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# Masculinised jobs, feminised jobs and men's 'gender capital' experiences: Understanding occupational segregation in Australia

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## Abstract

Australia features a highly segregated workforce where certain occupational spaces appear to privilege particular gendered dispositions. While research on gender and work highlights the association between occupational segregation and gender inequality, conventional explanations of why men and women continue to be concentrated in different occupations, and in different roles within occupations, can be considered problematic. This article argues that we may be able to achieve a deeper understanding of gendered occupational segregation than previous explanations have offered by appropriating Bourdieu's concept, 'capital'. Drawing on qualitative research with Australian workers we explore men's 'gender capital experiences' within masculinised and feminised occupations. The article discusses how male, masculine and feminine embodiments can operate as capitals which may be accumulated and transacted, perpetuating horizontal gender segregation in the workforce but also vertical segregation within occupations. In doing so, we expand the work of feminist Bourdieusian scholars who have reworked Bourdieu's approach so that gender, as well as class, may be understood as a central form of stratification in the social order.

**Keywords:** Bourdieu, class, gender, masculinity, occupation

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In recent years, feminist Bourdieusian scholars have appropriated Bourdieu's theoretical approach in order to examine the operation of gender distinction and power. Most notably, the work of Leslie McCall, Bev Skeggs and Terry Lovell has been central in the gendering of Bourdieu's capital. This article builds on this work and describes how the concept 'gender capital' might be operationalised in the Australian context to produce new insights into how occupational segregation is produced and reproduced. The article builds on Huppatz's work (2009, 2012), which focuses on the mobilisation of 'gender capital' by women in feminised occupations in Australia, and discusses how the concept can also capture men's experiences of occupations. Drawing on qualitative research with male workers we explore men's 'gender capital experiences' within a range of occupations. The article discusses how male, masculine and feminine embodiments can operate as capitals which may be accumulated and transacted by male workers, perpetuating horizontal gender segregation in the workforce but also vertical segregation within feminised occupations.

## Occupational segregation in Australia

Australia features a highly segregated workforce where certain occupational spaces appear to privilege particular gendered bodies and dispositions. For example, Preston and Whitehouse (2004) found that in 2002, 62.6% of women worked in female-dominated[1] occupations and 65% of men work in male-dominated occupations. They conclude from the research that: 'It is clear from these figures that men and women are most likely to work in "own-sex" occupations' (Preston and Whitehouse, 2004: 8). Indeed, more recent occupational data suggests that in occupations such as social work and nursing, women have increased their share, and in male-dominated occupations, such as construction, men have increased their share. The significance of these trends is amplified by the fact that these occupations are major sites of employment in Australia. In 2010, 11% of the total work force was employed in the health care and social assistance industry, and 9% of the total workforce was employed in the construction industry. Yet, in 2010, 79% of people employed in health and social assistance were female, and 88% of those employed in the construction industry were male (Australian Government, 2011). Barns and Preston (2010: 96) argue that gendered occupational segregation is 'deeply entrenched in Australia' and likely to become even more entrenched with current patterns of employment.

The now extensive research on gender and work has highlighted the association between occupational segregation and gender inequality, including the widespread symbolic and material devaluation of female-dominated work (Cohen and Huffman, 2003; England, 2005; Magnusson, 2009). Yet these patterns continue, despite the removal of formal barriers to men's and

women's participation in the full range of occupations. Indeed, even as occupations themselves change with the introduction of new work practices, new types of work or new types of personnel, there remain few occupations that are considered 'gender-neutral' (Connell, 2006a, 2006b; Diamond and Whitehouse, 2007). In this article, we are concerned with contributing to theories of gendered social stratification through the idea of gender operating as a form of capital. We argue this line of inquiry has potential to further illuminate how gendered occupational segregation is perpetuated.

Blackburn and Jarman (2006) have argued that theories of occupational segregation often rely upon on essentialised conceptualisations of gender in which the categories men and women are regarded as fixed, and the distinctions between these categories are 'naturalised'. Yet most contemporary feminist researchers view notions like 'man' and 'woman' as attributions of a false unity to what are unstable and ambiguous categories. As Alvesson (1998: 971) explains: 'Gender is seen by many researchers as a social and linguistic construction, as a nonstable social meaning ascribed to the male and female.' It is important, then, that approaches to occupational segregation are capable of going beyond 'body counting' (Alvesson and Billing, 2009), or categorising and comparing males and females, and instead are able to focus on how and where masculinity and femininity, as social constructions, are produced and reproduced.

