

Social Capital vs. Democratic Knowledge: A Manifesto

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1. Introduction

Over the last two decades, the idea of “social capital” has played an important role in the literature on democracy and development. The scholarly literature encompasses multiple, and even conflicting definitions of this term, but work by Robert Putnam has come to define the landscape and shape policy terrain. Many of you are probably familiar with his book *Bowling Alone*, in which he argued that various negative trends in U.S. social and political life—declines in education, increases in crime, decreases in voting—flow from decreases in social capital. He anchors his account of a decrease in social capital in the U.S. around a historical story of decline in membership in face-to-face based chapter associations like the Rotary Club, over the period from 1970 to 1990. You may also be familiar with his influential 2006 Johan Skytte Prize Lecture in which he argued that diversity inherently erodes social capital (Putnam 2007) and argued that there is a

necessary “trade-off between diversity and community” that can, at best, be “ameliorated” (Putnam 2007: 164).¹ His proposed technique for ameliorating the trade-off between diversity and community is to reduce the salience of identity in people’s lives.

In my lecture today, I’d like to propose an alternative to the social capital framework for addressing the sorts of questions about civic life with which Putnam is concerned. In place of the social capital paradigm, I offer the concept of “democratic knowledge.” In what follows, I will begin by making an argument for why we should adopt an alternative to Putnam’s framework and then I will spell out the particulars of the alternative I propose. Ultimately, my purpose in doing this is to provide a different framework for tackling the question of how to cultivate democracy--and specifically egalitarian, participatory democracy--in conditions of diversity. In addition, just as this lecture proposes that we move beyond Putnam’s social capital paradigm, it also seeks to lay intellectual foundations for movement beyond both assimilationist and multicultural ideals. I hope to establish the theoretical foundations that might support real progress in the direction of a “connected society.” This is a society in which people can enjoy the bonds of solidarity and community but are equally engaged in the “bridging” work of bringing diverse communities into positive relations while also themselves individually desiring and succeeding at forming personally valuable relationships

across boundaries of difference. Importantly, in a connected society, the boundaries among communities of solidarity are fluid, and the shape of those communities can be expected to change over time.

In what follows, I will begin with (yet another) critique of Putnam, then introduce the concept of democratic knowledge, and finally focus on one component of democratic knowledge, namely an understanding of the sociality of self-interest. I take this component of democratic knowledge to be fundamental and, in some sense, the basis for all other components. In the conclusion, I will indicate how the “democratic knowledge” concept can contribute to the pursuit of a connected society.

2. Putnam’s Lacuna

In Putnam’s formulations, “social capital” refers to the resources that individuals develop through their social networks, and the private and public payoffs that those networks bring. We gain jobs through social networks, but also well-being and happiness. These are private goods. As to public goods, our communities benefit from the production of generalized trust, mutual support, cooperation, and institutional effectiveness (Putnam 2000: 21-22). In his analyses, social capital simply is what arises from certain kinds of interaction: volunteering, participating in political campaigns, attending block parties and neighborhood

picnics, joining clubs like the Odd fellows and Rotary Club. Similarly, Putnam's research identifies social capital as what simply arises from certain facts on the ground, in particular, demographic homogeneity.

Yet there is an important lacuna in Putnam's argument. Our interactions with others in both structured activities (clubs, political parties, and so forth) and unstructured informal interactions are not unmediated, "natural," or somehow "essential" activities.² Instead, we bring to them expectations, capacities, competencies, skills, and knowledge (or the lack thereof) that generate the phenomena that emerge from our interactions: perhaps trust, perhaps distrust; perhaps a commitment to mutual benefit; perhaps an agreement to disagree and drift apart. Structured activities—for instance, club membership—can help set expectations for participants and educate them in the competencies, skills, and knowledge that lead to interactions that generate "social capital." Even informal, ostensibly "unstructured" interactions are mediated by protocols of engagement disseminated by local and national cultures. In this regard, the activities that Putnam sees as the source of social capital are perhaps better understood as clusters of rituals, rules, and protocols that mediate interaction in ways that do (or do not) generate "social capital."

Once one sees those structured activities in this way, one realizes that they can be broken down into: (a) the interactional contexts into which they invite

participants, (b) the particular capacities they demand of participants, and (c) the competencies, skills, and knowledge that they cultivate in participants. Seen in this light, specific activities like clubs, political parties, and recurring bridge games, are no longer necessary to the production of social capital. Instead, what is necessary is a body of knowledge and the skills and competencies that come with it. I call this body of knowledge “democratic knowledge,” and I will say more about this label shortly.

