The political is personal: A case study of MamaBake, an Australian cooking group for mothers

Abstract

This research examines alternative forms of political engagement in an Australian big batch cooking group for mothers, MamaBake. It uses qualitative methods to explore the ways in which mothers participate both offline and online, and challenge the widespread claims of citizens’ declining political interest and engagement. The four interlinked journal articles, which form the body of this thesis cover a specific aspect of the MamaBake group. Focusing on the process definitions of politics, it argues that mothers are finding new and innovative ways to participate, but since their participation takes place in the private sphere, and in forms, which can’t be easily quantified or measured, it often goes unnoticed by the proponents of the decline thesis. The thesis addresses some of the concerns associated with process politics by demonstrating how the ‘political’ can be expanded without turning it into a meaningless category. It also argues that the tendency to conceptualise alternative forms of participation in terms of their market orientation leads to a failure to recognise the important social developments. Overall, this research demonstrates the interactive and iterative nature of the public and the private spheres, and the significance of this to the study of political participation.
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