In addition, theories of occupational segregation often rest on understandings of occupations as static categories, within which individual experiences are relatively homogeneous. Rather than categories, occupations are social spaces that involve diverse positions and practices, which both produce occupations and are produced by them. As Atkinson (2009) points out, occupations are environments that produce cultures and dispositions, including, we would argue, gendered cultures and dispositions. Yet explanations of occupational patterns tend to universalise the experiences of men and women, and universalise what happens within occupations, so that the differences between masculine and feminine positions, dispositions and practices – including class differences – disappear. Approaches to occupational segregation also tend to emphasise male agency and under-emphasise women's ability to resist, as well as support, a status quo in which they have an unequal status (Blackburn and Jarman, 2006). For example, often women are represented as being 'forced out' or 'forced into' occupations, whereas men are seen to make 'choices' not to employ, promote or work with women.

We suggest that Bourdieu's dynamic approach to social stratification provides an alternative starting point for the analysis of occupational segregation. We argue that gender capital may be an extremely useful concept for exploring men's and women's movement through occupational social spaces, and thus sheds light on the continuity and reproduction of occupational segregation.

## Introducing the concept of gender capital

Bourdieu's concept 'capital' may be loosely defined as a resource, and the presence or absence of capital is an important element of class distinction. Capital is therefore a concept that helps researchers to understand how opportunities are enabled or constrained for individuals: 'it enables us to think through different types of values and mobility' (Skeggs, 2004: 21). Bourdieu mostly referred to three types of capital: economic capital (economic wealth), social capital (advantageous social connections) and cultural capital (advantageous cultural goods, dispositions and qualifications). Cultural capital is the most diverse of the three as it takes several forms and exists in: institutional states (in the form of educational qualifications), objectified states (in pictures, books, instruments etc) and embodied states (as aspects of the habitus) (Bourdieu, 1986). Furthermore, these capitals becomes a fourth type of capital when they are legitimated in society: symbolic capital. The 'capital' concept allows us to think about wealth beyond the economic. However, in this article we suggest this concept might be even more useful and reworked to understand the gender practices involved in occupational segregation.

Bourdieu himself suggested the evolutionary potential of his framework when he added symbolic capital to his formulation and when he proposed that each species has subtypes (see Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 119). Bourdieu suggested that there is value in expanding his formulation as it enables us to 'explain the structure and dynamics of differentiated societies' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 119). Some theorists have argued against the expansion of Bourdieu's conceptual toolkit. For example, Bennett et al. (2009) argue that gender is not a capital; rather, it informs or structures cultural capital within fields. They have reservations about developing Bourdieu's original formula, suggesting that this is a project that will never end so that we will have a limitless list of wealth. However, we assert that 'gender capital' allows us to account for both class and gender processes; it makes gender central in social space. Thus, this reworking serves an important political function in addition to a theoretical and empirical purpose (Huppatz, 2012). In making this argument, we are building on the work of several feminist Bourdieusian scholars.

### Feminists reworkings of capital

Although Bourdieu (1984: 107) famously stated 'sexual properties are as inseparable from class properties as the yellowness of lemon is from its acidity', he paid little attention to the relationship between capital and gender.[2] Indeed, Bourdieu originally saw gender as a secondary form of stratification and therefore depicted capital as gender-neutral and merely shaped by gender in the 'reconversion process' (McCall, 1992: 841–2). This has meant that some Bourdieusian feminists have taken issue with the relationship between gender and capital, and in so doing have moved *beyond*

Bourdieu. For example, in her 1992 article 'Does Gender *Fit*? Feminism, Bourdieu, and Conceptions of Social Order', Leslie McCall proposes that gender is a cultural capital and argues that a case for gendered capital can be grounded in Bourdieu's formulation of embodied cultural capital. Bourdieu (1986: 47–9) stated that when cultural capital exists in an embodied form it takes 'the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body' and may be possessed through processes of 'self-improvement' or without conscious cultivation (for example, through socialisation). This understanding of cultural capital suggests that gendered dispositions may also act as capital. Furthermore, McCall points out that Bourdieu did not term gender 'secondary' only on the basis of its significance in stratification, gender was also termed 'secondary' due to its hidden form. This allows for an interpretation of gender as a primary, yet elusive force in social space which appears as natural and universal.

