

BOOK REVIEW/COMPTE RENDU

Brenda O'Neill and Elisabeth Gidengil, eds., *Gender and Social Capital*. Gender Politics – Global Issues Series. New York: Routledge, 2005, 432 pp. \$US 39.95 paper (978-0-415-95023-7), \$US 130.00 hardcover (978-0-415-95022-0)

The widespread appeal of social capital is apparent across the social sciences where the exponential growth of literature would suggest a near obsession with this concept. In the last twenty years over 21,000 scholarly articles and a flurry of books have been published on the topic of social capital. What innovative insights could the eighteen contributors to *Gender and Social Capital* possibly offer to contemporary discussions? Plenty as it turns out.

Feminist scholars have observed that much of the literature on social capital is “gender blind,” even strongly male-biased, and dominated largely by a rational choice perspective. Critical analysis of social capital, particularly as this concept relates to women, is undertaken for the first time in any sustained fashion with the publication of *Gender and Social Capital*. O'Neill and Gidengil have produced an outstanding collection of writings that brings together scholars in the areas of politics, women's studies, and sociology to evaluate Putnam's social capital thesis. The volume highlights the importance of gender differences in the distribution, nature, and mobilization of social capital.

Building on these disparities, Arneil (ch. 2) elaborates a sophisticated critique of social capital, noting a distinction between the maternalistic nature of women's organizations, building capital for others, and the fraternal nature of men's organizations, building capital for themselves. Putnam's claim of declining social capital turns out to be a positive development for women, as “relics of the past” receded and women secured a direct path to political power (p. 38). Stolle and Micheletti (ch. 3) also challenge the notion of eroding civic and social life, marshalling an impressive inventory of crossnational surveys and case studies, and revealing an innovative form of civic engagement, dominated by women: the boycotting or buying of products and services based on ethical and political values. They contend that Putnam's declining thesis is founded on the disappearance of traditional participation mechanisms, while neglecting new participation styles that have replaced, even broadened, earlier social life. Norris and Inglehart (ch. 4) introduce ideas of social trust,

and using the 2001 World Values Survey test structural, cultural and agency explanations of gender differences in associational involvement. Their analysis documents sex-segregation horizontally among different types of civil associations and gender gaps in associational membership and social trust.

Caiazza and Gault (ch. 5) provide a focused analysis of religious and environmental organizations, two associations in which women are prominent in numbers and leadership. Their review reveals among women involved in these associations a communal form of social connectedness, “a backbone of social capital” (p. 119). Altruism and inter-connection play an important role in women’s building of social capital and the transition to civil and political activism. Morrow (ch. 6) provides a qualitative analysis of children and adolescents in English schools, underscoring the salience of social context and locale for the growth of social capital and how this varies by gender.

The remaining and majority of chapters address political implications for a gendered study of social capital, and many new theoretical and methodological insights emerge through this journey. For example, Sapiro (ch. 7) examines the relationship between gender and politics and importantly, the nature and significance of inequality in social capital with consideration of capital deficits and return deficits. In Chapter 8, O’Neill provides a focus on religious volunteerism among Canadian women. Her analysis reveals the generation of beneficial bridging capital through women’s volunteering for religious organizations as well as the personal benefits derived from such participation.

Lowndes (ch. 9) reveals women’s “social capital profile” (p. 234) to be strongly embedded in neighbourhood-specific networks of informal sociability and women’s usage of social capital as a resource is more often applied toward family health and well-being and in efforts to balance competing demands of home and work. Gidengil, Goodyear-Grant, Nevitte, and Blais (ch. 10) take on the challenging question of why women appear to have lower stocks of political knowledge. Using Canadian survey data, the authors explore how associational involvement and network diversity influence the political knowledge gap. Their analysis reveals women tend to belong to community-oriented associations related to kin ties, care activities, and the private sphere, while men’s organizations revolve more often around recreational and economic activities. These differences hold powerful consequences for the communication of political knowledge.

