

Journal 1
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10 April 2001

This journal entry is going to predominantly be about the first several chapters in Putnam's *Bowling Alone*¹ regarding the general trend in the declining interest in social capital experienced first hand. I am not going to go over every point that Putnam makes in *Bowling Alone*. Instead I am going to go over my margin notes and items of particular interest to me. I will then touch upon my orientation of my volunteer services at the William Way Community Centre.

With all aspects involving social capital, the trend points downwards. People are becoming more individualistic now-a-days and more isolated, according to Putnam. It seems, though, that Putnam has been able to put in writing only what we (as a society, or group of concerned individuals) have been *feeling* all along. He has investigated and given "proof" through "facts" for the very real disengagement of individuals from communal activities. The big question is whether this trend is going to continue, or plateau at some point? Only continued reading would tell.

In the chapter of Political Participation, Putnam notes that "electoral abstention is even more important as a sign of deeper trouble in the body politic than as a malady itself." (Putnam, 35). Could this possibly be with America's displeasure with the results of the political system in place now. Noam Chomsky in January's *Z-Magazine* that the only explanation for the 50/50 split between the candidates points to a randomisation of pure votes. Chomsky argues that people were voting at random; looking towards pure statistics, would explain why the vote was split. If this is the case, then the American body politic were split between the two candidates which were, for the most part, quite similar. In hindsight, it seems like President Select G. W. Bush was playing the centrist line (pretending), while Vice-President Al Gore was actually riding the standard Democratic centrist line. Currently, Bush is playing every radical right card in his hand, which may actually hurt his career in the mid-term elections.

Technology also seems to be playing a major role in isolating individuals. Over and over again, I am wondering if the so-called "information revolution" played a role in the downward trends. Consider the widening gap in the news and information among the generation X. Putnam cites the drop in daily newspaper readership under 35. What about the concept of working too much to read the news? The last thing I do, when I come home is work. I usually plant myself down in front of the computer and read some email, visiting some websites. I don't sit down and read the paper, mainly because I would have had to purchase it, and carry it... then what to do with it after you are done, throw it out: why do so, when you can get it on the [WWW](http://www) for free, without "killing trees." Further, what type of news is being shown on television or in the newspapers has a lot to do with the quality of the newscasts. Media, for the most part, caters to the status quo and sensationalism; they often opt for the entertainment route of offering news because it will get more ratings than, say, an interview of Noam Chomsky. Consider people coming all the way from foreign countries to see the steps of the art museum, and Rocky's footprints rather than the statue of William Penn down the street.

1 Putnam, Robert D. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster 2000.

Turning towards the volunteer orientation at William Way Community Center, I noticed that they often reference the centre with the acronyms LGBT, standing for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender. What is amazing is the consistency with which they refer to these groups together through use of the tongue twisting acronym. I am not commenting on the normative use of such an acronym as something which is negative per se. I am, however, surprised at the stress on inclusiveness; i thought, up until this point, that gay was all-inclusive. I understand the reason for “covering of all the bases” though, mainly because these individuals have been ostracised, if even implicitly, all of their lives by society.

Alternative sexual roles at a “Gender-Bender” ball, redefined formal dress for me. It gave way for a change in my *worldview* in regards to something as simple, and at the very same token, as complex, as the social event called ‘a ball.’ Again, I am not making any judgements of a normative and qualitative nature; what I am pointing out is that in my very narrow world, the ideal types (in a Weberian sense) of formal dress attendants are: males in a tuxedo, females in a long evening dress, going together as couples. Indeed, if I were going to a formal dress ball or dinner party, the first instinct would be to play out my role as male, bringing along my roommate, who is female. It never occurred to me that the (very social) rules of the *formal* dress dinner party, could be altered to allow for males dressing as females (in formal dress) and vice-versa, including male-male couples and male-female couples.

I suspect that as time goes on, there will be much to learn from this experience as far as consciousness shaping is concerned.