Beverley Skeggs' book, *Formations of Class and Gender* (1997) explores working-class women's experiences and expands on this understanding of gendered capital, making a case for *feminine* cultural capital. Skeggs finds that working-class women actively pursue and use femininity as capital for 'halting losses'. Therefore, femininity is a 'discursive position' that is taken up and resisted by women in multiple ways. Furthermore, in her chapter titled 'Context and Background: Pierre Bourdieu's Analysis of Gender, Class and Sexuality', Skeggs (2004: 22) argues that gender normalcy as gendered capital works differently for boys and girls. She asserts that gender normalcy offers a limited form of capital for girls whereas it is institutionalised in schools and is therefore symbolic capital and provides masculine power for boys. In this way gender is an 'asymmetrical' form of capital.

Therefore, some feminists claim that women not only accumulate capital, they also possess their own feminine forms of capital. Moreover, importantly, they see gender as *cultural* capital; these theorists understand femininity as culturally learned. This means that, while women may be encouraged to take up this form of capital more than men, it is a capital that is available to men as well as women.

In her 2009 article, 'Reworking Bourdieu's "Capital"', Huppatz also argues that gender is cultural capital but draws on research with paid caring workers to distinguish female and feminine capitals. Huppatz suggests that there is a distinction between the advantages that flow from being hailed as female – usually through recognition of bodily difference – and the advantages that flow from femininity, so that in making use of the concept 'gender capital', femaleness and femininity should not be conflated. In short, female capital and male capital relate to the gender advantage that is derived from being perceived to have a female or male body, whereas feminine capital and masculine capital relate to the gender advantage that is derived from a disposition or skill set, or from simply being hailed as feminine or masculine.

In addition, some theorists have also suggested that we are witnessing greater use of gendered capital due to changes in the economy. For example, in 'Thinking Feminism With and Against Bourdieu', Terry Lovell (2000) argues that the labour market is changing so that the demand for stereotypical feminine skills is rising. This means that femininity may be tradable for economic capital on the labour market, just as masculinity is (although femininity may not be rewarded with symbolic capital), and this may mean that working-class femininity is becoming more profitable than working-class masculinity. In 'The New Economy, Property and Personhood', Lisa Adkins (2005) also suggests that there exists a 'new economy' in which gender is seen as a cultural product; as a malleable, indeterminable, workplace resource. However, Adkins argues that gendered capital is limited by a reworking of the relationship between people and their labour. As work in this new economy increasingly involves social interaction and embodied performance, its profitability depends very much on 'audience effects' so that customer experience or customer satisfaction is a key indicator of employee performance. However, as women's performances of femininity are often considered the outcome of 'natural advantages', customer effects are not necessarily recognised, which means that individuals do not always own or accumulate gendered capital. For Adkins, gendered capital does not always 'stick' to the subject.

Feminists have therefore reworked Bourdieu's concept, 'embodied cultural capital' to include gendered capital and have argued the significance of this concept for understanding the labour market.

## Masculinity research and capital

Ava Baron (2006) argues that until recently 'gender and work' research tended to equate gender with the study of women and femininities. However, since the 1980s masculinity has become a topic of increasing interest (Thorpe, 2010) and there has been a wave of studies concerned with men's occupational experiences. Moreover, some masculinity researchers have also found gender to be an asset. Patricia Yancey Martin (2001) discusses what we view to be masculine capital, without naming it as such. In her article 'Mobilizing Masculinities' she outlines how masculine practices are mobilised to men's advantage in organisations. For example, she discusses how men 'peacock' and 'self-promote' in organisations but women do not and this puts women at a disadvantage.