Everitt (ch. 11) examines the impact of gender-role orientations in shaping the relationship between social capital and political engagement. Her analysis explores traditional, moderate, and modern views on gender

roles and family values. Her account demonstrates the important role of religious organizations in enhancing civic engagement, but that this impact is uneven across members of society. Erickson (ch. 12) restores the centrality of social networks to our understanding of social capital and as sites of informal politics. Her analysis provides hope for active political agency on the part of women as women move into diverse roles in work and politics, expanding their networks and attempting greater influence of others.

In Chapter 12, Goss and Skocpol direct us to the gender preference gap in American voting patterns. Their discussion attempts to explain the policy gender gap and the weaker role played by women's organizations in policy domains. Meanwhile, Carroll (ch. 14) shifts our attention to examine women's success in securing elected positions. She uses survey data on women US state senators and state representatives to evaluate women legislators' connections to feminist organizations and women's groups as a source of social capital.

Gidengil and O'Neill, in their introductory chapter, highlight Erickson's chapter as bringing a distinctively sociological focus to bear on social capital and gender. However, this claim understates how sociological the entire collection truly is. While all authors reference Putnam's thesis of declining social capital portrayed in *Bowling Alone*, most also integrate sociological scholarship as a basis for critiquing Putnam's claims. Sociologists Pierre Bourdieu, James Coleman, Nan Lin, and Alejandro Portes are discussed at length in several chapters as authors engage in more contextual, historical, cultural, and networked conceptions of the forms and effects of social capital. The volume is interdisciplinary through theoretical dialogue and debate.

Throughout the volume authors are united in their focus to address two questions at the core of inquiry: "What can a gendered analysis tell us about social capital and what can social capital theory tell us about gender and politics" (p. 2)? In response to the first question, the authors argue that this perspective sheds new light on gendered patterns of political engagement. Second, the authors demonstrate how social capital informs our understanding of gender gaps in political preferences, specifically with reference to issues of social welfare. Third, the authors approach associational investments with an eye to both public and private benefits, providing a more nuanced picture of the personal considerations shaping women's choices regarding associational involvement in organizations. Fourth, the authors reveal how social capital offers useful insights as to why women are so much less likely than men to hold elected office.

On the second question, what social capital offers to the study of gender and politics, the authors are less committed. Their hesitation lies largely in response to the literature on social capital that pines for the nostalgia of a golden era, one which may never have existed, and if it did, was founded on the exclusion of women from full participation in associations and politics. But there is also the suggestion that social capital is not so novel to feminist political scholarship. As Sapiro notes in her chapter, "In this field, the notion of contextually shaped resources for politics and power provided by the relationships among people is hardly new" (p. 177). Yet, the authors agree that social capital, at minimum, provides a conceptual label that helps to build bridges across disciplines engaged in the study of gender and politics. Social capital offers new insights to bridging and bonding, practices of inclusion and exclusion, and contextual and cultural dimensions influencing the valence of benefits and costs for community well-being.

Edited volumes too often offer a brief overview to the papers collected with no attempt to summarize themes, acknowledge loose ends, or postulate future directions in research. This is *not* the case with *Gender and Social Capital*. In the final chapter, Gidengil and O'Neill draw common themes among authors, return to the core questions of the volume, and illuminate the "darker side" of social capital, including sinister plots toward exclusion or assimilation. They also consolidate the volume's contributions to refined measurement of the social capital concept, challenges to Putnam's claim of declining social capital, and finally the potential of social capital theory to infuse studies of gender and politics with new research directions.

Gender and Social Capital is an ideal resource for students of political and social theory, community studies, social networks, and collective action. For scholars of social capital, this volume is mandatory. The indicators developed take us leaps forward in the measurement of this elusive concept. Through a broad array of data (of over 50 countries, with more detailed attention to Canada, Britain, and the US), the gendered analyses included in *Gender and Social Capital* reveal the underdeveloped state of theorizing on social capital. The authors prompt serious consideration of differences in the nature of social capital, the contingent bases for the conversion of social capital, and how social inequalities influence the accumulation and investment of social capital. As Gidengil and O'Neill observe, "women disproportionately bear the costs of social capital creation, while deriving fewer benefits" (p. 380).

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