation—individual activities (7 items)

If the respondent had done any of the following activities:

Signed a petition, contacted a local Member of Parliament, written to the Council, contacted a local councilor, written a letter to the editor of a newspaper, attended a Council meeting, attended a protest meeting.

Civic participation—collective activities (4 items)

If the respondent had been involved in any of the following activities:

Resident or community action group; political party, trade union, or political campaign; campaign or action to improve social or environmental conditions; local government.

Community group participation—mix of social and civic (4 items)

If the respondent had been involved in any of the following activities:

Volunteer organization or group; school-related group; service club; been involved with a children's group.

Initially, frequencies were gathered on each variable contained within levels of social, community, and civic participation (six types), and the data file was divided into male and female.

All items contained within the six participation types were then totaled to compute a total score for each respondent for the following six items: informal social participation, social participation in public places, social participation in groups, individual civic participation, collective civic participation, and community group participation. Using the participation types as dependent variables and gender as an independent variable, a one-way between-groups multivariate analysis of variance was performed. In addition, multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was also conducted to compare the mean differences between men and women on a combined dependent variable of participation.

Qualitative data. The second stage of the study was concerned with understanding participation from the participant's perspective. In this, the researcher wanted to develop an understanding of what motivates women's involvement in social, civic, and community life and the social realities of their experiences. These motivations and experiences are crucial to our understanding of social capital.

In-depth one-to-one interviews were conducted with 12 women who had already been involved in Stage 1 of the research. It was decided that participants would be interviewed on two separate occasions, 1 week apart. Each participant was interviewed for approximately 2 hours in total. Each interview was tape-recorded with the permission of the participant. The interview guide consisted of open-ended questions that explored women's

daily lives. In Stage 1, the quantitative data had revealed a difference between men and women in social and community group participation. The intent here was to develop an understanding of why this might be so. It was also the intent to explore fully the range and types of participation they were involved in. For instance, in the first interview, participants were asked to describe a week in their lives and how they viewed their lives as being different from their partner's. The participants were interviewed again 1 week later. A diary the participants had been asked to keep for the week was used as the basis for the second interview. Several of the participants used the week to talk to other women about the research project. Not all kept a formal diary; however, all of the participants produced some written reflections about their week. The diary or the written reflections gave a focus to the first part of the second interview.

Again, participants were asked open-ended questions. They were initially asked to reflect on the first interview. Participants were asked to talk about their week and to describe how they felt about their involvement in certain activities. They were asked to think about their caring responsibilities and how these may have affected their life experiences, goals, or ambitions. In the final question, participants were asked whether there was anything in their life that they would like to do differently. In all, there were very few questions as the researcher wanted participants to provide the direction for the interview by telling their story.

The data were analyzed using a model of narrative analysis (Ezzy, 2002; Sands, 2004). The researcher's intent was to analyze the data in successive stages, looking for plot, characters, metaphors, interpretations, and cultural norms; how the stories compared and contrasted; and how the researcher was viewed by the participant. This required careful reading of the transcripts at each stage of the analysis. It was anticipated that this type of multistage layering of systematic analysis would add rigor to the study (Stevens & Doerr, 1997).

Results

In a mixed methods study, reporting on findings is complex because of the vast amount of data collected (Gioia, 2004). The findings presented here were selected to demonstrate how a mixed methods study can provide both statistical data and narrative data to increase understanding. Thus, only some of the findings from Stage 1 and Stage 2 will be presented. First, some examples of the quantitative data will be presented. Examples of the qualitative data will then be presented by means of three particular narrative themes.

Quantitative Results

The first stage of the research was driven by the following research question: *Do men and women have different social capital profiles?*

To answer this question, a key distinction was made between social, community, and civic participation (see Table 1). This decision to differentiate between the different types of participation reflects more accurately the different social worlds that men and women occupy.