Another point follows from this recognition that “social capital” emerges not from any given activity itself but instead from bodies of knowledge applied to interaction in the contexts of particular activities. The body of knowledge activated by any given structured activity guides its participants in interaction that will successfully generate social capital *in that particular social context*. Thus, if the relevant social organization has a very homogeneous membership (for instance, if all members are women of a certain race and class), then the body of knowledge captured and conveyed through the activity of participation in that organization will be very specific to the production of social capital in that sort of demographic context. What follows from this is the idea that the bodies of knowledge relevant to producing the interactions that are most likely to generate social capital must vary with the social contexts in which they are supposed to operate. A further thought is that when bodies of knowledge developed in one social context are applied to a

new social context one should expect them to fail because of the mismatch. You can probably start to tell now where my argument is headed. What Putnam diagnoses as a decline in social capital is, I believe, simply a mismatch between old forms of social knowledge, not all of them, in fact, democratic, and changed social circumstances that demand more of us in a democratic direction.

I turn now to the concept of “democratic knowledge” in order to give it more definition and only thereafter will return to my critique of Putnam.

3. Democratic Knowledge

Why have I called the relevant body of knowledge that supports the production of social capital in diverse associational contexts “democratic knowledge”? Here I follow Alexis de Tocqueville who identified the cultivation of such knowledge as a signal intellectual contribution of democracies to human social development.

Tocqueville praised 19th century Americans for having greatly elevated the *science* and *art* of association. They had, he argued, developed to “the highest perfection of the day the art of pursuing in common the object of their common desires” and had “applied this new science to the greatest number of purposes” (Vol. II, Book 2, ch. 5, Bradley edition with modification). The terms “art” and “science” are Tocqueville’s: in the original French, it is “l’art de poursuivre en

commun l'object de leurs communs désirs" and "cette science nouvelle." With these remarks, Tocqueville meant to distinguish the resources of the young democracy from those of aristocratic Europe. Where aristocrats used capital and hierarchical command structures to get things done, in his argument, democrats must employ social power, which is to say, collective action. Consequently, democratic citizens develop a tacit theoretical knowledge, a "science of associations," about how to grow, sustain, and use associations. On the basis of this science, citizens develop an accompanying "art of association" that guides them, situation by situation, through group organization and collective action. On Tocqueville's argument, the science and art of association are among the most important inventions of egalitarianism.

I adopt from Tocqueville the idea that the egalitarian politics of democracy, which must substitute social power for the economic and political power of aristocrats, or at the very least counterpoise social power to those powers, develops a body of knowledge about how to grow, sustain, and use associations. This "science of associations" consists of an implicit theoretical knowledge possessed by the citizenry about the dynamics of group organization and collective action. The accompanying "art" provides situational guidance for the actual work of building associations and using the social capital that they generate. Any given "associational ecology" consists of the landscape of associations (describable by

size, types, distribution, and relations) but also of both a science and art of association that provide the structure for that landscape.

Many prominent scholars, Putnam, first among them read Tocqueville as if his arguments about associationalism in the young United States had captured some ahistorical and essential element of “American-ness.” But in fact Tocqueville’s claim is historical and historicizing. He wrote that Americans of the 19th century had developed the art of association to “the highest perfection *of the day* [emphasis added].” They had, as he put it, “le plus perfectionné de nos jours l’art de poursuivre en commun l’objet de leurs communs désirs.”

We too often overlook Tocqueville’s temporal qualifier (“de nos jours”). Despite the power of 19th century associationalism in the U.S., there remained room for evolution and improvement in both the science and the art, whether to be effected in that country or another. One has only to think about segregation’s costs for American social and political life to see the limits of 19th and early 20th c. associational practices in the U.S. (Anderson 2010, Rothstein 2013, Bowles, Loury, and Sethi 2009). One has only to remember India’s remarkable experiment to build the largest democracy on the planet, an experiment initiated prior to the achievement of a spread of literacy conventionally thought to be a necessary precursor to democratic development. Or one might think of the invention of the truth and reconciliation commission in South Africa. All these examples disclose

how the history democracy involves continued evolution in the art and science of association. Most importantly, we have yet to learn which capacities, skills, competencies, and bodies of knowledge can support interactions in contexts of diversity that generate social capital supportive of egalitarian democracy.

