Integrating Two Cultures in Mixed-Methods Research: A Tale of the State Feminism Project

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Introduction

As the growing literature on Multi-methods Research (MMR) shows, there are distinct advantages and disadvantages to conducting such studies. While some assert that MMR should be the industry standard in political science and is becoming the norm, particularly in the subfield of Comparative Politics (Coppedge 2009), others take a "cautionary perspective" arguing that the trend toward MMR may actually undermine good political science scholarship.[i] Interestingly, both perspectives play on the differences between qualitative and quantitative approaches, differences that originate from divergent worldviews, concepts and analytical logics--the "two cultures" (Mahoney and Goertz 2006). For advocates, combining qualitative and quantitative methods brings more analytical leverage to studies through, for example, addressing omitted variable bias, identifying causal mechanisms, or developing more valid concepts (e.g. Bennett 2007 or Collier et al. 2004). For detractors, the fundamental methodological differences undermine the accuracy and validity of mixed methods studies through unsophisticated and often incorrect use of different methods, differentiated measurement of key concepts and general "epistemological incommensurability" (Ahmed and Sil 2009).

The goal of this article is to show how the differences between the "two cultures" have been used to methodological and theoretical advantage in one large-scale comparative study, the

State Feminism Project. Drawing from the study's process and results, we illustrate how an integrated approach to the "two cultures" can enhance empirical research and develop a theory of state feminism about women's policy agencies, women's movements and the state in western postindustrial democracies. In doing so, we show how some of the traps or "speed bumps" (Coppedge 2009) of MMR can be overcome by conducting an "integrated concurrent" (Cresswell 2003) approach to the results of different methods to reach a productive combination of the divergent methodological traditions.

We first present the State Feminism Project in terms of how it sought to "choose not to choose" (Mazur and Parry 1998) between the two cultures from its beginnings in 1995 to the recent completion of the concurrent and integrated mixed-methods capstone analysis in McBride and Mazur (2010). Next, we take a closer look at the effect of this integrative approach first on conceptualization and then on theory development by illustrating how fitting the findings from different methods advanced understanding of the puzzle of state feminism. Our essay concludes with a brief discussion of the lessons learned from bringing the two cultures together in one study.

The State Feminism Project: A Pragmatic and Integrated Approach to MMR

In many ways the State Feminism Project is unique. It has a single set of descriptive cases collected by a research group of 43 people, the Research Network on Gender Politics and the State (RNGS), that benefited from generous research funding. The group also developed a common theoretical framework that guided data collection and analysis through an integrated analytical logic, published in five issue specific books (McBride Stetson 2001; Mazur 2001; Outshoorn 2004; Lovenduski 2005; and Haussman and Sauer 2007). RNGS then worked

together to transpose the qualitative concepts, measurements and data into a quantitative data set.[ii]   Following the completion of the comparative issue area books and the dataset, the capstone analysis addressed research propositions from the state feminism framework developed by RNGS using three methods, seeking an integrated concurrent mixed-methods analysis. Thus, we are not suggesting that others can conduct a study of the same magnitude, but that the strategy and principles used in the State Feminism Project can expand the MMR agenda, open up the menu of effective practices, and perhaps assuage some of the recent criticisms.

Founding Principles: Empirical Feminism, Methodological Pragmatism and Integration

RNGS was founded in 1995 as a response to the weaknesses of an initial study of women's policy agencies in 14 western postindustrial democracies (McBride Stetson and Mazur 1995).   Many contributors to this edited volume and other experts agreed that the country-case studies of agencies were insufficient to assess the effectiveness of the relatively new government structures assigned to promote women's rights and gender equality. From the first founding meeting, members of RNGS shared a set of common principles about research. First, we opted for an empirical feminist approach where hypothesis testing, standards of replication and transparent measurements and indicators are combined with a focus on gendered processes and an effort to bridge the gap between feminist and non feminist scholarship related to gender, movements and the state.[iii]