Levels of participation by gender are displayed in Table 2. In general, higher levels of social participation were recorded for women with the exception of group, hobby, and

Table 2
**Levels of Participation Reported by Respondents in Social,
 Community, and Civic Activities, by Gender (in percentages)**

	Men	Women
Social participation informal ^a		
Visited family/family visit	69.02	75.02
Visited friends/friends visit	59.06	61.00
Visited neighbors/neighbors visit	53.4	49.6
Social activities in public space ^a		
Went to a café/restaurant	40.09	44.00
Went to a social club	23.00	17.09
Went to cinema/theater	18.59	20.01
Went to a party/dance	8.03	9.08
Group hobby/sporting activities ^a		
Played sport	9.00	6.04
Went to a gym/exercise class	4.00	3.04
Went to class	3.05	7.06
Involved in a hobby group	5.03	6.05
Went to self-help/support group	2.00	4.07
Singing/acting/music group	2.03	1.05
Individual civic participation ^b		
Signed a petition	56.10	61.50
Contacted local member of parliament	14.02	9.08
Written to the council	15.07	13.00
Contacted local councilor	10.02	6.05
Attended a protest meeting	6.03	4.08
Attended a council meeting	7.03	4.01
Written letter to editor of newspaper	6.01	5.04
Collective civic participation ^b		
Resident/community action group	8.05	9.02
Campaign/action to improve social or environmental conditions	8.07	7.08
Political party/trade union/political campaign	4.08	2.04
Local government	5.08	3.09
Community group participation ^b		
Volunteer group or organization	30.01	32.02
School-related group	12.05	23.03
Children's group	7.00	18.02
Service club	13.05	6.06

a. Did activity monthly or more often in the past year.

b. Did activity at all in the past year.

sporting activities. Low levels of civic participation were recorded apart from signing petitions. Generally, higher levels of participation were recorded for community group participation, especially those involving children and school-related activities.

Informal social participation. Each respondent was given a score out of 18 on the first of the new variables, informal social participation. This category contained three items: whether

the respondent had visited family or had family visit, visited friends or had friends visit, and had visited neighbors or had neighbors visit.

Social activities in public spaces. This participation category includes social activities that occurred outside the home and consists of the following items: whether the participant had been to a café/restaurant, social club, cinema/theater, and party/dance. Each respondent was given a score out of 24 on social participation in public places.

Social participation in group hobby or sporting activities. This participation category includes social activities in group, hobby, or sport and contains the following items: whether the respondent had played sport, had been to the gym or exercise class, had been involved in a hobby group, had been involved in a self-help group, had been singing/acting or had been musician in a group, and had gone to a class. The six items were grouped together, and respondents were given a total mean score out of 24 on social participation in group hobby or sporting activities.

Civic participation—Individual items. This participation category includes civic activities conducted on an individual basis such as signing a petition, contacting the local Member of Parliament, and writing to council, writing a letter to the editor of a newspaper, attending a council meeting, contacting a local councilor, and attending a protest meeting. These seven items were grouped, and respondents were given a total score out of 7.

Civic participation—Collective activities. This form of participation comprises those civic activities that are performed with other people such as belonging to a resident or community action group; belonging to a political party, trade union, or political campaign; joining a campaign or action to improve social or environmental conditions; and being involved in local government. Individual items were grouped, and respondents were given a score out of 4 on this item.

Community group participation. The types of activities in this category included involvement in a children's group, school-related group, service club, and volunteer group. Respondents were given a score out of 4 on this item.

A one-way between-groups multivariate analysis of variance was performed. The six participation scales were used as dependent variables. The independent variable was gender. Preliminary assumption testing was conducted to test for normality, linearity, univariate and multivariate outliers, homogeneity of variance-covariance matrices, and multicollinearity, with no serious violations noted. There was a statistically significant difference between men and women on the combined dependent variables, $F(6, 1372) = 6.16, p = .000$; Wilks's Lambda = .97; partial $\eta^2 = .03$. When the results for the dependent variables were considered separately, significant differences between men and women were found on three of the six participation scales; informal social participation, $F(1, 1378) = 10.63, p = .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .01$; social participation in group, hobby, or sporting activities, $F(1, 1378) = 2.81, p = .000$, partial $\eta^2 = .01$; community group participation, $F(1, 378) = 11.43, p = .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .01$. A Bonferroni-adjusted alpha level of .008 was used. An inspection of mean scores indicated that women reported higher levels of informal social participation, social participation in groups, and community group participation.

