

Gender, Knowledge and Social Capital

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Women typically know less about politics than men do (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Verba, Burns and Schlozman 1997; Norris 2000; Gidengil et al. forthcoming). This gender gap in political knowledge cannot be explained by differences in educational attainment or material resources. Nor can it be explained by the greater demands that childcare responsibilities continue to make on many women's time. Most importantly for our purposes, this knowledge gap cannot be explained by any differences in the amount of social capital accumulated by women and men. As such, it demands a critical re-appraisal of Robert Putnam's (2000, 343) argument that "social capital allows political information to spread." After all, if social capital really does facilitate the spread of information about politics and if women accumulate as much social capital as men, women should know just as much about politics as men.

This paper uses data from the 2000 Canadian Election Study (CES) to examine the interplay between gender, social capital and knowledge about politics. We set out to show why men and women with equivalent amounts of social capital can have very different stocks of political information. The answer lies, we argue, in the gendered nature of social capital and in gender differences in the salience of politics.

Social Capital and Political Knowledge

The implication of Putnam's argument is clear: the more social capital people have, the better informed they are going to be about politics. Given the wealth of data provided in *Bowling Alone*, Putnam furnishes surprisingly little in the way of evidence to document this link between social capital and the acquisition of political information. He simply seems to assume that political information flows through social networks: "Most of our political discussions take place informally...We learn about politics through casual conversation. You tell me what you've heard and what you think, and what your friends have heard and what they think, and I accommodate that new information into my mental database..." (p. 343). The notion that political discussion enhances political knowledge is eminently plausible. There are at least three reasons why talking about politics could enhance people's stock of political information. First, the conversations themselves are likely to be a source of information about politics; second, political discussion may stimulate further interest in politics; and third, the fact of engaging in discussion about politics in social settings provides people with an incentive to acquire information so that they can keep up their end of the conversation.

The problem with Putnam's argument is not the notion that political discussion will facilitate the spread of political information, but the assumption that politics will be a topic of casual conversation. He is quite explicit on this point: "Political information flows through social networks, *and in these networks public life is discussed*" (p. 338, emphases added). However, this is far from being a given. Bonnie Erickson and T.A. Nosanchuk (1990) have provided fascinating insight into the way that an association as seemingly apolitical as a contract bridge club can mediate the flow of political information. At the same time, though, they emphasize that it takes politicized partners to stimulate political discussion: "if people have friends who talk politics in the association, they do so more themselves" (p. 206).¹ The "if" is critical. When bridge partners talk, they are not necessarily talking about politics.

This begs the question: do women's associational involvements and informal social networks bring them into contact with people who like to talk about politics, and if they do, does

this stimulate greater political discussion on women's part? There is reason to be doubtful on both counts. Typically, the average number of associational memberships is very similar for women and men. However, as Norris and Inglehart (2003) note, two types of inequality characterize the associational experiences of men and women, vertical segmentation and horizontal segmentation. In other words, substantial differences exist in terms of the sizes and the types of associations to which men and women belong. There is a growing body of evidence to suggest that voluntary associations are gender-segregated (McPherson and Smith-Lovin 1982, 1986; Popielarz 1999; Inglehart and Norris 2003; Norris and Inglehart 2003). The basic finding is that, "Men are located in core organizations which are large and related to economic institutions, while women are located in peripheral organizations which are smaller and more focused on domestic or community affairs" (McPherson and Smith-Lovin 1982, 883). Inglehart and Norris (2003) provide convincing evidence for this gendered pattern of civic participation, for they note that membership in political parties, unions, and professional associations is male-dominated, while women tend to join organizations associated with education, the arts, religious institutions, and care-oriented activities. This pattern holds across the countries of the developed West (Inglehart and Norris 2003). Moreover, there is evidence that women are not only less likely than men to belong to gender-integrated associations, they are also less likely to belong to male-dominated associations than men are to belong to female-dominated ones (Popielarz 1999).

It is important to emphasize that these differences do not simply reflect selective joining on the part of women and men; they also reflect selective recruitment by the associations. McPherson and Smith-Lovin (1982) list a number of reasons why women are less likely than men to be recruited into large, job-related organizations. These relate to patterns of occupational segregation, the competing demands of running a home and caring for children, and lack of valued attributes like financial resources and political contacts.

This pattern of gender-segregation is consequential. One of its effects is to limit both the scope and the diversity of women's social networks. McPherson and Smith-Lovin (1986) report that the typical female membership in a voluntary organization not only generates fewer face-to-face contacts than the typical male membership, but those contacts tend to be less sex heterogeneous than men's. More recently, Popielarz (1999) has reported that women's memberships in voluntary associations tend to limit their contacts, not just to other women, but to women of a similar age, level of education, marital status, and labour force participation. Indeed, she goes so far as to characterize "the voluntary association experience ... [as] an isolating one for most women involved" (p. 238).

As McPherson and Smith-Lovin (1986, 63) note, "Interpersonal contacts generated by voluntary affiliation can create channels through which useful information and influence pass. The heterogeneity of the members in a group is especially important in this regard." They conclude that the pattern of gender segregation in voluntary organizations does not simply mirror the gender segregation to be found in other domains, but helps to perpetuate that segregation by limiting women's information to the traditional domains of home and community. Popielarz (1999, 248) takes up this point: "The ties women form within voluntary organizations are significantly less likely to be information-rich bridging weak ties." This conclusion is certainly troubling given Granovetter's (1973) contention that bridging, cross-cutting ties are more valuable than the strong, bonding ties characteristic of families and tight-knit communities in terms of providing diverse sources of information and perspective.

Of course, people's social ties are not just a function of their memberships in formal groups. In fact, some researchers have problematized the proclivity of mainstream social capital analysis to focus on formal, bureaucratic organizations, arguing that this tendency serves to distort perceptions of the character, frequency, and locations of social interaction, especially when it comes to the social, political, and civic involvement of women (see Lowndes 2000; Norris and Inglehart 2003). Despite the analytical focus on formal groups, most social and interpersonal interaction occurs outside such groups. This is one reason why we need to broaden the focus to include informal networks as well. As Tindall and Wellman explain (2001, 266), while "people view the world in terms of groups, they function in networks." In a similar vein, Norris (2002) states that memberships in formal associations – "Weberian bureaucratic organizations" – are proxy indicators for the phenomenon that social capital research is primarily interested in, namely, social networks. In other words, associational memberships provide the researcher with information – albeit incomplete – about what types of people talk, socialize, mobilize, and interact, as well as when, how often, and what types of bonds are created. While Putnam's focus is squarely on formal associational life, especially the memberships and activities of traditional civic groups, informal social ties are an integral component of his concept of social capital: "social capital refers to networks of social connection" (p. 117). However, just as Putnam seems to overlook the gendered nature of associational involvement – except to examine how large-scale female entry into the paid workforce killed the PTA and other traditional civic groups – he also seems to neglect the extent to which gender inequalities shape people's networks.