To see just how the science and art of association, which I have re-labelled democratic knowledge, can evolve, it's worth looking a little more closely at the lacuna in Putnam's argument. It was only by falling into it that I came to understand the importance of democratic knowledge as a framing concept.

4. Falling into Putnam's Lacuna

Many scholars have criticized Putnam's arguments in *Bowling Alone* and in the Skytte Lecture, yet his paradigm has been remarkably resilient with regard to its continuing influence on public discourse and even policy-making. This, I believe, is because most critiques of Putnam have focused on only one strand of his three-part argument. Critics are likely to challenge the historical story; the empirical, causal story, or the normative prescriptions, but not all three at once. In contrast, a recognition that Putnam fails to take into account the status of social organizations and activities as clusters of rituals, rules, and protocols and, therefore, as also repositories for bodies of knowledge, skills, and competencies,

permits us to revise the historical story, the causal story, and the normative story simultaneously.

I will start with the historical story. As I have indicated, Putnam's historical tale of decline in social capital in the U.S. turns around reductions in membership in thirty-two chapter-based associations between 1970 and 1990. The heart of his book is the famous "Figure 8," a dramatic visual depiction of a fall narrative.

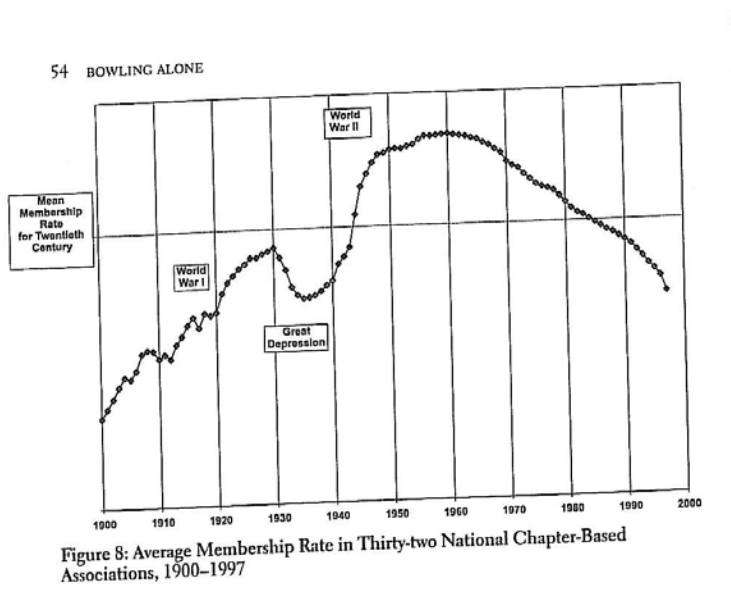


Figure 8: Average Membership Rate in Thirty-two National Chapter-Based Associations, 1900-1997

The chart represents a basic picture of a continuing decline in associationalism in the U.S. from a high point of engagement in 1960 through the final decades of the 20th century. Putnam also looks at political participation; voting rates; religious life; workplace connections; informal, social connections; altruism, volunteering, and

philanthropy; and reciprocity, honesty, and trust. His goal in doing so is to check to see whether other demographic trends align with the dramatic picture presented in Figure 8. He does find evidence of similar patterns across the other domains, though not all of them, as he himself admits, can be explained through direct links to the associational issues tracked in this all important graph. For instance, he tracks U.S. crime rates and employment in policing, noting steep rises in both after 1970. Yet, as he acknowledges, a great deal of that change has to do with the increasing severity of drug laws and sentencing policies (Putnam 2000, 144-145). And he concedes that volunteering actually seems to go up during the period that he has otherwise identified as the decades of decline.

But the most extraordinary feature of Putnam's story is that he never takes into account changes in the law of association that transpired in the U.S. precisely between 1964 and 1990. Indeed, he mentions the Supreme Court only once in his book and to refer to an 1896 decision. But over the course of this period the law of association changed significantly through the extension of anti-discrimination requirements to private clubs. These changes were effected through the diffusion of state-level "public accommodation" statutes, as well as through Supreme Court decisions upholding them. Together the state statutes and Supreme Court decisions were the vehicle by which public anti-discrimination requirements were applied to

private organizations, starting with restaurants and hotels and reaching, eventually, to private schools and clubs.