The notion of 'masculine capital' has also been taken up more explicitly in more recent masculinity research. Most notably, Tristan Bridges' 'Gender Capital and Male Bodybuilders' explores the mobilisation of gender capital by male bodybuilders and argues that: 'Hegemonic masculinity takes different shapes in different fields of interaction, acting as a form of cultural capital: gender capital' (2009: 83). Therefore, it is hegemonic masculinity that tends to operate as gender capital and what constitutes hegemonic

masculinity varies from context to context. In addition, Tony Coles' 'Negotiating the Field of Masculinity' (2009) takes a different approach and argues for a field of masculinity in which hegemonic masculinity, although fluid and changeable, tends to be symbolic capital. Coles emphasises the role of bodily capital and argues that bodies that are in line with hegemonic masculinity are most valuable in the field of masculinity. Finally, Sune Qvotrup Jensen (2006) in her article 'Rethinking Subcultural Capital' discusses the value of 'expressive masculinity' in a subculture that is constituted by young men of non-Danish ethnic origin. She states that expressive masculinity is a distinct subcultural style, which should not be essentialised but is related to bodily capital. Jensen (2006: 270) argues that, for the young men in her research: 'Bodily capital implies strength, guts and no fear of pain.' Jensen (2006: 271) therefore asserts that disadvantaged young men have access to an exaggerated masculinity 'which encompasses gender, class, ethnicity and "race"'. Like Skeggs (1997), she argues that gendered capital can be used by disadvantaged agents to halt losses.

Masculinity researchers have therefore argued for the adaptation of cultural capital to include 'masculine capital' and have examined the bodily forms that this type of capital might take.

## Understanding gender capital

Thus this research demonstrates that both femininity and masculinity are resources that are drawn on both consciously and unconsciously with varying success in movements through social space, particularly in the labour market. Moreover, Skeggs (1997), Alvesson (1998), Huppatz (2009) and others argue that femininity should not be generalised as a female condition or masculinity as a male condition, so that people with male bodies can be recognised as having feminine attributes, and people with female bodies can be recognised as having masculine attributes. This means that it is possible to 'do gender differently' but also, as Alvesson (1998), Adkins (2005) and Huppatz (2012) assert, doing gender differently can sometimes be advantageous, so that men may successfully mobilise femininity and women may successfully mobilise masculinity in certain social spaces. However, stereotypical or hegemonic gender dispositions may be the most rewarded dispositions (Bridges, 2009; Coles, 2009; Huppatz, 2009, 2012; Skeggs, 1997) and are more likely to be symbolically legitimated (although as Adkins [2005] suggests, in the labour market, the success of gender performances may be dependent on 'audience effects'). In light of this previous research and theorising, we conceptualise gender as cultural capital that exists as four different types of gender capital: feminine, masculine, female and male, and suggest that explorations of occupational segregation would benefit from including an examination of gender capital in a range of occupations. This article outlines men's gender capital experiences and, in particular, how men utilise maleness, masculinity and femininity as capitals. We explore

how gender can be traded in the labour market for access to employment, job stability, senior positions and class mobility.

## Method

This article draws on semi-structured, in-depth interviews with men who carry out jobs in gendered industries, including construction, retail, hairdressing, medicine and nursing, which were conducted as part of a broader study. The interviews lasted for 60 minutes on average and gathered narratives of respondents' life courses; although the focus was on work histories, information was gathered about family backgrounds, educational experiences, and trajectories and current lifestyles.

As part of these interviews we asked the respondents about their gendered occupational experiences. Both interviewers were female, and so it is possible that this affected the presentation of the narratives, and particularly the presentation of gender in the narratives. We were also aware that this is a slippery discussion point, as gender experience is often ambivalent and unstable. As Skeggs (2004: 29) argues: 'What feminists have shown consistently over a long period of time is that norms do not work, or are not taken up; identities are a limited resource, a form of cultural capital that are worked [on] and uncomfortably inhabited.' And in this way our conception of gender once again departs from Bourdieu's approach, as Bourdieu saw gender as largely ingrained and dichotomous, and for the most part did not consider deviation from generalisations (Silva, 2005).