Summary of Quantitative Findings

A look at social, civic, and community participation provides evidence of difference between men and women, suggesting a prevalent gendered pattern of participation. These findings lend support to Lowndes's (2000) contention that men's and women's social capital is different, with women more involved in informal sociability. Lowndes (2004) has since argued that women are more likely to draw on informal sociability to help them "get by" by balancing the competing responsibilities of work, home, and children (Lowndes, 2004, p. 61).

This argument seems to be reflected in the findings presented here. The descriptive statistics point to some differences between men and women. On individual items that involved social participation, women reported higher levels than men. They were also involved more in activities that had a group focus or community group focus. Their level of participation was higher for those activities that were focused on children. In contrast, men reported higher participation in activities that were generally more formal in focus. For instance, they were more involved in traditional service clubs, social clubs, sporting clubs, and political parties/trade union groups. Men recorded slightly higher involvement in civic activities.

The quantitative results presented here show a difference between men and women on social and community participation and to a limited extent civic participation. Women scored higher on items contained in the informal social participation scale, with women more likely to make and receive visits with family and friends. Gender did not appear to affect social participation in public places. Women were more involved in social participation in group activities. This look at social participation suggests women predominate in the informal arenas built around family and friends. Turning to civic and community group participation, men reported slightly higher rates of civic participation. Women, however, participate significantly more in activities that have a community group focus. They participate more in school and children's groups. These findings may well reflect women's social worlds, constructed around family responsibilities.

What they are not able to do is expand on why this might be so. The researcher was attempting to understand why men and women had different social capital profiles. Although the quantitative data give a broad snapshot of women's and men's participation in social and community activities, they do not tell the reader what is the underlying motivation for such participation, the experience of this, and the feelings associated with giving up other types of participation. These motivations and experiences are crucial to our understanding of social capital. In the present study, the researcher wanted to delve into what lies behind motivations to participate and the experiences of these. This type of approach had been missing in the social capital literature.

Qualitative Findings

The following research question drove the second stage of the study: Why do women participate more in social and community activities than in civic activities?

The data presented here provide insight into the participants' understandings of participation. This is important, because it extends understandings beyond *what* women become involved in to *why* they become involved. What is striking in the findings is the different

ways the women thought about how they participate and their motivations behind this. A pattern started to emerge in their responses.

The women interviewed were all in their thirties and forties, all mothers, and all struggling to find the time to pursue their own interests. When the researcher delved into some motivations behind their participation, it became apparent that the experience of motherhood, more than anything else, influenced these motivations. All the participants felt overburdened by the responsibilities associated with motherhood. They reflected on how they measured up as a "good mother." Here, some were influenced by the ideology of familism and expressed guilt at not always being there for their children. They felt that they should participate in social and civic life for the sake of their children. A second and overlapping group became involved as mothers to avoid social isolation. Another group rallied against participating as "mothers" and instead wanted to participate as active citizens. Their experiences in doing so were surprisingly similar; they all had experienced exclusion closely tied to their gender and their role of mother. Each theme will be discussed in turn.

Wanting to be a "good mother". The first group of women focused on the traditional volunteer activities associated with women and, more particularly, mothers: help in the school classroom, mother's club, fruit and milk preparation at preschool, assistance with school canteen, and help with school excursions. They had taken the concept of a "good mother," doing it all for their children, and had located themselves within this image. They often felt good about their involvement, which they saw as contributing to their children's development. Members of this group in this study are motivated by an overwhelming sense that this is what they are supposed to do. They are either actively involved or wish for more time to be further involved in their children's preschool and school life. Motivations behind this vary, from wanting knowledge of their children's development to the pleasure their involvement gives to their children. A strong desire to foster their child's human capital was evident. They were not striving for individual recognition; rather, there was a strong sense that this is what a "good mother" does. An example of this follows:

But I think being a working mother is definitely hard work. You've got to really juggle your commitments at work and then your responsibilities to your family. That sometimes makes you feel like you're a bad mother because you can't get there all the time. Trevor's job is more flexible so he drops them off and picks them up. Instead of Mum going to do those things, this year it's been swapped around. He's going to any parent/teacher interviews, anything that's in the hours that I can't get to. That's hard, because sometimes you feel like you should be there, and you can't be there And that's hard because I know, being a working mother, you feel that you're not fulfilling your whole motherly role, if you can't be there.