The approach adopted by social network analysis may provide a corrective for such analytical 'blindspots'. Social network analysis does not ignore formal organizational memberships. A social network is composed of a set of actors (or nodes) and a set of relationships between these actors; the actors are not necessarily individuals but can also include groups and organizations, both formal and informal. This approach is more fluid than Putnam's for "membership and boundaries become important analytical variables rather than a priori analytic constraints. The pattern of relationships becomes a research question rather than a given" (Tindall and Wellman 2001, 273). Indeed, the social network analyst does not privilege (or romanticize) traditional civic associations. Instead, social network analysis adopts a decidedly structural focus, for it addresses, above all, "patterns of relationships that connect members of social systems, and how these patterns channel resources to specific locations in social structures" (Tindall and Wellman, 2001, 266). Through its conscious attention to the impact of social structures on networks, the social network paradigm offers valuable insights into how social roles and norms, not choices and dispositions alone, structure (and constrain) how and with whom individuals interact. Thus, the perspective may be conducive to investigation of the gendered patterns of interpersonal networks, for it pays attention to relationships rather than memberships, as well as the social opportunity context in which individuals are located.

Empirical findings reveal substantial gender differences in interpersonal networks. Women's networks tend to be smaller and more homogeneous than men's (Moore 1990). Moreover, women have more ties to kin than men whereas men have more ties to coworkers than their female counterparts (Fischer and Olicker, 1983; Moore 1990; Renzulli, Aldrich, and Moody 2000). These differences in men's and women's networks are not simply a matter of contrasting dispositions. Notions that women are simply (or inherently) more oriented or drawn toward filial bonds ignore the effect social factors exert on women's social circles. In line with the SNA

paradigm, Moore (1990) reports that the gendered nature of interpersonal networks is as much, if not more, a reflection of women's dissimilar social structural locations. Indeed, acquaintance with dissimilar others is contingent upon "an opportunity context that precludes or makes possible various kinds of social contacts" (Moore 1990, 727).

Erickson (forthcoming) provides convincing insights into the differing opportunities available for men and women to generate social contacts. She reports that "men have more strategic locations in social structure on the whole: they are better placed to meet many others, and to enter their networks" (p. 14). Erickson identifies three reasons why networks are gendered. They relate to opportunity, attractiveness, and homophily. Men's and women's social circles offer different opportunities for contact. These differences reflect gendered patterns of employment, recreational activity, and associational membership. Men are also more likely to be in the sorts of high-status jobs that enhance networking opportunities and provide an entrée to different social circles. Additionally, because "status advantage becomes network advantage" (Erickson forthcoming, 3), these same high-status jobs enhance men's attractiveness as network members. Homophily is also a matter of attractiveness, but attractiveness that is based on similarity. People tend to be attracted to people like themselves, so women will tend to form ties with other women and men will tend to form ties with other men. However, the combination of opportunity and attractiveness means first, that men's contacts with other men tend to be more varied than women's contacts with other women, and second, that men and women alike have more varied contacts with men than they do with women. Thus, women not only have more same-sex contacts compared to men; more importantly, women tend to be embedded in networks that are less varied in terms of other social and demographic characteristics such as age, and education and income.

Putnam's neglect of the gender dimension is a critical oversight in his understanding of the link between social capital and political knowledge.² Just as gender segregation in voluntary associations makes for gendered forms of social capital, so "contacts with men are a different form of social capital than contacts with women" (Erickson forthcoming, 3). The point is that women's social capital may be less instrumentally valuable when it comes to the sort of resources that men control.³ Politics is still very much a man's world, and gendered forms of social capital may mean that men get exposed to more information about that world than women do. One reason that women's social ties are less instrumentally valuable in this regard is that their ties are much more likely than men's to be restricted to people with similar backgrounds, skill sets, and social resources, resulting in less varied and more redundant sources of information.

However, it is not simply that women's associational involvements and informal social networks are less likely to bring them into contact with people who like to talk about politics. Even when women belong to the same types of associations as men and have the sort of status advantage that makes for network advantage, they may still be less knowledgeable about politics than their male counterparts. McPherson and Smith-Lovin (1982) found that the difference in the sizes of women's and men's organizations was not simply a function of the types of organizations to which they belonged. On the contrary, the differences were to be found in almost every type of voluntary organization and were actually the most striking in job-related organizations. Not only did fewer women than men belong to business associations, but women belonged to smaller business associations than men. The same was true of labour unions. But even if women and men belong to the very same associations, they are not necessarily

developing cross-gender ties. McPherson and Smith-Lovin's (1987) study of homophily in voluntary associations found that members tend to form friendships with people of the same gender. And even if women belong to gender-integrated associations and count as many men as women among their acquaintances or are acquainted with women with diverse backgrounds and characteristics, we still cannot assume that the knowledge gap will close. Information about politics will only spread if people are actually engaging in political discussion. If women are less interested in political talk than men, social capital will not close the knowledge gap.

This look at social capital and gender inequalities in associational life and interpersonal networks leads to a series of empirical expectations. First, we predict that simply controlling for associational involvement and network diversity will have little effect on the gender gap in political knowledge. Second, we expect that the gender gap will be smallest for people who belong to instrumental associations and largest for those whose memberships are confined to expressive and community-oriented groups. However, even among those who belong to instrumental associations, a significant gender gap will remain. Similarly, we expect that diverse, sex-heterogeneous networks will make for a smaller gender gap in political knowledge, but that a significant knowledge gap will remain. Finally, we predict that political discussion will be a key factor in the interaction between gender, knowledge and social capital.

Data and Methods

Our analysis is based on data from the 2000 Canadian Election Study.⁴ This study contained a number of items designed to assess Canadians' knowledge of politics. During the campaign, respondents were queried about their knowledge of some general facts about politics: the name of the federal finance minister, the name of their provincial premier, Canada's prime minister at the time of the Canada-US Free Trade Agreement, and the capital of the United States. During the campaign and again after the election, respondents were also asked to name each of the federal party leaders and to match campaign promises with the correct political party.

The 2000 Canadian Election Study included two measures of social capital. Respondents who completed the self-administered mail back survey were presented with a list of voluntary associations and asked to circle any in which they had been active during the past five years. The criterion of having been active is an important one since there are groups, like labour unions, which people may have no choice but to join. There were nine types of association on the list, along with a catchall "other" category. Following McPherson and Smith-Lovin (1982, 1986), we have classified the associations into three categories. Business associations, professional associations and labour unions are all instrumental organizations that have economic goals. Religious organizations, community service groups, and women's groups typically qualify as organizations that are more expressive and/or oriented toward community affairs. Finally, sports associations, environmental groups, and ethnic associations occupy an intermediate category that blends expressive and instrumental purposes in varying combinations. This is admittedly a rather crude breakdown. There are obviously associations that are expressive or oriented toward the community that are highly instrumental. As Lisa Young (2002, 115) notes, some neighbourhood associations may very well end up becoming highly politicized in the process of working for change in the local community. Similarly, religious groups will on occasion politicize the faithful. As Young goes on to argue, however, "the location of such groups is within civil society, and engagement with the formal political sphere is not their primary reason for being" (p. 115).