However, the respondents' lives did appear shaped by gender. As Atkinson (2010) found in his research on class and work, where a discourse of 'social class' emerged as a 'prominent, if fuzzy, scheme of typifications' (Atkinson, 2010a: 3–4 ), we found our respondents employed the discourse of 'gender' in a similar way. Gender appeared as a prominent scheme through which the social world *and* respondents' social identities was 'thought, described and felt' (Atkinson, 2010a: 4). For example, when we asked the question 'What is your gender?' most respondents felt the question redundant: their gendered position was taken for granted.

The study aimed to grasp respondents' available capital, and also capture differences in perceptions and dispositions of apparently similarly situated individuals. In our case these included the differences for those situated as men or as women. Put simply, we were interested in exploring how men and women express and understand occupational spaces as open to them, or 'for the likes of them'. That is, we were interested in accessing individuals' perceptions and dispositions (Atkinson, 2009) as they permeated their narratives.

The interview questions were constructed to yield information on perceptions of gender capital and included:

1. Did your gender assist you in gaining employment within the area? How?
2. Are the characteristics that make you good at your job related to gender? How?
3. Has your gender worked to your advantage within this occupation? How?

In this article, we provide some examples from the interviews to illustrate male workers' experiences of three of the forms of gender capital described above: male capital, masculine capital and feminine capital (female capital was not found to be relevant for this cohort; for discussions of female capital see Huppatz, 2009, 2012).

## Findings

As Illouz (1997: 41) comments:

> For a particular form of cultural behaviour to become capital, it must be convertible into economic and social benefits; it must be convertible into something that agents can play with in a field, that will give them right of entry, or disqualify them, or help them seize what is at stake in the field.

The male workers who participated in the interviews described utilising gender to access occupations, to do well in occupations and to gain promotion; they therefore cultivate and utilise what we perceive to be gender capital at various points in their careers, including male capital, masculine capital and feminine capital. This section is divided by these three subspecies of gender capital, and includes a discussion of the relationship between gender capital and class, and of gender limits.

### Maleness as capital

To restate, male capital relates to the gender advantage that is derived from being perceived to have a male body, and this form of capital is distinct from the capital that flows from being perceived to be masculine. It is the advantage that flows from the recognition of bodily difference, whether that bodily difference is 'natural', technologically or culturally produced. This can be the simple 'recognition' of a body that cannot get pregnant: the recognition (and misrecognition) of the 'reproductive distinction' that is made in the cultural creation of the categories 'men' and 'women' (Connell, 2002). Graham, a medical specialist, perceived being recognised as 'male' as advantage:

*Question*: Did your gender assist you in gaining employment in medicine?

*Graham*: I think it probably did, because it wasn't expected that I would bear children, break my training and so on and taking time out.

Some male workers commented on how their bodies assist in promotion to management positions. This appears to particularly be the case for men who work in feminised jobs. For example Ned, a nurse, stated: 'I think you get noticed more as a male nurse.... And I'm not sure but [I think] that's why you see more men in higher clinical or management positions ...'

So, having a body that is recognised as male appears as a quality of gender that can guarantee employment in some occupations and management positions in others, regardless of whether 'masculinity' is embodied by an individual. Here, male capital may be operating. In feminised spaces, this is probably because male bodies are a point of difference, but also because male bodies are commonly aligned with what are perceived to be masculine competences. These competences are often presumed to be more relevant for management positions than feminine competences. In other occupational spaces, it may simply be a case of men being seen to have 'the right body for the job' because male bodies are often associated with a masculine disposition toward both employment and family responsibilities. As a tight link is often made between bodies, dispositions and assumed skill sets, masculine capital may be relevant for Ned's and Graham's experiences as well.

## Masculinity as capital

Masculinity appears to be the gender disposition that the men have drawn upon the most, and the most successfully, in their occupations. These dispositions are stereotypes of masculinity and may be experienced ambivalently, nevertheless, the men's embodiments of these stereotypes have assisted them in gaining employment, doing their jobs well and accessing promotion. Masculine bodily appearance is one dimension of masculine capital. A 'muscular masculinity' (Baron, 2006: 146–50) was depicted as an important asset for some occupations. For example, a construction worker highlighted how, not just male bodies but masculine bodies, aid in success within the industry:

*Question*: Are the characteristics which make you good at your job related to gender?