Of the 32 organizations whose data lie beneath Putnam's famous graph, twenty-five were gender segregated as a matter of policy at their founding and a twenty-sixth, the Order of the Eastern Star, which did admit both men and women, was nonetheless founded as the women's companion society to the Masons; members were (and still are) the female relatives of Masons, with male Masons also joining to provide connections to the parent organization. Beyond their respective founding moments, these twenty-six organizations also maintained gender segregation as a matter of either policy or practice throughout the period of mid-century civic vitality that provides the starting point for Putnam's tale of decline.³⁴

In other words, twenty-six of Putnam's 32 cases suffered direct or implicit legal challenges to their basic constitutions in the period from 1964 to 1987.⁵ Indeed, most of them had abandoned gender segregation by the end of this period, and only six maintain gender segregation to this day. These six are the Knights of Columbus, whose membership pool is Catholic males; the Boy and Girl Scouts of America, whose membership pools are children and young adults of the relevant gender; the Boy and Girl Scouts adult leaders; and the three Masonic societies, which are closely affiliated with one another-- the Masons (male), Shriners (male), and the Order of the Eastern Star (mainly female). Constitutional protections for

religion gave shelter to the exclusionary policies of the Knights of Columbus while the juvenile status of members of the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts protected those organizations.⁶ Indeed, when one looks closely at the data for the organizations whose membership policies were brought into question by the changing legal landscape, an interesting picture emerges. Whereas the median decline for all 32 associations was 58%, those associations that had the constitutional protection of religion or juvenile membership had declines below 15%: 5% for the Boy Scouts, 6% for the Knights of Columbus, 8% for the Boy and Girl Scouts combined, and 15% for the Girl Scouts. In other words, those associations whose exclusivity the law continued to tolerate and that were not otherwise impacted by a broad legal and cultural shift toward gender integration—all Catholic clubs; and the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts—tell a markedly different story about membership changes across the 20th century than do those organizations that were directly affected by gender integration.

Theda Skocpol gets closest to seeing the history right. She writes:

Civic life was abruptly and fundamentally reorganized in late-twentieth-century America. Between the 1970s and the 1990s older voluntary membership federations rapidly dwindled, while new social movements and professionally managed civic organizations took to

the field in huge numbers, redefining the goals and modalities of national civic life.

The most important changes did not happen incrementally; nor did they simply bubble up from below. Government offered new opportunities and obstacles to civic activists. Social ideals changed.

But the point I am making here goes beyond Skocpol's. It is not merely the case that social ideals changed. Instead, the formal rules of the game changed. Correcting Putnam's history, then, requires recognizing how the law of association structures any given associational ecology and already establishes some portion of the rules that govern social interaction.

Let me provide one more example of how the law structures the associational ecology. The U.S. Fair Housing Act prohibits discrimination in rental housing while nonetheless protecting what is called "Mrs. Murphy's exception": this is the rule that if you have four or fewer units to let, the non-discrimination requirement does not apply to you. You may discriminate freely. In other words, Mrs. Murphy may limit her tenants to fellow Irish-Americans, for social reasons and personal comfort, so long as she limits the number of her housing offerings to four units. Similarly, the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Statute provides that businesses with fewer than 15 employees are exempt from anti-discrimination law. In other words, these two laws draw a line between zones in which two different protocols of

association obtain. While Mrs. Murphy may bond with her ethnic peers in an exclusionary fashion as long as she limits the scale of those bonds, the moment she seeks to extend the social bonds that she builds through ownership of rental housing, she must change her modes of association. In order to meet her legal obligations, if Mrs. Murphy were to acquire a fifth rental unit, she would need to change how she advertises, how she interviews, and how she decides on tenants. She would need a new set of skills, competencies, and bodies of knowledge in order to do right by these legal requirements. Or imagine if Mrs. Murphy's exception were suddenly discontinued. Mrs. Murphy would need to alter her ways of being in the world quite radically. Changes to the law of association, in other words, are powerful disruptors of the protocols that structure associationalism.