The self-administered mail back survey also included questions on network diversity, measured in terms of the number of different occupations in which respondents knew other people.⁵ The assumption underlying the use of a position generator is that, “the more occupations a person has one or more contacts in, the greater the network diversity” (Erickson forthcoming, 1). As Erickson goes on to explain, this simple approach is powerful because occupation is “a master role” and as such, it is associated with significant differences in interests, tastes and information. Erickson’s measure of occupational diversity introduces an important gender dimension. Respondents were asked whether they knew any men and/or women in each of 15 different occupations.⁶ A number of criteria were used to identify the occupations employed in this gendered position generator. The occupations had to include at least 20,000 people and their Census titles had to use every day language that survey respondents would comprehend. The occupations also had to span the occupational hierarchy from unskilled to higher professional, and they had to be drawn from different economic sectors. Within each occupational category, Erickson paired one of the most female-dominated occupations with one of the most male-dominated ones, choosing occupations that enjoy roughly equivalent prestige. Following Erickson, we have constructed three scales, measuring diversity of contacts with anyone, diversity of contacts with women, and diversity of contacts with men, respectively. Each scale is a simple count of the number of occupations in which the respondent had acquaintances.⁷

Because the measures of associational involvement and network diversity were only asked in the mail back survey, the analyses are limited to respondents who completed the mail back. Knowledge levels tended to be consistently higher among these respondents than among those who only completed the post-election and/or campaign surveys. This largely reflects the fact that younger respondents were less likely to have participated in this part of the study, and younger people tended to know less about politics (Gidengil et al. 2003). However, the gender gaps in political knowledge are very similar, whether we look at the whole sample or just those who completed the mail back questionnaire.

Findings

Gender and Knowledge about Politics

Canadian women are clearly less knowledgeable about politics, on average, than men (see Table 1). When surveyed immediately after the 2000 federal election, almost one woman in 10 failed to come up with the name of the leader of the Liberal Party, Jean Chrétien, despite the fact that he had just led his party to its third successive victory since assuming the leadership. Among men, the figure dropped to one in twenty-five. Men and women alike had more difficulty naming the leaders of the opposition parties, but for every leader men were more likely than women to come up with the correct answers. It bears emphasis that this included the name of the lone female party leader, the NDP’s Alexa McDonough. Only 57 percent of women were able to name four party leaders, compared with 69 percent of the men.

[Table 1 about here]

The gender gaps persisted when women and men were asked to identify various election promises with the correct party or parties. The gap was widest for the Alliance Party’s proposal to introduce a single tax rate for all Canadians earning less than \$100,000 per year. Perhaps this is not surprising. Fiscal issues are often seen as being less salient for women, and women were much less likely than men to be supporters of the new right party (Blais et al. 2002; Gidengil et

al. 2003). However, this would not explain why women were less likely than men to know that the NDP was promising to introduce a national prescription drug plan. Health care was an even more important issue for women than for men in the 2000 election, and women were more likely than men to support Canada's social democratic party. Similarly, given the fact that women in Canada, as elsewhere, tend to be more concerned about social spending (Gidengil 1995), we might have expected the gender gap to narrow for the Liberal promise to use half the federal surplus for spending on health care and social programmes. However, the gap was much the same for these two promises as it was for the Conservatives' promise to introduce a law requiring that the federal debt be paid off within twenty-five years. The gap was even wider for the promise of both the Alliance Party and the Bloc Québécois to bring in a law to combat criminal biker gangs. This was a particularly salient issue in Quebec where a young boy had been killed by a car bomb intended for a rival gang. However, the gap was actually wider in Quebec: barely half the women interviewed could identify the promise with the correct party, compared with more than three-quarters of the men. Overall, more than one-third of women (35 percent) were unable to identify a single party position correctly. Only half as many men (17 percent) were as uninformed about the parties' election promises.⁸

Comparable gender gaps emerged when the focus turned to general knowledge about politics. The easiest questions proved to be naming the capital of the United States and naming the premier of one's province, but even on these two questions a 10-point gap separated women and men. The gap was wider still for the federal finance minister. Less than two-thirds of the women were able to name the person who is charged with charting the country's fiscal and monetary policies. Finally, only half of the women could name Canada's prime minister at the time of the Canada-US Free Trade Agreement, compared with three-quarters of the men. Overall, only a third of the women (35 percent) managed to get all four general political knowledge questions correct, compared with three-fifths of the men (62 percent).

There is, in short, a sizeable knowledge gap between women and men. What is striking about this gap is not just the consistency with which it appeared but the fact that it appears to be resistant to a host of relevant controls. In order to simplify the analysis, we have combined the various knowledge questions into a single composite measure.⁹ Women had an average score of 7.1 on this 13-item political knowledge scale, while men had an average score of 8.9. In other words, on average, men got almost two more correct answers than women did.

This gap is not simply a function of the fact that the average woman typically still has less education than the average man. Education is certainly a powerful correlate of political knowledge: university-educated women averaged three more correct answers than women who left school without a high school diploma. The education effect is hardly surprising. On the one hand, education imparts literacy skills and enhances people's cognitive capabilities, making it easier for them to acquire and to comprehend information about politics. On the other hand, people who are more highly educated are more likely to be embedded in social networks where politics is a topic of conversation (see Tichenor, Donohue and Olien 1970). However, regardless of their educational attainment, women received lower scores than men. University-educated women still averaged one fewer correct answer than university-educated men. Among high school dropouts, the gender gap doubled to almost two fewer correct answers. Women with some post-secondary education knew less on average (7.1) than male dropouts (7.9).

Income tells a similar story. Economic disadvantage is clearly associated with lower levels of political knowledge. This is understandable. People who are struggling to make ends

meet may simply lack the time and the energy to pay much attention to what is going on in politics. They may also lack the financial resources. Acquiring information about politics is not a cost-free activity. Subscribing to a daily newspaper or going on-line in search of political information are likely to be beyond the means of those who are barely getting by. And they may have little incentive to follow politics closely if they feel that the political system is unresponsive to their needs and interests. Affluent women, like affluent men, did indeed score higher on our knowledge scale than low-income women. However, affluent women averaged at least one fewer correct response than affluent men, and women with household incomes in the bottom twenty percent averaged one and a half fewer correct responses than similarly disadvantaged men.

The gender gap in political knowledge does not look set to disappear any time soon. At 1.6, the knowledge gap is just as wide among men and women born since 1970 as it is among those born before 1945. Among 18 to 24 year olds, the gap actually widens to 2.4. Despite the massive changes that have occurred in women's lives over the past four decades, the knowledge gap shows no sign of narrowing. True, women who were employed full-time knew more about politics than women who were full-time homemakers, but the difference between women and men in full-time employment (1.6) was twice the size of the gap between these women and their stay-at-home counterparts (0.8).