*Aaron*: In some aspects it's better if you are stronger and athletic I guess. Because it is quite hard, physical work so I guess if you are a strong dude it would help out 'cause you'd get things done quicker because you've got that physical capability. It helps if you don't eat too many pies at lunch time. I did weights to make sure I'm fit – it makes it easier. You know what I mean?

Here, Aaron is talking about the benefits of a muscularity attached to masculinity in construction work: you need to be a strong '*dude*'. Aaron has therefore actively cultivated a masculine capital. What is more, Aaron's narrative indicates that work environments sometimes produce masculinity; he

mentioned that the work environment encourages him to make his body *more* masculine. This is an example of Bourdieu's 'occupational effects' (Atkinson, 2009): jobs are social spaces that not only attract certain gendered dispositions, they also *produce* gender. Dispositions have an impact on social spaces but social spaces also impact dispositions.

Middle-class forms of masculinity may also be produced in work environments. Baron (2006: 149) suggests that men use their bodies as 'social currency' differently across the class divide, particularly as a way of distinguishing middle-class men from labouring men. For example, certain work environments encourage men to distance themselves from muscular masculinity through masculine business attire, and this can be important for promotion. Damian, for example, explained that his movement into a management role in the construction industry was assisted because he: 'could look good in a shirt and tie. Other blokes just won't do it.' His cultivation of middle-class masculine capital was one way his gender worked to his advantage in this occupational space: he could convert his appearance into economic benefit.

Of course, spaces of social action do not always have such a clear impact on the habitus. As Skeggs (2004) and Butler (1999) and Adkins (2003) argue, the habitus does not necessarily always clearly submit to the field as Bourdieu seemed to suggest. In other research, for example, Huppatz (2012) demonstrates that female nurses do not necessarily find a caring demeanour easy, even though this is a feminine norm and demanded within the paid caring field. However, there is a dynamic interplay that exists between habitus and field and in these cases it does seem that the habitus is impacted by the occupational space.

The interviews also indicated that assumptions about masculine skills also assist male workers in occupational spaces. For example, Graham, a senior medical specialist, stated that his masculinity assisted him in his career: 'I was assisted by my decisiveness, the ability to make quick decisions, which is a masculine trait.'

Likewise, Terry was adamant that his masculinity was an asset in his trajectory in retail, where he moved from customer service (which he considered feminine work) to running his own small business. This progression was possible, he suggested, because: 'it involved money, developing the business, as a man … it was about masculinity'.

Here, masculine capital, particularly the assumption of an assertive disposition, was implicated in career success, as Graham reached the upper echelons of his profession and Terry took ownership of a retail business.

As we suggested earlier, masculinity may also work as capital in feminised occupations. For example, male nurses discussed the use value of masculinity in nursing. When asked if his gender aided him in his career path Stan, a nurse manager, replied: 'Yes … in being promoted and that pisses me off. I am sure that men are promoted because they're men and

women are just left behind.… I think men are more pushy and aggressive and they promote themselves more.'

Stan's narrative suggests that men are ambitious and competitive and this puts them at an advantage in pursuing senior positions. Therefore masculine qualities are perceived to enable the achievement of senior positions within nursing management jobs; they operate as capital.

Hence, within these narratives, these workers align men with masculinity and dichotomise masculinity and femininity, so that masculinity is associated with culture, rationality and aggression. These are not links that we wish to make. Nevertheless, according to these accounts, these workers experienced these 'masculine' qualities as assets within occupational spaces. Because they are normative qualities for many they appear to work as capital.

These depictions of masculinity as aiding men in accessing the senior positions in feminised occupations also indicate that masculine capital may hold more value than feminine capital (Huppatz, 2009, 2012) and this may be why vertical segregation is so prominent in feminised work. As Bridges (2009: 93) comments: 'Gender capital is also defined, employed and evaluated within a patriarchal gender order that values a hierarchical relationship between masculinities and femininities, regardless of contextual distinctions.' This finding also supports Skeggs' (2004) argument that gender is an 'asymmetrical' form of capital.