Once we see that changes in the law of association should be at the heart of Putnam's historical tale, it becomes clearer that his story would be better if re-told as having to do with *change* from one protocol of association to another, rather than as having to do with the *decline* of a particular set of protocols. Importantly, such a change in the historical narrative leads directly to a further alteration, this time in the causal narrative. Putnam's explanation for the "decline" in civic engagement, and therefore in social capital, consists of increases in time spent working, the growth of suburbia and commuting, television, generational change and some "other" factor that he leaves unexplained. There is good reason to think that this

missing “other” factor is indeed legal change. It’s even possible that legal change accounts for more of the decline than Putnam allocates to that “other” factor. Recent controversies, for instance, over the membership rules of the American Boy Scouts and their treatment of gay scouts and scout leaders have provided ample evidence that legal contestation over the scope of anti-discrimination law can generate membership declines, as legal theorist and historian Andy Koppelman has documented. Yet for all the interest that is provoked by a causal arrow that moves from legal contestation and legal evolution to a decline in a particular kind of associational practice, this is not really the important revision to Putnam’s causal story. The important revision is this: it is not a decline in particular activities, such as club membership, that leads to a reduction in trust and in commitments to norms of reciprocity; it is a misalignment between the social skills, competencies, and knowledge that people have acquired to-date and the social context in which they are asked to apply them that leads to a decline in trust and commitment to norms of reciprocity.

Think, again, of how well Mrs. Murphy is likely to do with her new tenants the first time she lets to an African-American family. Or take the following as an example: Just yesterday I was told by a reputable source of a distinguished private school that this year devoted a part of its annual celebratory Field Day to competitions between the “Blues” and the “Golds.” All students who were children

of alumni or had other prior family connections to the school were assigned to the “blues”; all students without such connections were assigned to the “gold.” There are many reprehensible features of such a game, but among them is the fact that this division would also have divided the students by ethnicity for the most part. The organizers seem to have been simply inattentive to this detail. It is impossible to imagine that this kind of game will generate trust and norms of reciprocity, even if, in an earlier day, some other version of a competition between “Blues” and “Golds” might have worked perfectly well.

This observation makes clear, then, how the changed historical and causal stories also lead to an alternative normative prescription. In the face of changes in our associational protocols, which now more comprehensively require interactions in conditions of diversity, we don’t need to re-engage people in out-moded activities, or make identity less salient; instead, we need to build up our knowledge base about the skills, competencies, and know-how that can generate trust and norms of reciprocity in contexts of diversity. In other words, we need evolution in the science and art of association.

5. Evolution in the Science of Associations

Some of that evolution has been underway in the legal cases themselves. When we track the jurisprudence that, in the U.S. at least, effected a radical change

in the associational ecology between 1970 and 1990, we can see lawyers and judges, most prominently Supreme Court Justice, Sandra Day O'Connor, at work on trying to bring about conceptual improvements to the *science of associations*, which is to say, on the core theoretical framework that we bring to bear in understanding associationalism. In cases having to do with gender exclusive club membership practices, we see her, for instance, discovering a concept much like social capital and then we see the Court as a whole eventually coming to apply it. Take as an example the decision they handed down against the Rotary Club's exclusionary membership policies. The Supreme Court held that the application of public accommodation statutes to private clubs was "justified by the State's compelling interests in eliminating discrimination against women and in assuring them equal access to public accommodations." They continued: "The latter interest extends to the acquisition of leadership skills and business contacts, as well as tangible goods and services" (481 U.S. 537, 548-549, 1987)."

In this decision, the Court importantly interpreted the right to equal protection and non-discrimination to apply to the distribution of social capital. In other words, the justices identified the content of social capital—for instance, the acquisition of leadership skills and business contacts through social interaction—as appropriate objects of egalitarian effort and in so doing conceptually distinguished between inegalitarian and egalitarian patterns in the distribution of social capital,

endorsing the latter as the constitutionally acceptable variant. This decision records a critical and paradigm-shifting discovery within the history of the science of association. It is this: the excessively unequal distribution of the social capital generated by associations is analogous to the problems of the mal-distribution of both the right to vote and formal commercial opportunities.⁷ If at earlier points in the history of the U.S., laws had to be changed to ensure that everyone got the vote, in the late 20th century laws were changed to equalize access to social capital.⁸

Putnam, in his own treatment of social capital, does not in fact reach this conceptual distinction between egalitarian and inegalitarian, or democratic and non-democratic, forms of social capital. The conceptual evolution attached to the changing legal framework, in other words, pre-dates and well outstrips his paradigm. And this is what leads to the important difference between his normative prescription and my own. He seeks to restore something. I follow the direction of the legal arguments and seek to understand the social protocols by which we might generate specifically egalitarian forms of social capital. It is in this sense that I seek specifically *democratic* knowledge: the competencies, skills, and know-how that grow and sustain adequately egalitarian forms of social capital. Thus, in seeking democratic knowledge, I seek to identify the content of the art of association that would make good on developments in the science of association that have drawn a distinction between egalitarian and inegalitarian forms of social capital. In

invalidating gender and racial segregation throughout a large swathe of American associational life, the Court drew a distinction between non-egalitarian and egalitarian forms of social capital. With legal formulations like Mrs. Murphy's exception, the national legislature restricted the scope of associational life based on particularistic bonding. When it did these things, it set citizens of the U.S. the challenge of developing a new art of association. While I have dwelt on the U.S. case, the theoretical point extends beyond boundaries. Once any society's science of association can distinguish between inegalitarian and egalitarian forms of social capital and once its law of association begins to require people to function by limiting their engagement with the former and expanding their engagement with the latter, there will be work to do to give content to the art of association that can make good on these evolutions in science and law.