This focus on being a good mother did not automatically mean that all the participants enjoyed their participation in these child-focused activities. For some it represented hard work, different from what they were used to and often quite tedious. They stuck with it because of their strong sense of doing the right thing by their children. One participant reflected,

So I'll do fruit duty then. Because it's from 9:00 a.m.-11:00/11:30 a.m., I stay the whole session then, until 2:00 p.m. It's such a long session, I don't know how preschool teachers do it;

I get such a headache. The kids really like it and Kerry loves showing me, so I stay the whole session.

The above quotes provide some insight into one group's motivations behind participating as mothers in the community. Their construction of this is that they tolerate their participation for the sake of their children. The metaphor "good mother" aptly describes what lies behind such motivations. Their gender and role as mothers strongly influence their degree of social responsibility.

Wanting to avoid social isolation. Although there was one group who demonstrated strong bonding types of social capital, involved with their family and friends, there was another group who were new to the regional area. This group comprised seven nonlocal women, each striving for ways to establish roots and connections in the community, with varying success. They each looked to the community in an attempt to avoid social isolation. Motivations were not always altruistic in nature; sometimes, altruistic motivations combined with motivations of self-preservation.

One participant's story is a powerful example of this. She describes herself as a "fringe dweller"—someone who has tried knocking on several doors, but has ultimately felt excluded from the larger margins of society. She reflected on this:

Int: Do you often feel isolated or lonely?

E: Yes, very much so. I heard something this morning on the radio, on the ABC, and they were talking about how people who are part of community groups and social groups actually live longer than the people who are isolated, and I thought, I can really feel that in the pit of my stomach, that isolation, how it's just not healthy, not good.

Another participant, also new to the area, has had to work hard at establishing social connections. She used emotive language to describe her 1st year in the area. *Horrible* and *ugly* are the words she chose. When she arrived in the community, she immersed herself in children's activities as a way to get out of the house, with varying success. She has reinvented herself as the "mothers' group junkie," desperate to belong to a group and to feel included again.

I'm not by nature an extrovert, but I just hated being stuck at home. I'm not really into babies, I realized. I thought it might be different with my own, but it wasn't. I became a real mothers' group junkie and because I like structure, I'd have Monday, playgroup, then Tuesday I'd go to the library, there was a little craft session. I joined Nursing Mothers because I was really into breast-feeding at the time. I did kids' gym and swimming lessons. Every day we had an activity, and I got to meet people like that. Some groups were better than others. The kids were doing gym, and the group of women there I didn't particularly get on with, so they just stopped doing gym. And I thought, am I doing this for the kids, or am I doing this for me? And it was really for both of us.

There were several stories of social exclusion and social isolation coming through the data. Several of the participants had tried to participate through their children, and not all had had positive experiences. Although the quantitative data showed gender polarization in participation based on children, the qualitative data help explain why this may be so.

The participants often had two different motivations for participation; trying to be a good mother and trying to avoid loneliness and social exclusion.

Wanting to be a good citizen. The third group is primarily focused on being a good civic citizen, and the involvement of members of this group was more civic in nature. They had extended their involvement to political parties, committees of management, and collective civic action. Although they did not reject the stereotype of the “good mother,” their sense of community extended beyond their children. The following quotes provide examples of this:

The question was, What motivates me? I think it's a real sense of obligation and responsibility. It's a really good thing for the community if people become more involved. I'm just astounded when people say no. I think, you can do that?

I feel really strongly about our responsibility to make sure that, you know, we [don't] take, take, take all the time. I use the leisure center and use facilities and services that are provided by state, local, and federal governments, so I feel compelled to somehow put back in. Do you know what I mean? I feel like I need to put back in. The conscience is there. I think women also go through the guilts, and we do have a desire to please and to put back in. I think that's a big part of our makeup, if you can generalize.

This group's participation was structured by altruistic motivations. They each shared a developed sense of civic conscience and wished to be involved in more public activities, often the activities that social capital theorists advocate. They rejected gendered roles associated with volunteering, in favor of more formal roles usually associated with men.