Married women averaged two fewer correct responses than married men. If being part of a couple makes for more diverse social networks and involvement in more socially diverse voluntary associations, this does not make for higher levels of political knowledge, at least on the part of women. The knowledge gap between married women and single women is only half a question on average, but among men the gap widens to 1.3. And married women typically know less (7.2) than single men (7.9). The presence of children in the home made little difference (0.4) to women's knowledge about politics. Nor did the 'double shift': women who were working full-time outside the home *and* had children under 18 received almost exactly the same average score as women at large.

[Table 2 about here]

Indeed, regardless of personal characteristics, the average woman knew less about politics than the average man (see Table 2).¹⁰ Even controlling for a variety of social background characteristics, there was a difference of about one and a half correct answers between women and men, a difference comparable to that between a high school dropout and someone with some college or between someone with a household income of less than \$20,000 per year and someone with a household income of \$90,000, other things being equal.

Gender and Social Capital

One possible explanation for this knowledge gap is that Canadian women have less social capital than Canadian men. However, this is clearly not the case. Paralleling US findings (McPherson and Smith-Lovin 1982), the level of associational activity is almost identical for women and men. Twenty-seven percent of the women reported no activity in any voluntary association over the previous five years, but the same is true for 27 percent of the men. Meanwhile, 12 percent of the men had been active in four or more voluntary associations, but so had 13 percent of the women.

The story is similar for network diversity. Women and men alike knew people in an average of ten different occupations. Over one-third of women and almost as many men knew people in thirteen or more different occupations. Only one woman in ten knew people in four or

fewer occupations; the same was true of men. Contrary to evidence reported elsewhere (see Campbell 1988), simply counting the number of different occupations (among those listed) represented by people's friends and acquaintances, women's and men's social networks appear to be equally diverse.

Social Capital and Political Knowledge

Clearly, then, the knowledge gap cannot be explained by any deficit in social capital on the part of women. Women are active in as many voluntary associations as men, and women's social networks are just as diverse as men's, at least with respect to occupation. However, equivalent amounts of social capital do not make for equivalent stocks of political knowledge on the part of women and men.

[Figure 1 about here]

Just as Putnam (and others) would predict, activity in voluntary associations *is* associated with political knowledge.¹¹ People who had been active in four or more associations over the previous five years averaged about one and a half more correct answers than people who had been active in none. This was true of women and men alike (see Figure 1). Strikingly, though, women who had been active in four or more associations typically knew barely as much about politics as men who had been active in none. This seems to lend credence to the notion that men and women reap different returns on their social capital 'investments' (see Lin 2000). Ultimately, the gender gap in political knowledge was apparent at every level of associational involvement from the lowest to the highest, casting doubt on Putnam's straightforward equation of social capital with political knowledge.

[Figure 2 about here]

Network diversity *per se* had barely any association with knowledge about politics, except for the small minority who knew people in fewer than five different occupations. Aside from respondents who knew people in only a very few occupational categories, the number of different occupations represented among people's friends and acquaintances made little or no difference to how much respondents knew about politics. This was true of both women and men (see Figure 2). However, women who knew people in thirteen or more different occupations knew less about politics than men who knew people in four or less. And the gender gap in political knowledge was apparent, whether networks were sparse or diverse.

[Table 3 about here]

Even controlling for social background characteristics that might account for differences in political knowledge among women and men with equivalent amounts of social capital, the knowledge gap remains (see Table 3).¹² Once social background characteristics associated with active group involvement and network diversity are taken into account, associational involvement has only a modest effect on knowledge about politics, and network diversity *per se* has little impact. Meanwhile, the gender gap in political knowledge remains just as wide as before. Even when they have accumulated equivalent stocks of social capital, women know significantly less about politics than their male counterparts.

Gendering Social Capital

It is not enough, though, simply to look at the amount of social capital without recognizing its gendered nature, specifically the vertical and horizontal segmentation that serves to differentiate women's and men's associational and network experiences (Norris and Inglehart

2003). As prior studies have shown (McPherson and Smith-Lovin 1982, 1986, 1987; Popielarz 1999; Inglehart and Norris 2003), there clearly are differences in the types of association in which women and men are active (see Table 4). In the Canadian context, women were significantly more likely than men to have been active in community service groups and, of course, in women's groups. They were also a little more likely than men to have been active in a religious organization, though the difference is of borderline statistical significance ($P < .10$). Meanwhile, men were significantly more likely than women to have been involved in labour unions, business associations, and, above all, sports associations. Overall, forty-two percent of men belonged to one or more job-related associations, compared to 32 percent of women. Conversely, 59 percent of women belonged to one or more expressive or community-oriented groups, compared to 48 percent of men. For a significant number of women (23 percent), this represented their only form of associational activity. Finally, 40 percent of men belonged to one of the other types of associations, compared to only 29 percent of women. As predicted, then, men seem to be more active than women in instrumental, job-related associations, while women appear to be more involved than men in expressive and community-oriented groups.

[Table 4 about here]

Thus, Canadian women, as opposed to men, are more likely to be involved in associations characterized by few directly political or economic interests or ties and which provide relatively fewer opportunities for the acquisition or exercise of valuable civic skill. Undoubtedly, certain groups, particularly women's/feminist organizations, do provide women with these opportunities (see Philips 1991). Nonetheless, the horizontal segmentation of men and women into different forms of associational activity must certainly affect their relative chances for political discussion and knowledge gains.

Similar to associational involvement, the expected patterns also hold for network diversity (see Table 5). Men have significantly more diverse contacts with men than women do, and women have significantly more diverse contacts with women than men do. However, women's same-gender contacts are much less diverse than men's. Indeed, their contacts with men are typically more diverse than their contacts with women. The difference amounts to almost one occupation. Men clearly enjoy a network advantage: men's and women's networks alike include a significantly greater range of men than of women. In the case of men's networks, the difference amounts to over two occupations, which suggests that, "men move in substantially male worlds" (Erickson forthcoming, 7). Erickson's (forthcoming) analyses suggests that much of the male network advantage can be explained by the fact that men tend to occupy more strategic positions in a variety of social spheres. Meanwhile, the tendency to prefer friends and acquaintances of one's own gender helps to explain the prevalence of same-gender contacts. However, homophily is only part of the explanation. Opportunity constraints play a role here, too. Work and family both seem to make for more diverse cross-gender contacts.

[Table 5 about here]

Erickson (forthcoming) reports that the single most powerful predictor of network diversity is participation in voluntary associations.¹³ The more associations in which people have been active, the greater the range of people they know. This is true of women and men alike, and it applies to contacts with both women and men. However, at every level of associational involvement, men's same-gender contacts remain more varied than women's. Even among people who have been active in four or more different kinds of voluntary associations, the gap in

same gender-contacts amounts to two whole occupations. Moreover, their networks continue to include a wider range of men than of women.

Predictably, expressive and community-oriented groups are less likely than instrumental, job-related associations to bring women into contact with a diverse range of men ($p < .10$). They are also less likely to bring women into contact with a diverse range of women ($p < .10$). For men, by contrast, the type of association makes little difference to the diversity of their contacts with women or men alike.