### Femininity as capital

Nevertheless, there are also some limited examples from the narratives of femininity working as an asset for men. For example Russell recognised that a feminine disposition aided him in his nursing career. He said: 'I'm not a really masculine guy, I'm not a really blokey bloke … I'm a soft gentle kind of guy. If I'd been a construction "hard man" there would be no way I could get a job in nursing.'

Indeed, it seems Russell used feminine capital to move out of his precarious physical work into work that had 'more longevity'. He explained that in nursing: 'eventually I will exceed my [expectations of my] economic potential [more] than I would in construction'. Similarly, when asked 'are the characteristics which make/will make you good at your job related to gender?' Stan, a nurse manager, replied:

> Ah … that's an interesting question. If I had to compare my maleness to people outside of the health field … then I'd say I have more feminine characteristics … not in my behaviour but in how I look at things. I have a more nurturing role. Or a more nurturing approach to things …

Stan's femininity aided him in entering nursing, competently carrying out his job and in his management practices.

Men also appear to successfully wield feminine capital in hairdressing. For example, Adam asserted that his femininity aided his success in hairdressing:

*Question*: Does your femininity help you get clients?
*Adam*: Oh yeah, most of my clients are female.

In Adam's view, his femininity manifests in his capacities to 'camp it up', which for him equates with a willingness to discuss women's issues and engage in physical and emotional yet non-sexual intimacy with women, as well as carrying his body 'lightly' and with 'flamboyance'. According to Adam, these qualities are important for recruiting female clients, which is essential for success in the feminised hairdressing industry.

These examples show how men can wield feminine capital and how men are not confined to masculinity. They also demonstrate that femininity is valuable in feminised jobs. In feminised occupations, like nursing and hairdressing, femininity might work as capital and be wielded by men. This suggests that while masculine performances may have more symbolic weight and are regarded as valuable in running business and obtaining management positions, in order to be competent in feminised occupations, men also need to willingly display femininity (Huppatz, 2012). In these occupations, femininity *and* masculinity are required. Moreover, men's performances of femininity may translate to workplace rewards, as these performances may be more likely to be viewed by clients as labour, as Adkins (2005) suggests. Femininity therefore appears to be a valuable resource on the labour market, at least in interactive work, as Lovell (2000) proposes.

### Class, gender capital and occupational choice

Finally, we would like to mention that class was significant in the men's narratives. Despite the apparent use value of gendered embodiments, class constrained the career choices of some of these men so that both gender and class are implicated in men's career choices. For example, Aaron, a construction worker, indicated that this was one of the only options for someone of his gender and class position. Aaron stated that he has never contemplated feminised work and that construction is the best of four choices that were available to him:

*Question*: What do your family and friends think of your occupational choice?
*Aaron*: Dad thought it was good – because he told me electricians are always inside roofs and plumbers are always inside sewerage systems. And it's better than digging holes … I have mates that are … some are carpenters and tradesman so they're in the same industry.

In this way class *and* gender limited this worker's career choice. Aaron is carrying out work that his father expected him to participate in and that is in line with his friends' practices. Although he has made use of masculine capital, it is in the limited sphere of practice that is available to him. Here, another of Bourdieu's concepts is useful for understanding work practices: *symbolic violence*. Symbolic violence is a violence that is gentle and invisible

and constrains actions so that they are in line with the doxic order, and it seems to have been enacted in Aaron's communications with his dad and has limited his practice. Aaron appears to hold some gender capital, but this has not enabled him to mobilise his gender/class position; he is confined to work that is appropriate for a certain type of working-class masculinity. As with the women in Skeggs' (1997) study, his gender capital operates within class limits.

Another of the interviewees, Stan, a nurse, has a very different story; he talked about how his career choice has *enabled* mobility. Stan stated that he entered nursing because it distanced him from his family's working-class position – it was a significant step up, in terms of pay, reliability and status from factory work:

> I worked in a factory when I first finished school and then I had a friend who had tuberculosis and he said 'Why don't you work in a hospital instead of a factory?', so then I became an orderly.