6. The Sociality of Self-Interest

In the final section of my lecture, I'd like to sketch one further conceptual insight that I think is prompted by recognition of the important work that the law of association does in structuring our associational ecologies and establishing the interactional contexts in which outcomes like trust and norms of reciprocity will or will not emerge.

Social psychologists analyze individual identity in terms of forms of “self-categorization” that entail both a personal identity and a social identity. That personal identity is “a cognitive definition of self as a unique individual person defined in terms of personal attributes, individual differences, and interpersonal relationships” (Postmes p. x). This contrasts with social identity which consists of “the cognitive definition of self in terms of shared social category memberships and associated stereotypes” (Postmes p. x). Importantly, social, organizational, and demographic contexts can bring one or the other of these strands of identity to the fore, and the question of which identity concept forms the basis of any particular social bond can affect the dynamics of interaction. Either identity concept can be the basis of positive interactions but the specific methods of achieving positive interactions in any given social context depends on which identity concept has been made salient in that context.

This framework is important because it helps us see that some sort of social identity is always accessible to each individual, operating alongside or in tandem with his personal identity. Nor is the case that any given individual has access to only one social identity. Instead, “an infinite number of levels are available in principle” (Postmes p. x). Through a process called “self-categorization” each of us settles, in particular contexts, on the combination of personal and social identity that we will use to navigate that social context. These concepts from psychology have

importance for how we understand the concept of self-interest, for they make clear that, insofar as our self-concept embraces a social identity, our conception of our own self-interest necessarily has a social component. We will seek the good of the social group with which we identify as part of seeking our own self-interest.

I call this conception of self-interest, which expands outward beyond the narrowest personal self-conception, equitable self-interest. Equitable self-interest is self-interest defined by the incorporation of self-conscious recognition of the need to preserve healthy social relationships as a part of achieving personal well-being.⁹ It is worth comparing it to a concept of “rivalrous self-interest.” “Rivalrous self-interest,” is the phenomenon of “wanting more than”—more than someone else, more than what one deserves, more than is consistent with concord in the public sphere. In the context of families, we know the problem as sibling rivalry. Citizenship, like brotherhood, is plagued by rivalrous desire, which, manifest in politics, can be solved neither by breeding brothers nor ultimately by cultivating virtue. This kind of self-interest is the basic problem that necessitates systems of justice, and polities use law to restrain rivalrous self-interest. Friendship introduces a different technique for solving this problem. Friends know that if we always act according to our own interests in an unrestrained fashion, our friendships will not last very long. Friendship teaches us when and where to moderate our interests for our own sake. In short, it solves the problem of rivalrous self-interest by converting

it into equitable self-interest, where each friend moderates his own interests for the sake of preserving the relationship. *For the sake of preserving the relationship.* Equitable self-interest is a form of self-interest in which the agent recognizes that her continued membership in the group is necessary to her flourishing and that, consequently, the continued existence and health of the group is itself built into her own conception of self-interest.¹⁰

The call to develop an orientation toward “equitable self-interest” is not a call to citizens to act altruistically and against their own self-interest in the public sphere. It is rather to use an enriched understanding of self-interest, even along lines developed by contemporary economists.¹¹ The idea of “rivalrous self-interest” aligns with the conventional understanding of self-interest, dominated as it is by the economists’ notion that individuals have “a utility function,” best interpreted in relation to economic payoffs. This conception of self-interest is typically understood in an aggressively competitive framework. To urge a shift away from emphasizing rivalrous self-interest in both our analytical and our ethical work is to underscore two points that economists have themselves begun to make: (1) people have “a wide array of non-pecuniary tastes and preferences, such as the desire for children, the concern for status, and the desire for fairness [and/or] retribution”; and (2) “people’s tastes and preferences (understood broadly as above) depend on their social identities, understood as an interplay between the