Second, RNGS members shared a methodological pragmatism with respect to research methodologies, arguably the bedrock of good mixed-methods research (Cresswell 2003). That is, we were willing to consider whatever methods would help answer the core question of the study: if, how and to what degree do women's policy agencies achieve *state feminism* through

bringing women's movement interests into government affairs and policy? Part and parcel of this open-mindedness toward methodology was an understanding that qualitative and quantitative approaches could be useful in developing a systematic cross-national and longitudinal study of the dynamics and drivers of state feminism. In fact from the beginning, inspired by King, Keohane and Verba's, *Designing Social Inquiry*, RNGS agreed to incorporate elements of both approaches in the original research design; in other words "choosing not to choose (Mazur and Parry 1998)" one approach over the other.

The following decisions for the research design, made by the network as a whole, guided the project researchers through the collection of data about and analysis of the interactions among women's policy agencies, policy debates and women's movements in 16 countries pertaining to five policy areas from the 1960s to the early 2000s finally resulting in the five issue-based books. It is important to note the degree to which these decisions intertwine both qualitative and quantitative logics. RNGS was, therefore, wedded to an integrative strategy prior to the development of an explicit mixed-methods plan.

1) Comparative Method with Policy Debate as the Unit of Analysis – Overall RNGS followed a most similar systems design to control for levels of economic and political development, studying agency activity only in western postindustrial democracies. At the same time, the group wanted to maximize the number of observations, deciding that the unit of analysis would not be a country, but a specific policy debate within a country. Researchers agreed to study the influence of agencies between 1 and 5 debates in each policy area for each country for a final 'n' of 130 policy debates in the dataset. [iv]

2) Quantitative Universe Construction and Sample Selection—Given the group's goal of doing a systematic analysis of agencies, RNGS sought to enhance the representativeness of the cases,

following ideas based in quantitative analysis and sampling: a) to expand the range of issue areas to cover policies that have gender dimensions: job training (work and family), prostitution (sexuality), abortion (reproduction), and political representation (citizenship); b) to add a fifth issue of national importance regardless of gender dimension; c) to establish criteria to guide researchers toward a systematic selection of debates in each gender dimension area to enhance coverage over time, salience, and institutional arenas. Each policy, therefore, was a stand-alone analysis of agency-movement interactions over the course of the policy process while at the same time a case or observation providing information about a common theoretical framework.

3) <u>Qualitative Case Analysis</u> – In the interest of trying to understand the specific role of agencies in affecting policy debates and bringing women's movement actors and their interests into each debate, RNGS agreed that researchers would follow standard methods of process-tracing to analyze the dynamics and outcomes of each debate using archival research, interviews and consultation of secondary and primary resources. Worksheets were used to ensure uniform debate selection and analysis, to standardize as much as possible the data collection process, and to provide the maximum potential for replication.

4) <u>Model Specification</u> -- RNGS designed an analytical model, informed by both feminist and non feminist comparative politics literature, setting forth dependent, independent and intervening variables to generate hypotheses about the dynamics and determinants of women's movement success with the state and the intervening influence of agencies in those outcomes. Three clusters of independent variables covered women's movement resources, policy environment characteristics and left support. At the same time, RNGS followed the tradition of small 'n' comparative studies with two typologies based on nominal measures. These define women's

movement impact—the dependent variable—and women's policy agency activity--the intervening variable.

Moving from Descriptive Cases to a Numerical Dataset

In the study's fifth year, RNGS members decided to transpose the qualitative case analyses published in the issue books into a numerical dataset that could be used to test hypotheses about state feminism across all the debates in the study as well as become a resource for researchers outside of the project. This process involved a complete review and enhancement of conceptualization, setting forth operations for measurement that were valid and reliable, securing agreement of the network researchers, and finally asking them to complete additional worksheets to provide the necessary information for the measures. Released in 2007, the RNGS dataset has information on 28 concepts from the state feminism framework with measurements for 120 variables that pertain to these concepts, including numerical indicators (98 variables) and descriptive information (22 variables) for each policy debate. The dataset suite includes an SPSS file, a 130-page codebook and 700 pages of text appendices with the descriptive information on each debate. Thus, even the quantitative dataset includes both qualitative and quantitative information. The RNGS dataset corresponds with what Lieberman identifies as "Historically-oriented and Integrated Replication Data Bases" – "… systematically collected and theoretically informed containers of facts and observations for a consistent set of units over time" (2009: 39).