Gendered Social Capital and Political Knowledge

As predicted, how much people know about politics does vary according to the type of voluntary association(s) in which they have been involved (see Table 6). The highest levels of political knowledge are to be found among people who have been active in one or more job-related organizations. As we have seen, these are the associations in which men are typically more likely to be involved than women. Knowledge levels are significantly lower in the types of associations in which women are most likely to be active. Indeed, if we look at people who are *only* involved in expressive and community-oriented groups, they typically do not know much more than people who are not involved in any groups whatsoever. This is especially true of women, but even for men the difference in average knowledge scores fails to meet conventional levels of statistical significance. As for those who only belong to other non-job-related groups, only the men have significantly higher ($p < .05$) knowledge scores, and not the women. In other words, men's involvement in these groups appears to bring them a higher return.

[Table 6 about here]

However, by far the most striking feature of Table 6 is the persistence of the gender gap in political knowledge. *Regardless* of the type of association, men remain significantly more knowledgeable than women. Indeed, if anything, the gap is actually a little *wider* for people who have been active in one group or another. The smallest gender gap (1.02) is to be found among those who have been involved in environmental groups, but this is because the men tend to be less knowledgeable than men in general, a reflection of the fact that they are disproportionately young. And even in this category the gender gap remains significant ($p < .05$).

[Table 7 about here]

The results are equally striking for network diversity and political knowledge (see Table 7). With only two exceptions, the gender gap in political knowledge persists, regardless of the diversity of people's networks and regardless of whether those networks are male-dominated or relatively gender-balanced. The two exceptions relate to networks that are female-dominated. Such networks are very much the exception, especially for men. With so few men in this category, it is difficult to know how reliable the results are. These two exceptions aside, the gender gaps are all statistically significant.

The second noteworthy feature of Table 7 is the fact that network diversity does not seem to do much to boost women's political knowledge. Indeed, the knowledge gap between women who know few men or women and those who know many is of borderline statistical significance ($p = .06$). Network diversity seems to give men a much bigger knowledge boost, but only if that diversity extends to both same-gender and cross-gender contacts. These men had an average of two more correct answers to the knowledge questions than women with equally diverse contacts. This is testimony once more to the fact that men seem to derive greater returns from their 'investments' in social capital.

These patterns hold, even in the presence of controls for factors that could affect both associational involvement and network diversity (see Table 8). People whose associational activities are confined to expressive and community-oriented groups are no more knowledgeable about politics than people who do not belong to any groups. People who are active in job-related groups or in other non-job-related groups, on the other hand, do seem to know rather more than those who are inactive, though the effect is of borderline statistical significance for the non-job-related groups. Finally, people who know a lot of men and women in different occupations are significantly better informed about politics.

When interaction terms are added, these effects all grow. While the interaction terms fail to meet conventional levels of statistical significance,¹⁴ they all have the correct sign, indicating that these effects are weaker for women. The effects of adding the interaction terms may not be strong, but they are consistent. They suggest that associational involvements and network diversity do indeed benefit men more than they do women.

Talking About Politics

This leaves the question of why. As we noted at the outset, Putnam's argument about the relationship between social capital and political knowledge hinges on a crucial prior--and unexamined--assumption: and that is, that people actually *do* talk about politics around the water cooler or wherever else they engage in casual conversation. In fact, most people do not talk about politics that often. At the end of the last federal election, Canadians were asked: "did you discuss the election with other people often, occasionally, or not at all? Only twenty-eight percent replied "often," and almost one in ten said "not at all." Women were a little less (26 percent) likely than men (30 percent) to say that they had discussed the election often, and a little more (11 percent) likely than men (7 percent) to say that they had not discussed it at all. While statistically significant, these differences were very modest.

People who frequently engage in political discussions do seem to know more about politics.¹⁵ The knowledge gains actually seem to be larger for women, but this is because women who rarely, if ever, discuss politics know so little about it. Women who had not discussed the election at all averaged four fewer correct answers than women who had talked about the election a lot. Meanwhile, their male counterparts averaged only three fewer correct responses than men who had often discussed the election. This was largely because men who had rarely discussed the election still knew a good deal more (6.58) than women (4.87) who had had little to say.

Even when women discuss politics as often as men, the knowledge gap persists. Women who had talked a lot about the election still knew less about politics (8.76) than men (9.57) who had discussed the election frequently. This is not altogether surprising: people who know more about politics in general also tend to acquire more new information (Nadeau et al. 2003). An existing stock of political information helps people to make sense of new information, and this helps ensure that they retain that information. For example, someone who is reasonably familiar with politics in Canada will know that the NDP is the party that favours public provision, and so it may be easier for that person to assimilate the fact that the NDP's response to the high cost of prescription drugs is to propose a national prescription drug plan.

This is only part of the story, though. As we have seen, the sort of voluntary associations in which women tend to be active typically relate to the traditional domains of home and community and often limit their contacts to people with similar backgrounds and social

resources. As a result, they may be exposed to less varied and more redundant sources of information. Meanwhile, men are more likely than women to be involved in the sorts of instrumental, job-related organizations that are likely to encourage the spread of a wide variety of information about politics. But even when women belong to such organizations, the knowledge gap will not necessarily close. Just because women belong to these organizations, they are not necessarily discussing politics. When they do discuss politics as often as their male counterparts, though, the knowledge gap shrinks to 0.36

[Table 9 about here]

As Table 9 shows, the combination of political discussion and involvement in instrumental, job-related organizations can significantly enhance women's knowledge about politics. Being active in a job-related group is associated with a significantly higher level of knowledge about politics but only *if* women are discussing politics frequently. Being active only in expressive and community-oriented groups or in other, non-job-related groups does not have the same effect on women (results not shown). Even if they discuss politics frequently, they do not seem to know significantly more than we would expect, given their frequency of political discussion alone. The same is true of network diversity (results not shown).

Conclusion and Discussion

Our analysis of the linkages between gender, social capital, and knowledge about politics leads to several conclusions. First, Putnam is at least half right. The relationship between social capital and knowledge *is* positive, for active social/civic involvement appears to be correlated with heightened knowledge about politics. However, even when men and women possess roughly equal stocks of social capital, an information gap exists in which men consistently outperform women on political knowledge questions. Indeed, women scored lower than men across all thirteen knowledge items from the 2000 Canadian Election Study, ranging from knowledge of the capital of the USA to the identities of the party leaders to party promises during the 2000 campaign. Controlling for an array of potentially relevant social background characteristics did not alter the gender-knowledge gap and neither did the social capital variables: regardless of income, education, social involvement, and network diversity, women clearly knew less about politics than men did.