(multiple) social categories of which they are members and the prevailing norms structuring behavior in that social category.”¹² The term “equitable self-interest” captures the idea that any given individual’s “utility” can reasonably be expected to include outcomes that preserve, rather than damage, the collective groups that provide that individual’s basic forms of self-protection and identity.¹³

The important thing that the work of social psychologists helps us recognize is that all forms of self-interest, because they flow from a self-concept, are versions of “equitable” self-interest. The only question is the social level at which an individual attaches to a social identity. Conventional versions of self-interest presume that our social identity operates at no level more expansive than that of an immediate family. What the social clubs in which Putnam was interested succeeded at was in cultivating processes supportive of self-categorization that led people to commit to their social identities as club members and to the obligations that come with that. Their fulfillment of social obligations generated the “social capital” that Putnam measures; it also provided identity benefits. As organizational structures, the clubs built protocols for participation and structures of reward that supported self-categorizations that relied on the social identity of “club member.” But an important element of the reward structure for that approach to self-categorization involved what scholars have called “the wages of whiteness” or the benefits of gender exclusivity. These are the sorts of features of the associational

ecology valorized by Putnam that the democratic knowledge concept helps make visible.

What, then, is the alternative to the associational science and art of the heyday of America's social clubs? Here I'd like to return again to the U.S. Supreme Court's discovery of a distinction between egalitarian and inegalitarian forms of social capital. Pursuing the former while avoiding the latter requires us to develop systematically new social protocols that can support operations of equitable self-interest at the expansive levels of neighborhood, community, city, state and even, I would say, globe, without having to rely on particularistic benefits to do so.

7. Conclusion

Now for a few words of conclusion.

The project of identifying the many additional components of democratic knowledge—beyond this concept of the sociality of self-interest and the expansiveness of equitable self-interest—entails working out across many domains—the ethical, the discursive, the legal, the pedagogic, and the intersubjective—just what the social protocols are for generating trust in conditions of diversity. It also entails ascertaining how to bring those protocols into being.

The challenges of building a connected society—to which the multiple components of democratic knowledge are directed—are manifold. New protocols

are needed for interaction inside organizations and to build bridges among them. But perhaps most complex of all is the question of how we should equip ourselves to interact in the less obviously structured context of informal interactions. In conditions of diversity, fewer of our encounters with others are launched from within a shared horizon of social expectations. Consequently, for such moments, democratic knowledge must first of all equip us to navigate with others who are different from us toward mutually intelligible social expectations. This sounds challenging but I believe expanding our knowledge base, our science of association, in this way is do-able, if we directly apply ourselves to the question. We need, in particular, to be able to attach our self-concepts to the social identity of “bridgers,” those who can build structure for interaction with those who are different from them; we equally need a capacity to make that identity of “the bridger” salient, and therefore operative, for others. With such a social identity among the several accessible to us, we can enjoy the benefits of group solidarity, without falling into isolation or becoming a danger to others. Recognizing the sociality of self-interest, and facilitating it in these directions, would be an example of democratic knowledge at work. Cultivation of individuals’ ability to move between bonding and bridging versions of social identity is the necessary alternative to a neo-assimilationist focus on reducing the salience of identity. And, finally, developing

democratic knowledge—the science and art of association—in this direction holds true promise for achieving a connected society.

¹ [“E Pluribus Unum: Diversity and Community in the Twenty-first Century”](#)^[9] (the 2006 Johan Skytte Prize Lecture), presents findings from the [Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey](#),^[10] “the largest and most comprehensive survey of civic engagement in America.” “The survey results revealed that Americans who live in more ethnically diverse communities are less likely to vote, do volunteer work, and trust others (both of the same and of different ethnicities/races) than are those who live in more ethnically homogenous communities. In other words, higher levels of ethnic and racial diversity are related to lower levels of civic health.” <http://prelectur.stanford.edu/lecturers/putnam/> Text by Chris Bourg, Assistant University Librarian for Public Services.

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²Cite Ferguson

³ The Parent Teacher Association was the one association to change its formal policies relatively early, admitting men in 1924, but as a matter of practice, it continued to function as a female institution; even today its membership is only 10% male.