The Concurrent Integrated Approach to MMR in the Capstone Analysis

The final step in the State Feminism project was to explore the propositions from the RNGS framework across all the issues, countries, and decades of the study, using the numerical dataset, the text appendices, and the case studies. After ten years of research and reporting the

central question remained the same: to what extent does state feminism exist and what are its causal drivers? From this question the capstone analysis extracted several propositions and examined them using appropriate methods for each. With RNGS data and studies as a launching pad we thus conducted a mixed-methods analysis that developed systematic understanding about state feminism and its component parts—representation, women's movements, debate framing and feminist institutions – both in terms of description and a larger theory of state feminism. By providing a composite descriptive and theoretical picture of agencies in western postindustrial democracies from the 1960s to the early 2000s, the capstone analysis and book, *The Politics of State Feminism: Innovation in Comparative Research*, is distinctive from the more general RNGS study.

Given the overall approach of the RNGS project, adopting an integrated approach to the capstone analysis was necessary if not inevitable. Typically, MMR in political science uses two methods in sequence, e.g., an in depth case study to validate findings from statistical analysis (e.g. Lieberman 2005) and, more recently, case studies in relation to formal theory (e.g. Dunning 2007). Unlike that sequential approach, we took a more "iterative" approach, which "…. leverages the distinctive but complimentary strengths of different research methods to make progress on substantively important topics" (Dunning 2007: 22). This is also referred to as "triangulation" (Collier et al. 2004). We prefer to use the term offered by Cresswell—a concurrent integrated approach--since it suggests bringing different logics of qualitative and quantitative approaches together for more accurate and theoretically meaningful results, not just "adding case studies and stirring." We combine three different methods that cut across the qualitative –quantitative divide—descriptive and inferential statistics, comparative qualitative analysis and causal mechanisms case studies. As will be illustrated in the examples below, we

integrate findings, recognizing the analytical logic of each approach, to develop a new theory of state feminism. We found that, rather than seeking mutual validation for each method, this integrative approach is similar to the "alternative logic" of MMR of "fitting-together of a puzzle" identified by Ahram (2009:9).

Methodological Integration in Conceptualization

In this section, we discuss the ways that the decision to use multiple methods led to a necessary and valuable exploration of the central state feminism concepts leading to new discoveries and greatly expanding the significance of the work. When we started planning the RNGS project, we wanted to "do science"; we belonged to the culture that values comparative analysis, causal inference, replicable methods, and empirical validity. Yet, we had chosen a topic where information was so limited that we had to start from scratch to gather data through descriptive research, case by case. In developing the research plan in the 1990s we were heavily influenced by KKV; thus, we intended to have enough cases to provide the basis for empirically valid findings and contribute to cumulative knowledge and theory building.

We thought long and hard about the challenges: (1) many researchers from different countries and backgrounds were needed to study the cases and write up the results; (2) we were studying policy debates across 5 different issue areas (abortion, job training, prostitution; political representation and priority issues of the 1990s); the span of the study—from the 1960s to the early 2000s—covered a period of change in just about every aspect of the topic. We knew that if we were to be able to deliver an empirically valid theory of state feminism that we had to pay careful attention to conceptualization: from nominal definitions to clear steps for gathering the information about those concepts, i.e. operationalization.

The first collaborative meetings of RNGS focused on the research plan, specifically conceptualization of the major components of the RNGS model. For example, *gendering* was a key concept in connecting the women's policy agencies, women's movement and policy debates. Influence of women's movements and women's policy agencies was determined by the extent to which their activities led to the gendering of policy debates—bringing explicit gender language and ideas into the issue definitions used by policy actors. We spent a good deal of time figuring out how to define gendering and how to determine whether or not the debates were gendered. We also clarified what we meant by other terms such as *compatible policy content* and *procedural access.* The RNGS project description, an ever evolving document, was the "handbook" for this work and the worksheets filled in by each researcher showed the data results.