The key to understanding why Putnam's knowledge-social capital connection does not hold up when examined through a gender lens is that he pays too little attention to gender inequalities (Molyneux 2002). Putnam devotes surprisingly little attention to the different social and civic contexts in which men and women operate and, consequently, overlooks the uneven distribution of benefits – including information and other social resources – that may accrue from formal and informal social ties. If social capital does result in knowledge gains, the gains are not an automatic product of belonging to a group or socializing with friends and neighbours. There is an emerging body of literature suggesting that the 'returns' on social capital are contingent: men's social and civic networks are better placed than women's to capitalize on social relationships, whether in terms of employment prospects, career advancement, or a diversity of information sources. Women's associational involvements and interpersonal networks are characterized by their greater homogeneity (in terms of sex, age, education, income), small size, and large numbers of kin. Not only have women historically and culturally been presented with fewer opportunities to meet and interact with dissimilar others due social structural factors such as gender roles and norms, but the advantages men continue to possess in terms of occupation,

income and status tend to make them relatively more attractive social group and network members than women (see Erickson forthcoming).

This analysis has provided further evidence that women tend to belong to expressive or community-oriented associations that are related to kin ties, ‘care’ activities, and the domestic sphere, while men’s organizational and interpersonal experiences tend to revolve around economic and recreational activities. Evidence confirming the contextual and situational differences in men’s and women’s associational lives and networks is clear; men and women often move in different formal and informal circles, a fact that has drawn too little attention from leading social capital theorists.

Moreover, this analysis has shown that these differences can be consequential. Women’s involvement in expressive and/or community-oriented groups brings them into contact with a less diverse range of men and women. As a result, even when they do discuss politics, women whose activities are confined to such groups seem to acquire less politically-relevant information. The same is true of their involvement in other non-job-related groups. When it comes to knowledge about politics, men derive significantly better ‘returns’ on their ‘investments’ in social capital. Women only begin to draw close *if* they belong to instrumental, job-related organizations and *if* they engage in a good deal of political discussion.

The persistence of the gender gap in political knowledge is a cause for concern. Lack of knowledge ultimately translates into lack of power. This becomes clear when simulations are used to show what the distributions of opinion or party preference would look like if women were, in fact, better informed about where the parties stand (Althaus 1998; Gidengil et al. forthcoming). The results suggest that women would be more likely to vote for parties that would sustain and strengthen the social safety net and promote greater liberalism on moral and lifestyle issues. The point is that people who know what the parties stand for are better able to translate their interests and values into appropriate political choices.

Too often, social capital theory and research has been blind to these gender inequalities. The analysis presented here suggests several antidotes to this analytical blindspot. There is an accumulating body of research findings showing that men and women often experience social and civic life quite differently. This needs to be addressed further in social capital research. Research needs to go beyond demonstrating that women seem to prefer church groups or community-oriented groups, or that women seem to prefer socializing with family rather than coworkers, to probe deeper into why these patterns hold and to explore their implications for the ‘returns’ to social capital such as trust, social support, and information (including political information). Similarly, we need to address the causal patterns underlying social capital and its consequences. It is not enough simply to assume, for example, that associational involvement heightens people’s political knowledge, however plausible or sensible this statement sounds. Most importantly for the gendered aspects of social capital, we need to address the contingencies. In other words, in dealing with an historically disadvantaged and still under-included group such as women, we must ask *when*, *how*, and *to whom* ‘returns’ to social capital will accumulate. Social capital is, after all, a form of *capital*, and inequalities in its distribution (either vertical or horizontal) are consequential. Ultimately, this paper confirms that social capital is not a gender-neutral concept – in either its manifestations or its consequences – a reality that must be incorporated more explicitly into future research and research agendas.

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Table 1: Gender and Political Knowledge

1. Names of the Party Leaders

	Women	Men	Difference ¹
Liberal Party	91%	96%	-5
Alliance Party	79%	90%	-11
Conservative Party	76%	86%	-10
NDP	59%	69%	-10
Bloc Québécois (Quebec only)	71%	85%	-14

2. Election Promises

	Women	Men	Difference ¹
Use half surplus for health care, etc.	29%	41%	-12
Single tax rate for incomes <\$100,000	32%	58%	-26
Law to repay federal debt in 25 years	13%	23%	-10
Law to fight criminal biker gangs	33%	49%	-16
National prescription drug plan	22%	33%	-11

3. General Political Knowledge

	Women	Men	Difference ¹
Capital of USA	84%	94%	-10
Provincial Premier	83%	93%	-10
Federal Finance Minister	64%	79%	-15
Prime Minister at time of CUFTA	52%	76%	-24

¹ All differences are statistically significant at $p < .001$

Table 2: Social Background Characteristics and Knowledge about Politics

Female	-1.58 (.14)***
Age in years	+0.04 (.01)***
Education	+2.23 (.24)***
Household income	+1.79 (.26)***
Full-time employment	-0.22 (.17)
Public sector worker	+0.02 (.20)
Union household	+0.04 (.16)
Married/partnered	-0.08 (.18)
Children under 18 years	+0.02 (.07)
Atlantic resident	+0.03 (.26)
Quebec resident	-0.14 (.19)
Western resident	+0.36 (.17)*
Rural resident	-0.03 (.17)
Visible minority	-0.95 (.32)**
Foreign born	-0.08 (.23)
Constant	+2.48 (.39)***
Adjusted R ²	.26
Number of cases	1,381

Note: The table entries are unstandardized OLS coefficients, with standard errors shown in parentheses. Education and income were measured on a 0 to 1 scale. With the exception of age, all of the other social background characteristics were represented by dummy variables, with the named category coded '1'. A detailed description of the coding can be found in the Appendix.

*** p<.001 ** p<.01 * p<.05

Table 3: Social Capital and Political Knowledge

Female	-1.53 (.14)***
Age in years	+0.04 (.01)***
Education	+2.37 (.23)***
Household income	+1.85 (.24)***
Western resident	+0.35 (.16)*
Visible minority	-0.70 (.36)*
Associational involvement	+0.13 (.06)*
Network diversity	-0.06 (.08)
Constant	+4.46 (.34)***
Adjusted R ²	.26
Number of cases	1,362

Note: The table entries are unstandardized OLS coefficients, with standard errors shown in parentheses. Education and income were measured on a 0 to 1 scale.