Despite this, they had each experienced the pain of exclusion and believe strongly that this is related to their gender and their role as mother. The following quote, from a participant who had attempted to become involved in a political party, provides an example of this:

I can remember when we moved here, a good friend of mine was quite involved in a political party, and I'm not really political but I thought this would be a good way of meeting people. I thought, I won't become a member; I'll go to a few meetings. Again, it was oh f The party up north were quite left-wing, whereas here they're much more right-wing and union orientated. There were a lot of men at this meeting. I turn up, and I was wearing one of my hippy tops with Kayla, breast-feeding baby, and the men, honest to God, as soon as I started feeding, they all just stopped. And I thought, have I done something? I felt very uncomfortable, and I never went back.

Another participant described taking on the responsibility for organizing a political campaign. In becoming the manager, she encountered a great deal of opposition coming from women themselves. She reflected on this experience and concluded she had overstepped the boundaries. She was given the message that she had deviated from the script and should leave “the political stuff” to men and get on with the hands-on work. She has since found that women do most of the fund-raising activities for the party, particularly the catering. She describes an experience when the Deputy Leader came up for a major function. The women did all the work before and after the dinner:

Oh, the money-raising area, that's fascinating to see what happens. That is women-dominated work to the extent that we had a function, and we all worked our butt off, but it was predominantly the women, then it was predominantly the women during the dinner, and it was predominantly the women after that dinner. And the men came in and out and grabbed a tea towel and dried some dishes, and that was all very nice, but it was fascinating to see. I thought, no, I haven't got the time or energy for this, so I backed off a bit. I got a very clear impression that there was women's work and men's work here.

There were several examples in the data where exclusion was experienced. The participants in this group were motivated to contribute at a civic level, but all have faced considerable opposition. They attributed this to traditional gender roles being more tightly scripted in rural areas. All had retreated, not knowing how to confront the hostility they encountered. Although their domestic skills were valued, their political skills were not. These stories help to explain why the levels of civic participation for women were so low in the quantitative data.

Summary of Qualitative Findings

The three themes presented in the narratives—wanting to be a “good mother,” wanting to avoid social isolation, and wanting to be an active citizen—provide some understanding of how women construct meaning around their involvement in social, civic, and community life. A look at the literature more concerned with women and volunteer work finds evidence of similar themes (Petrzelka & Mannon, 2006). They summarize how women have framed their volunteerism as (a) an expression of their maternal instincts, (b) a means for providing socialization, and (c) a means of involvement in public life.

There were examples of gender strategizing (Hochschild, 1989), with the first group devoting themselves selflessly to the care of their children—as this is what “good mothers” do. For others, there was clear evidence of becoming involved as a way to “get by” in two different ways: (a) to survive the experience of motherhood and its many competing demands and (b) to avoid loneliness. Self-preservation, as opposed to altruism, appears to drive participation. Those motivated by the spirit of altruism experienced exclusion directly related to their gender.

The qualitative findings provide a deeper story and help enhance the findings from Stage 1. These stories highlight a need to focus not just on what people do but also on why and what their subsequent experiences are. They help explain some of the quantitative findings and provide a more complete story of women's social capital. For instance, in the present study, women are involved more in bonding types of social capital, but this is very closely tied to their socially constructed roles as mothers. The stories also provide insight into why women's civic participation is limited. Issues such as time constraints, role constraints, and exclusion now surface and become part of the whole story of women's social capital.

Integration of Findings

This study sought to capture women's social capital. It has brought together and interpreted both the quantitative data and the qualitative data collected in this mixed methods

study. The quantitative data have assisted in providing the big picture, revealing a different pattern of participation for men and women. The qualitative data have assisted in developing and sharpening this picture, assisting to explain why this may be so.

This study has allowed for a much richer understanding of gender and social capital. Whereas the theoretical and empirical study of social capital has largely discounted gender, the findings of this mixed methods study underscore its importance. In the present study there was evidence of gendered patterns of participation. A pattern of difference between men and women was observed around levels of social; community group; and, to a lesser extent, civic participation. Overall, the quantitative findings provide evidence of women's predominance in informal sociability and to a lesser extent men's predominance in associational life.