It was not until we moved into what we called the "quantitative phase" of the project, developing the dataset containing numerical measures of all the concepts of the model, that we learned the limits of the conceptualization up to that point. The chapters of the issue books contained the information on each of the cases. We discovered, as we started to put them together, that the researchers at times did not use the same definitions and indicators even within the same country. Editors of the issue books worked with these chapters to count and sort into cross tabs; they did the best they could to draw comparative conclusions using the case descriptions. However, in developing a quantitative version of these studies, we confronted the bad news that we had not met our goal of empirical validity, let alone reliability in the cases.

But the news got even worse. We also saw that the researchers had a great range of opinion as to what entities were parts of women's movements and which actors and goals were feminist. On reflection, it seems that we all thought we knew what the women's movement was

and that there was no need to go further. However, we were long aware that the term *feminism* when uttered was likely to provoke a prolonged argument, not only about what feminism meant, but whether the term could be used across time and cross-nationally. Some researchers did not want to be labeled feminist and they did not want to take the responsibility to call political actors in their countries feminist.

We could not leave it there, however. What a women's movement is, that is how to observe the movement in scientific research, could no longer be ignored once the quantitative phase began. It was too central to the RNGS model and later, the state feminism framework for the capstone analysis.   The central research question was whether women's policy agencies promoted women's interests in policy and helped women gain procedural access to policy arenas. We used *women's movement* as the indicator of women's interests and participation. Thus we had to determine the demands of the movement in every policy debate and whether such demands were picked up by the agencies and coincided with the gendering of debates. It was essential to identify those entities that were (and were not) part of the women's movement in each country.

While a thorough understanding of the women's movement concept was important to answer the central research question, the meaning of feminism was even more important: the overall framework for analysis was *state feminism*. How could we do a study of state feminism if we could not agree on a definition of feminism? Of course the use of the term feminism in public discourse has always been contentious and certainly imprecise. But the rigorous criteria of validity and reliability so central to quantitative analysis gave us no excuse to just let it ride. We had to solve that conceptual problem as well.

This story of these conceptualization nightmares and their resolution are well described elsewhere (McBride & Mazur 2008; Mazur & McBride 2008).   The analytical distinction between two parts of the women's movement—ideas and actors who present them—was the key. Researchers could thus identify women's movement actors (as opposed to a collective notion of a movement) by their gendered ideas articulated in the public sphere. The feminist ideas became a subset of the movement ideas and could also be identified in policy debates and outcomes. The distinction between feminist movements as a subset of the women's movement, however, led to an awkward situation. What to call "state feminism?" The RNGS project defined it in terms of the relation between the agencies, the movement demands and policy outcomes. But, with this more refined and rigorous conceptualization of feminism, the question arose: what if the state accepts women's movement goals that are non-feminist? Is this state feminism? (non-feminist state feminism?) We bit the bullet and made the same distinction in this concept as we did in the women's movement/feminism concept. State feminism is the alliance between agencies and women's movement actors to achieve positive state response. State responses that incorporate feminist movement goals comprise a subset of state feminism. There are, thus, two types: Movement State Feminism and Transformative State Feminism.

All of this led to a reorganization of the capstone analysis. The propositions relating to Movement State Feminism and those pertaining to Transformative State Feminism are treated in separate chapters and the findings compared. We discovered, using a quantitative measure of feminist state response, that the postindustrial democracies have actually incorporated ideas and participants whose intent is to undermine the male-dominated underpinnings of the state itself, albeit at a much lower rate than the typically positive responses to women's movement demands more generally.

The main point here, however, is that our interests in expanding the KKV case-based comparative analysis toward quantitative analysis through a numerical dataset of the cases required us to expand and deepen the conceptualization of key components of the research design. Often we read that qualitative researchers are more attentive than quantitative researchers to complex concepts. Our experience shows that the standards of cross-case reliability and validity essential to numerical measurement of case descriptive information were the impetus for more rigorous and complex conceptualization.