*** p<.001 ** p<.01 * p<.05

Table 4: Gender and Associational Involvement

	Women	Men	Difference
Sports association	24.6	42.7	-18.1***
Business association	10.2	19.4	-9.2***
Labour union	14.7	21.8	-7.1***
Professional association	24.0	26.2	-2.2
Environmental group	8.9	10.6	-1.7
Ethnic association	4.1	4.2	-0.1
Other groups	11.0	9.3	1.7
Religious organization	36.8	33.0	+3.8
Community service group	51.1	44.3	+6.8**
Women's group	16.6	0.3	+16.3***

*** p<.001 ** p<.01 * p<.05

Table 5: Gender and Network Diversity

	Women	Men	Difference
Female contacts	6.32	5.97	+0.35*
Male contacts	7.22	8.08	-0.86***
Difference	+0.90***	+2.11***	

*** p<.001 ** p<.01 * p<.05

Table 6: Associational Involvement and Political Knowledge

	Women	Men	Difference
None	6.49 (204)	8.08 (212)	-1.59***
Expressive/community only	6.88 (173)	8.61 (97)	-1.73***
Other non-job related	7.26 (117)	8.96 (136)	-1.70***
Job-related	7.78 (244)	9.43 (326)	-1.65***

Note: The column entries are the mean number of correct responses. The number of cases is shown in parentheses

*** p<.001 ** p<.01 * p<.05

Table 7: Network Diversity and Political Knowledge

	Women	Men	Difference
Few women or men	6.95 (140)	8.33 (116)	-1.37***
More women than men	6.92 (52)	7.52 (14)	-0.60
More men than women	7.05 (88)	8.96 (151)	-1.91***
Some men and some women	6.73 (231)	8.88 (194)	-2.15***
Many more women than men	7.50 (30)	8.53 (12)	-1.03
Many more men than women	7.77 (111)	8.76 (176)	-0.99**
Many men and many women	7.74 (101)	9.65 (122)	-1.91***

Note: The column entries are the mean number of correct responses. The number of cases is shown in parentheses. 'Few' is defined as fewer than five different occupations. 'More' is defined as five to nine different occupations. 'Many more' is defined as 10 to 15 different occupations. 'Some' is defined as five to nine occupations.

*** p<.001 ** p<.01 * p<.05

Table 8: Gendered Social Capital and Knowledge about Politics

Female	-1.53 (.14)***	-1.30 (.26)***
Age in years	+0.04 (.01)***	+0.04 (.01)***
Education	+2.20 (.22)***	+2.21 (.22)***
Household income	+1.60 (.24)***	+1.61 (.24)***
Western resident	+0.35 (.15)*	+0.36 (.15)*
Visible minority	-0.91 (.30)**	-0.91 (.30)**
Expressive/community group(s) only	+0.30 (.21)	+0.38 (.32)
Other non-job-related group(s)	+0.38 (.21) ^a	+0.52 (.29) ^a
Job-related group(s)	+0.42 (.18)*	+0.55 (.23)*
Network diversity	+0.35 (.20) ^a	+0.49 (.27) ^a
Female*expressive/community only		-0.19 (.42)
Female*other non-job-related		-0.29 (.43)
Female*job-related		-0.29 (.34)
Female*network diversity		-0.32 (.40)
Constant	+4.35 (.31)***	+4.23 (.33)***
Adjusted R ²	.27	.27
Number of cases	1,381	1,381

Note: The table entries are unstandardized OLS coefficients, with standard errors shown in parentheses.

*** p<.001 ** p<.01 * p<.05^a p<.10^a

Table 9: Gendered Social Capital, Political Discussion and Knowledge about Politics

Female	-1.86 (.37)***
Age in years	+0.04 (.01)***
Education	+1.88 (.21)***
Household income	+1.54 (.23)***
Western resident	+0.25 (.14) ^a
Visible minority	-0.72 (.29)**
Expressive/community group(s) only	+0.39 (.31)
Other non-job-related group(s)	+0.48 (.28) ^a
Job-related group(s)	+0.46 (.23)*
Network diversity	+0.39 (.26)
Female*expressive/community only	-0.34 (.41)
Female*other non-job-related	-0.43 (.41)
Female*job-related	-1.13 (.53)*
Female*network diversity	-0.17 (.38)
Political discussion	+0.82 (.17)***
Female*political discussion	+0.58 (.26)*
Female* political discussion*job-related	+0.56 (.35) ^a
Constant	+3.64 (.36)***
Adjusted R ²	.33
Number of cases	1,378

Note: The table entries are unstandardized OLS coefficients, with standard errors shown in parentheses.