Stan's story suggests that the transgression of gender norms and the mobilisation of feminine capital can be so profitable it can sometimes assist men in moving class position. The mobilisation of feminine embodiments may be particularly advantageous for working-class men who need to 'halt losses' and find that most low-skilled employment opportunities in Australia are in service work. As Lovell (2000: 25) states in the context of recent labour force changes: 'the demand for caring is rising while the demand for "masculine physicality" is falling'.

## Gender limits

However, the men who mobilise femininity and participate in feminised work appear to do this at a cost. Many of the men discussed how their relationships with family and friends have suffered because they do feminised work. For example, Russell's choice to pursue nursing has strained his relationship with his father who sees construction work as more gender-appropriate: 'Dad was proud of me as a construction worker, because it was macho enough.'

Russell's narrative shows how doing gender well can provide esteem for a social agent whereas doing gender differently can reduce social standing.

Many of the men who work in feminised jobs also discussed how their sexuality has been questioned. For example, Stan commented on how he wears a wedding band to ward off unwanted assumptions about his sexuality: 'they'd ask the question, "Oh, are you gay then?" and then when I put the wedding ring on, it stopped all that. They wouldn't ask the question. It was easy. It made it easy.'

Stan's narrative demonstrates how masculinity and heterosexuality are closely bound; if an individual is not seen to be doing masculinity well, it is assumed that they are not doing heterosexuality well. These examples also

indicate why some men may be reluctant to pursue feminised work. If men's participation in feminised work brings social stigma and limits relationships, feminised jobs may seem a costly pursuit.

## Conclusions

We regard gender capital as an important tool for apprehending the continuity of occupational segregation. This article builds on previous work that has demonstrated how women's occupational choices and trajectories involve the mobilisation of gender capital and also that the designation of some occupations and occupational levels as 'feminine' involves the privileging of different forms of gender capital (Huppatz, 2009, 2012). In this article we have demonstrated the use value of gender capital for men, both for employment in certain occupations and for movement within occupations. Thus, the concept 'gender capital' provides a more nuanced approach to 'occupational choice' than is conventionally utilised.

The findings of this article show that gender capital helps to explain how some women and some men *contribute* to the feminisation and masculinisation of work by mobilising gendered dispositions. Workers' agency is a complex interaction of habitus, resources and social spaces, and gendered occupational segregation is the result of choices that occur within gendered and classed limits. This approach therefore moves beyond previous understandings of gendered occupational segregation that dichotomise choice and force. In addition, gender capital explains why men and women support the classed and gendered status quo, even when it contributes to their inequality: men and women are *invested* in gendered and classed practices. This concept therefore helps us to understand continuity in occupational segregation in the context of legislative, workplace and other cultural changes.

Finally, the gender capital concept is useful because it does not rely on an essentialised understanding of gender. If gender is a resource then investments in gendered practices and identities are not necessarily homologous with biological categories. Moreover, we have found that while masculine and male capitals may be most profitable in occupational spaces, including feminised occupational spaces, femininity may be a necessary resource for men in feminised occupations and both masculine and feminine capitals are wielded by men operating in the new economy (Adkins, 2005; Lovell, 2000). This indicates that, as Alvesson (1998: 1001) asserts: 'a strict definitional overlap of men and masculinities – men dominate, therefore masculinities dominate, which accounts for the domination of men – should be resisted'. It also gives further evidence for the idea that male femininity exists, just as Halberstam (1998) has argued that female masculinity exists.

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## Notes

1 Where the female share of employment in an occupation is higher than 70%, the occupation is regarded as 'female-dominated'. Where the male share of employment in and occupation is higher than 70%, the occupation is regarded as 'male-dominated'. An integrated or 'mixed' occupation is one where between the share of either males or females is between 31% and 69% (Preston and Whitehouse, 2004).

2 Late in his career Bourdieu wrote a book titled *Masculine Domination* (2001) that directly addressed gender relations, but even within this text he failed to analyse the relationship between capital and gender in any detail. This may be because he did not address class within this analysis. Despite (briefly) acknowledging the interconnection between class and gender in *Distinction*, within *Masculine Domination* Bourdieu treated 'women's oppression as analytically independent of class' (Fowler, 2003: 480).

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