Mixing Results of Three Methods to Build State Feminism Theory

We turn now to how we integrated three methods with different underlying analytic logics: statistical inference, crisp-set qualitative comparative analysis (csQCA) and tracing causal mechanisms in case studies. Initially our focus was on expanding the number of cases to allow statistical methods using the quantitative dataset. The research goal was to assess the independent influence of women's policy agency activity (as allies) on state responses to women's movement demands while controlling for effects of the characteristics of the movement actors and the policy environment during the debates. This way we expected to cross the bridge from descriptive cases to quantitative territory.

The more we immersed ourselves in the details of the cases of policy debates and rich descriptions of the policy making processes ranging from abortion battles in the 1970s to questions of state change in the late 1990s, however, the more we realized that newer methods of configurative comparative research showed promise for deepening our understanding and contributing to theory development. With QCA, for example, we learned we could retain some of the complexity of the cases and still come to conclusions about what factors produce positive

state responses for women's movement actors and the role of agencies in those outcomes. Thus, we added a third method to our multi-method approach. And, as the following discussion shows, this decision made all the difference between reporting quite disparate findings from quantitative analysis and qualitative comparative methods and the integrated set of findings that resulted. To illustrate, we tell the tale of how we discovered the *Backup Theory of State Feminism.*

As indicated earlier, the central question of state feminism is how important women's policy agencies are to women's movement success with the state. One way to explore this question is in terms of a hypothesis: **Alliances with women's policy agencies are a significant cause of women's movement procedural and policy successes in postindustrial democracies.** This hypothesis lends itself to techniques of causal inference while controlling for the effects of other influences such as the degree of cohesion among movement actors, the priority of the issue to the movement, the openness of the policy subsystem to movement actors, and receptivity of policy makers to movement ideas and so on. We used Ordinal Regression techniques to test several models of state responses to women's movement demands, each including a measure of women's policy agency activity (degree of alliance). We found that agency activity is an independent influence on favorable state response: the probability of successful response increased significantly with more agency activity. However, other variables were significant as well—subsystem openness and issue priority to the movement—and these had higher odds for success.

The OR runs showed us we needed to understand more about agency activity in the context of the policy environment and movement resources and so we considered another proposition: **Women's movements are more likely to be successful with the state when women's movement actors have more resources--cohesion and they consider the matter a**

high priority--and the policy environment is open and compatible with movement goals. Activities of agencies complement these conditions in achieving women's movement success. This question requires a method, like QCA, that allows discovery of which combinations of conditions are sufficient to achieve women's movement success with the state and when and if effective agency activity is one of those conditions. Our csQCA analysis at first was disappointing: there was no evidence that it is ever necessary or even sufficient for women's policy agencies to be insiders for movements to gain success with the state. A closer look at the analysis of the job training debates, however, revealed something very interesting.

Job training is an issue where women's movement actors have had great difficulty in many countries in penetrating the policy subsystems that control training and vocational education programs. When they have been successful, they have benefited from favorable policy environments—open policy subsystems and policy debates framed in terms that are compatible with movement goals. In those cases it did not matter whether or not there was an active, effective agency. There were some successes, however, where those favorable conditions were not present. For these, movements found success because there were women's policy agencies inside the policy debates and they brought about a successful outcome. Clearly, in job training debates, women's policy agencies play a backup role to help movements when otherwise favorable conditions are not present.

When we turned from *issue*-based analysis to a *country*-based analysis, we found more evidence of this backup role for women's policy agencies. Here, we classified the countries in terms of the proportion of women's movement successes among the debates across all issues. We looked for patterns that might explain the place of agencies as allies for the more successful movement outcomes in comparison with the less successful, again in relation to conditions of

movement resources and the policy environment. This analysis included both csQCA, for countries where there were enough cases that met the conditions for this method, and case studies of causal mechanisms. Evidence supporting the backup role of women's policy agencies mounted. In Canada, for example, a high degree of fit between movement actor demands and the approach of policy actors at the beginning of debates is a sufficient condition for state response whether or not there is an active, effective agency. However, in one successful debate, those conditions were not present and a case study of causal mechanisms traced the cause to the activity of an agency. A similar pattern was found in Finland. The evidence became even stronger in looking at countries with few movement successes, such as France and the Netherlands where, in the debates in this study, only with the help of effective agencies were the movement actors successful.