*** p<.001 ** p<.01 * p<.05^a p<.10^a

Figure 1: Gender, Associational Involvement and Political Knowledge

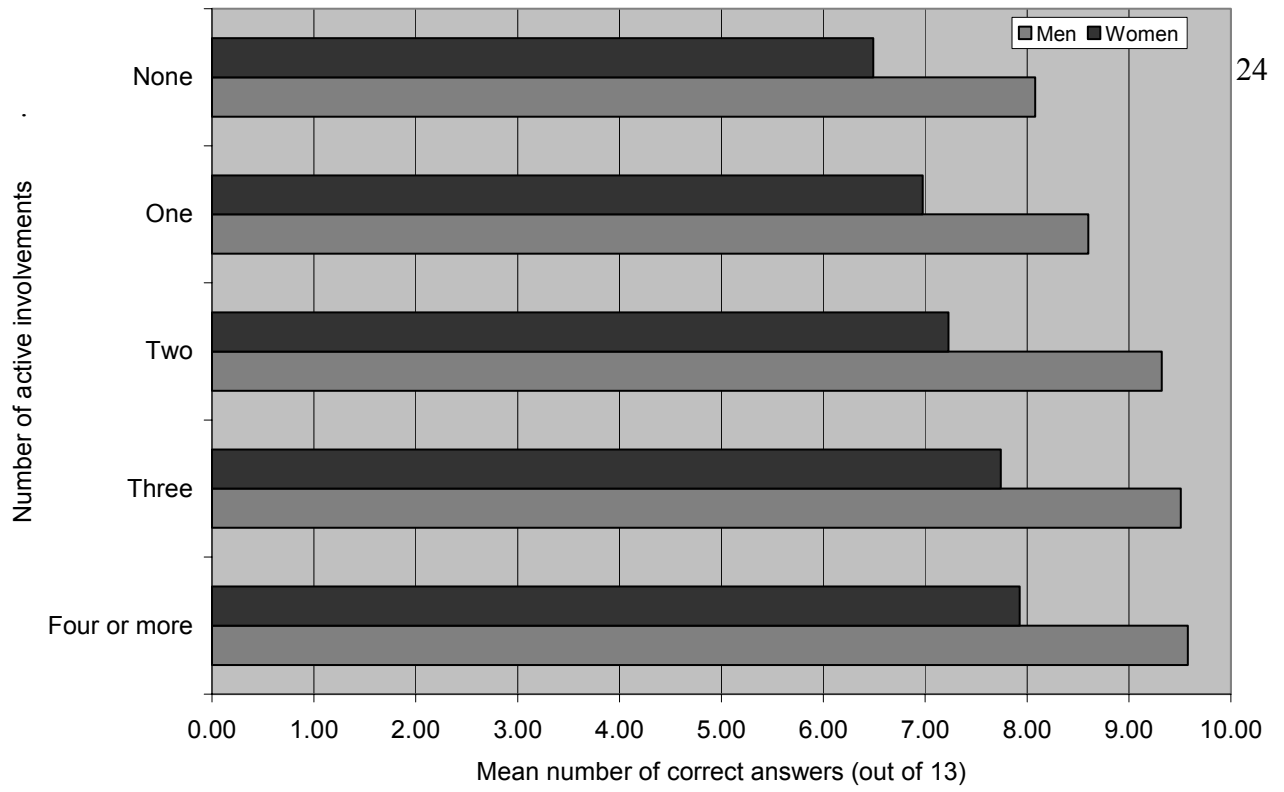
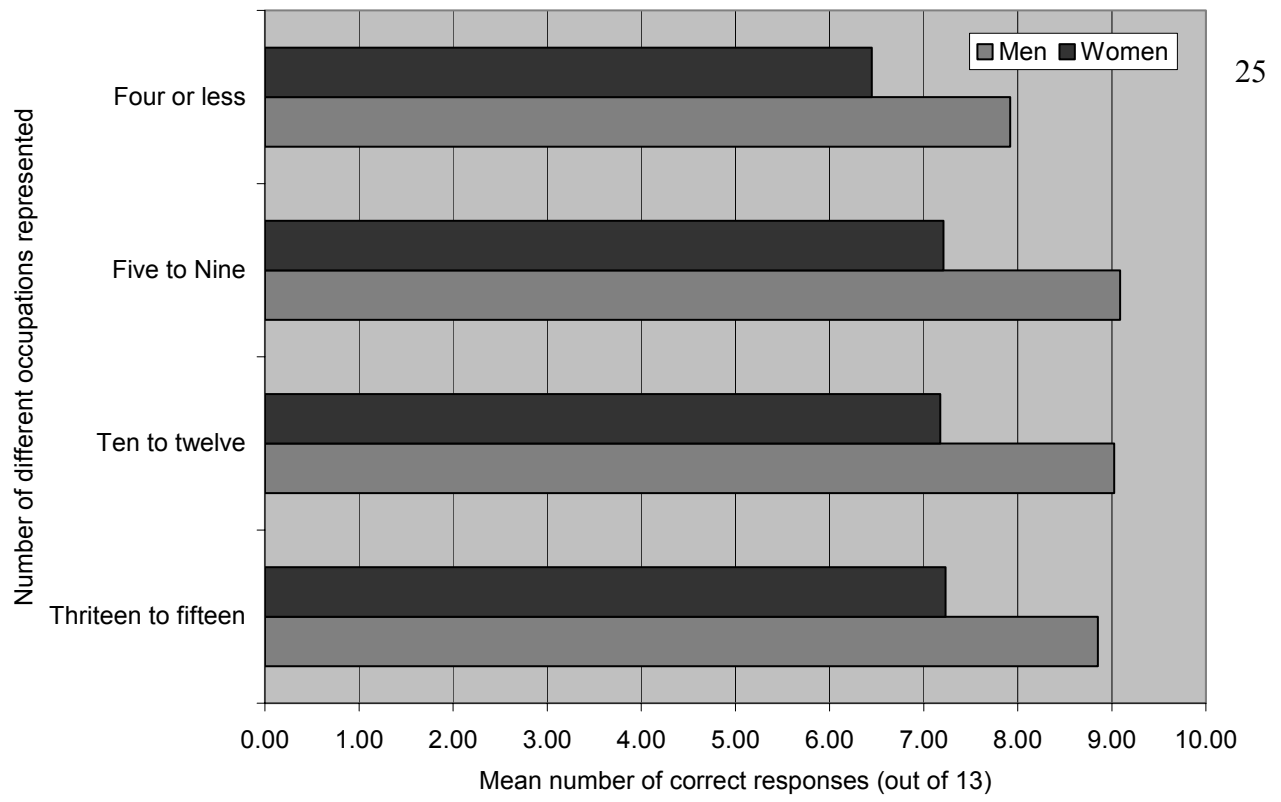


Figure 2: Gender, Network Diversity and Political Knowledge



¹ The authors anticipate the obvious question about the direction of the causal arrow: “does discussing politics with bridge partners increase political discussion elsewhere, or do those who have a general habit of discussing politics tend to talk politics in bridge?” (p. 215). They are able to show that having a politicized partner makes for more political discussion within the partnership than we would expect given the player’s own politicization. Interestingly, the politicizing effect of membership was weakest for those who were the most intensely involved in the game. They had little taste for talk, political or otherwise.

² Putnam (2000, 388-90) does discuss gender segregation, but does so in a purely historical context.

³ Erickson (forthcoming) is careful to avoid any implication that one form of social capital is superior to the other. When it comes to the resources that women control, ties to women may be more useful social capital.

⁴ Funding for the study was provided by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, Elections Canada, and the Institute for Research in Public Policy. The field work was conducted by the Institute for Social research at York University (outside Quebec) and by Jolicoeur (in Quebec). The response rate for the 30-minute campaign telephone survey was 59 percent. Of the 3,647 respondents, 2,918 participated in a 30-minute post-election survey and 1,539 completed the self-administered mail back questionnaire.

⁵ Ideally, we would also like to be able to compare women’s and men’s network diversity in terms of the proportion of kin versus non-kin, as well as the inclusion of individuals of varying ages, educational levels, and ethnicities. It would also be valuable to know *how* respondents became acquainted with individuals in differing occupations, whether through friends, family, coworkers, or spouses.

⁶ More details can be found in Erickson (2003).

⁷ The reliabilities for the scales were high, with Cronbach’s alphas of .86, .80, and .82, respectively.

⁸ Both Nadeau and Niemi (1995) and Dalager (1996) provide evidence that men are more likely than women to give an incorrect answer to political information questions rather than admit that they do not know. The cultural norm that politics is a man’s world may make it harder for men to admit to being ignorant of the issues of the day. If so, some of the gender gap in political knowledge could conceivably reflect the fact that men are more prone to guess. However, with five parties to choose from in the 2000 Canadian election, the odds of guessing correctly were not very high.

⁹ The resulting scale has a satisfactory reliability, with a coefficient Alpha of 0.80.

¹⁰ Similar analyses were run using measures of leader knowledge, general political knowledge, and knowledge of party promises. In each case, a significant gender gap remained. Overall, there was a difference of about one-third of a correct response between women and men for the four leaders’ names, one-half of a correct response for the four general political knowledge questions, and three-quarters of a correct response for the five party promises.

¹¹ This does not necessarily mean that associational involvement *causes* information gains. Indeed, the opposite is equally plausible: the more politically knowledgeable may be more disposed toward joining associations because they are more interested in politics, more

‘mobilized’ to collective engagement, or because they have more financial means to pay fees/dues.

¹² To simplify the analysis, we have omitted social background characteristics that did not have a significant association with political knowledge. The results are not materially affected by their exclusion.

¹³ Erickson rightly sounds a warning note about the direction of causality here: does associational activity make for diversified contacts, or do diversified contacts encourage people to get involved in a range of voluntary associations? As she observes, the relationship may well be reciprocal. The key point is that it persists, even controlling for social background characteristics that might encourage both associational activity and network diversity.

¹⁴ Introducing interaction terms also introduces an element of multicollinearity, which is one reason why the coefficients for these terms are not very robust.

¹⁵ Again, we cannot be certain of the direction of the causal arrow. It could be that people who know more about politics are readier to engage in political discussion