⁴The six exceptions were: 4-H, the Grange, the NAACP, Veterans of Foreign Wars, the American Legion, and the Red Cross. The last three were all, of course, associated with military service, where women’s work as nurses earned them inclusion in these associations. In 1918, there were 12,000 active-duty nurses; they were among the first women eligible for membership in the Veterans of Foreign Wars. Interestingly, the Veterans of Foreign Wars introduced a gender-exclusionary membership policy in 1944 and then reversed it again in 1978. See U.S. House. *Proceedings of the 45th National Encampment of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States*. Aug. 22-24, 1944. (H. Doc. 182) 1945. Text from: *Congressional Documents*. Available from: ProQuest Congressional; Accessed: 1/27/12; U.S. House. *Proceedings of the 79th National Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S.* (H. Doc. 96-100) Text from: *Congressional Documents*. Available from ProQuest

Congressional; Accessed: 1/27/12. See also: http://www.vfw.org/uploadedFiles/VFW.org/News_and_Events/VFWWomenatWar-LOWRES.pdf.

⁵ I consider all-male associations to have suffered direct legal challenges, while all-female associations suffered implicit or indirect legal challenges.

⁶ Of course, the law concerning the Boy Scouts has continued to evolve, and recent litigation over the Boy Scouts policies has led to membership declines. See Koppelman 2004.

⁷ Id

⁸ In historical terms, we can see the impact of the change to the science of association in the widening use over time by states of “public accommodation” statutes that expanded the category of organizations to which anti-discrimination law applied. By 1983, or roughly two decades after the passage of the Civil Rights Act, 40 states and the District of Columbia had enacted public accommodation statutes (*Harvard Law Review* 1991: 1836, n. 11). That captures the legally-driven pace of change in the associational ecology of the U.S. The expansion of these legal impacts nicely mirrors, in chronological terms, the descending curve of membership numbers represented in Putnam’s Figure 8. Michael Schudson (2003) describes the relation between legal and social evolution this way: “In schools and in universities, in families, in the professions, in private places of employment, in human relations with the environment, and not least of all in political institutions themselves, including the political parties, the rights revolution brought federal power or national norms of equality to bear on local practices. In each of these domains, the outreach of the constitutional order spread ideals of equality, due process, and rights. . . Individuals then carried the gospel of rights from one field of human endeavor to another, transporting rights across the cultural border of public and private.”

⁹ D. Allen 2004, 125-26, 133-34.

¹⁰ The concept of “equitable self-interest” is very similar to that of Evans and Woolcock’s “embedded autonomy,” a “mature disposition” characterized by “both informed commitment to a wider society, while retaining independence and liberty” (Szreter and Woolcock 2004, 7). See also .P. Evans, *Embedded Autonomy: States and Industrial Transformation* (Princeton 1995) and M. Granovetter, “Economic action and social structure: the problem of embeddedness,” *American Journal of Sociology* 1985: 91: 481-510. Compare to Appiah, Kwame Anthony (2010-06-28). *The Ethics of Identity* (Kindle Locations 5009-5016). Princeton University Press. Kindle Edition.

¹¹ Utility captures the satisfaction that agents take in particular outcomes. Here is one basic formulation: “What does it mean to say that agents are self-interested? It does not necessarily mean that they want to cause harm to each other, or even that they care only about themselves. Instead, it means that each agent has his own description of which states of the world he likes—which can include good things happening to other agents—and that he acts in an attempt to bring about these states of the world. The dominant approach to modeling an agent’s interests is *utility theory*. This theoretical approach quantifies an agent’s degree of preference across a set of available alternatives, and describes how these preferences change when an agent faces uncertainty about which alternative he will receive. Specifically, a *utility function* is a mapping from states of the world to real numbers. These numbers are interpreted as measures of an agent’s level of happiness in the given states” (Leyton-Brown and Shoham 2008, 1.

¹² Akerlof and Kranton 2010, 10-11.

¹³ Akerlof and Kranton provide an initial example from the history of Goldman Sachs (p. 5). “The company’s financial success has stemmed from an ideal remarkably like that of the U.S. Air Force: ‘Service before Self.’ Employees believe, above all, that they are to serve the firm. . . . Goldman Sachs’s Business Principles, fourteen of them, were composed in the 1970s by the firm’s co-chairman, John Whitehead, who feared that the firm might lose its core values as it grew. The first Principle is ‘Our clients’ interests always come first. Our experience shows that if we serve our clients well, our own success will follow.’ . . . The employees do not act according to basic tastes; by accepting Whitehead’s principles, they identify with the firm and uphold its ideals in both their professional and their personal lives.” This is an excellent example of the concept of equitable self-interest: an orientation in which one sees that the survival of the collective redounds to one’s own benefit.