To summarize, the backup theory of state feminism asserts that the greater the activity of policy agencies on behalf of women's movement actors, the greater the degree of positive response by the state to their demands. However, there are other variables that increase the odds of success more than agency activity. Such conditions, alone or in combination, are frequently sufficient for women's movements to gain positive responses from the state: priority of the issue, openness of subsystems and compatibility of movement demands with policy actors' views. These movement actors achieve success regardless of any alliance with a women's policy agency. When these favorable conditions are not present, however, active, effective agencies are likely to help actors overcome the barriers and bring about success in policy and participation. These findings are made possible by and supported by the integration of all three methods – statistical inference, configurative comparative analysis and causal mechanism case studies, which in turn validate each other and also allows for a more full and accurate picture of the place

of women's policy agencies as allies of women's movement actors and as advocates for movement goals with the state.

Conclusion: Lessons Learned

The State Feminism Project clearly shows the benefits of integrating qualitative and quantitative approaches in a single study, countering fears of "epistemological incommensurability"(Ahmed and Sil 2009).   The move from the qualitative to the quantitative phases of the project improved the precision and reliability of the operational definitions of key concepts contrary to the conventional wisdom that qualitative analysis leads to better concepts. The dialog among ordinal regression, csQCA and case studies in the capstone analysis helped us put together the components, like the backup theory, of a new theory of state feminism. By returning repeatedly to results from each method, it was possible, gradually, to make sense of the vast array of information about women's movements, agencies and policy processes over time, across countries, across issues. This concurrent integrated strategy produced mid range theory, undermining sweeping generalizations from feminist and non-feminist scholarship about causes of social movement success, the effectiveness of women's policy agencies, and the receptiveness of states to women's movement activism. This study, therefore, undertakes "double bridging" (Checkel 2008), across both the qualitative/quantitative AND the feminist/non-feminist divides.

To be sure, the time and resources invested in conducting the State Feminism project as well as it scope and magnitude make it unlikely that others will be able to assemble the number and range of original case studies necessary to reach the same level of mixed-methods integration. In addition, because of its origins in these cases, it could be argued that the RNGS numerical dataset is not the typical random sample dataset with interval data producing linear

regression; while it is quantitative, its nominal and ordinal measures contain the qualitative logic of its origins. Thus, the study is more likely to be compatible with research that uses more explicitly qualitative approaches than with scholarship that wholly embrace quantitative logics. And finally, the complexity and mid range nature of the findings reflects the risk of undertaking mixed-method research: after all of the work and time expended exploring the research questions, the answers lack the parsimony and elegance of macro theories. In the final analysis, however, finding complexity, bounded generalizations, and mid range theory is likely to present the more accurate picture of the reality of politics; therefore, integrating the two cultures may lead to better science after all.

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[i] See for example the recent symposium in this newsletter, "Cautionary Perspectives on Multi-Method Research." Fall 2008 7:2.

[ii] For the project description, dataset suite and code book and other specifics on RNGS go to http://libarts.wsu.edu/polisci/rngs/.

[iii] A second approach to feminist analysis is "standpoint feminism" where the scientific method is put into question for being "tainted (sic)" by patriarchy and exclusive of serious consideration of gender and women researchers. This approach employs interpretive and post modern epistemologies and researchers tend to reject standard social scientific protocols (Harding 1986).

[iv] The 130 debates in the RNGS dataset come from 13 Western countries. Debates covering prostitution in Israel, political representation in Japan prostitution in Australia, and job training in the EU were not included in the dataset but appear in the issue books.