The quantitative findings also highlighted significant differences between men and women in community participation centered on children. The researcher used the narratives to delve more into the motivations behind the range of participation. Here, the responses reflected more complex motivations. In several cases, the participants measured their own contributions according to socially constructed norms of behavior. Some measured themselves against the myth of the "good mother" embedded in the ideology of familialism. They are driven by duty and guilt and attempt to foster their own children's human capital, as this is what a "good mother" does. Hays (1996, p. 131) argues that all mothers share recognition of the ideology of "intensive mothering." Lareau (2003) argued the existence of a "new standard of child rearing in the middle class" (p. 248) supporting children in a range of creative and sporting activities.

Thurer (1994) claimed that this socially constructed myth of the "good mother" is synonymous with self-sacrifice. It is considered both normal and good to place children's needs above a mother's needs. This group volunteered as mothers and volunteered their time assisting in domestic service as their own mothers did. The problem here is that they also have competing demands on their time and do not always enjoy volunteering as a mother. These unpaid family and community support roles lack status and authority (Alessandrini, 2003).

Another story also came through, that of self-preservation. The participant who described herself as a "mothers' group junkie" was desperately joining various groups through her children to avoid social isolation. An assumption made in the social capital literature is that involvement in community life is driven by altruism. By delving into motivation, this present study has found a more complex set of motivation and experiences.

Women's limited access to, and involvement in, political activity has been extensively studied elsewhere (Burns, Lehman Schlozman, & Verba, 2001). Overall, in the present study, there was limited support for gender difference in civic participation. The descriptive statistics highlighted that men scored higher on individual items such as involvement in politics, trade unions, service clubs, and social clubs. Previous studies report greater gender polarization in participation (Lowndes, 2000; Onyx & Leonard, 2000). Similarly, an Australian Bureau of Statistics (2001) study found polarization in men's and women's volunteering, with men dominant in management, coaching, and maintenance and women dominant in fund-raising, preparation and serving of food, and supportive listening and counseling.

On their own, the quantitative findings do not tell the entire story. They highlight women's increased role in informal social participation, social participation in groups, and

community participation. However, the quantitative findings do not explain why their civic levels of participation were so low. Here the benefit of the participants discussing their daily lives was immense. Conflict and exclusion were keenly experienced. This was closely related to gender and gender expectations. They believed they were expected to volunteer as mothers. This kind of volunteering is reminiscent of the unpaid domestic work they do at home. Some enjoyed this, whereas the majority believed their skills were wasted. When they have tried to participate at a civic level, they have felt excluded, as if in attempting to enter the civic world they have attempted to enter some exclusive men's club. There was evidence here of the existence of Connell's (2002) gender order. Here, again, the qualitative data provided the story behind the statistics.

Despite a considerable body of literature devoted to social constructions of gender roles, there is little discussion in the social capital literature on the effect of gender. The power of the mixed methods research approach has been to build a comprehensive picture that challenges this lack of attention in the social capital literature.

Conclusion

Feminist research seeks to illuminate women's experiences through the eyes of women. Qualitative research has been favored by feminist researchers to explore these subjective experiences. This article concludes by arguing that, despite this, some feminist research questions may best be answered using a combination of data collection methods. Those seeking to influence the policy and practice agenda around women's issues might consider the types of data that are most highly regarded by the audience they are seeking to persuade. This can be important in convincing nonfeminist decision makers. A feminist mixed methods approach might provide the best and most convincing avenue to answer complex social issues. It can provide a more powerful and vivid story, illuminating issues of gender difference on a broad scale and providing the personal story to accompany this.

To date, the theoretical and empirical work of social capital has shown limited sensitivity to gender. The present study sought to redress this, using a mixed methods design. Despite previous reluctance to use quantitative methods, a mixed methods approach can be used to give a more powerful voice to gender inequality. In the present study, the two sets of data together capture the statistics and the story of women's social capital. The quantitative data have provided detail of genderized patterns of participation, thus providing the big picture of gender inequality. The qualitative data have provided the personal story, accompanied by thoughts and feelings that have brought depth and texture to the research study. The mixed methods approach to data collection has provided a convincing research basis to argue a particular gender order to women's participation.

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