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<u>Recovering Solitude: Arendt and Emerson on Solitude and Political Participation</u>

Abstract

How can solitude contribute to politics? Is time alone necessarily at odds with political participation or rather necessary for constructive public dialogue? In an increasingly interconnected world, people seem rarely to think about the potential value of time away from others or from the social media that keep them in constant contact. Recent political theory, too, has apparently abandoned the question of solitude; it has turned its attention instead to a focus on issues of social interaction. Curiously, Communications research today has taken particular interest how time alone, particularly time online, can contribute to politics and encourage civic engagement. In this paper, I propose that there are two ways of being alone: bridging solitude and bonding solitude. I use Hannah Arendt's theory of solitude to illustrate bridging solitude and Ralph Waldo Emerson's works to illustrate bonding solitude. I argue that Arendt's understanding of solitude as bridging provides a theoretical basis for understanding phenomena observed in recent Communications research and helps us understand how bridging solitude can be encouraged when one is online and, therefore, make time alone a form of capital that contributes to civic engagement.

Introduction

At the advent of the internet-age, Howard Rheingold reflected on the possible affects of technology on life, community, and relationships: "Because of its potential influence on so many people's beliefs and perceptions, the future of the Net is connected to the future of community, democracy, education, science, and intellectual life—some of the human institutions people hold most dear, whether or not they know or care about the future of computer technology" (Rheingold 1993, 6). Drawing on personal experiences, Rheingold strongly advocated for the benefits of the internet for individuals, communities, and politics (13). What changed, then, between 1993 and 2000, when Robert Putnam detailed technological advancements as one of the major reasons for the demise of community and social capital in the

United States? According to Putnam, the internet boomed and the ideas of community and face-to-face relationship building that were so important at its advent diminished in importance and the potential for social capital was eradicated. However, the real problem may be the failure to use the Internet as a new mode of social capital.

In *Bowling Alone* (2000) Putnam argues that the contemporary demise in social capital stems from a lack of community or trustworthiness that allows beneficial social networking to happen. He explains social capital: "[S]ocial capital is closely related to what some have called 'civic virtue.' The difference is that 'social capital' calls attention to the fact that civic virtue is most powerful when embedded in a dense network of reciprocal social relations. A society of many virtuous but isolated individuals is not necessarily rich in social capital" (Putnam 2000, 19). Social capital is the actual, face-to face, relationships and connections, what Putnam considers to be communities, that yield reciprocity and help goals to be achieved and politics to happen. Hence, internet technology and other such innovations that do not depend on face-to-face interaction undermine what Putnam understands to be the defining characteristic of social capital.[1]

Accepting Putnam's argument that widespread isolation, a lack of interest in face-to-face community building, creates a deficit in social capital, the question then arises as to how the United States might cope with this, how the United States might rebuild its social capital. At the conclusion of *Bowling Alone*, Putnam identifies six spheres of American life that need attention so that communities and the resultant social capital may again be formed. These areas are youth

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[1] Putnam is not alone in this idea that only face-to-face communication sufficiently contributes to social capital in a liberal democratic environment. Habermas notes, "In the context of liberal regimes, the rise of millions of fragmented chat rooms across the world tend instead to lead to the fragmentation of large but politically focused mass audiences into a huge number of isolated issue publics" (Habermas 2006, 414, fn. 14). Hence, internet "communities" fail to provide any social capital that can benefit or is essential to politics.

and schools; the workplace; urban and metropolitan design; religion; arts and culture; and politics and government (Putnam, 2000, 404). Recognizing the dominance of internet technology in communication today, Putnam stresses that he does not think the internet should be eradicated, but rather that it should be used to reinforce, and not replace, face-to-face social networks (Putnam 2000, 411; Putnam & Feldstein 2003). He suggests, like Rheingold and others before him, that the benefits of internet communities lie in the face-to-face connections that come from it rather than from the isolated conversations held remotely (Rheingold 1993; Castells 1996). However, making such face-to-face contact happen is difficult, and while encouraging spending and focusing on things like urban planning, the arts, and education can help with this, the foundational solution is to encourage individuals to strive for community. As Putnam concludes *Bowling Alone*, "We should do this [e.g. focus on building communities], ironically, not because it will be good for America—though it will be—but because it will be good for us" (Putnam, 2000, 414).

In this paper, I focus on Putnam's assertion that basic changes in community will only happen if individuals elect to do so for their own good, "because it will be good for us." While Putnam provides pragmatic policy options for invigorating social capital in the United States, his basic call for individuals to change and strive for community remains the most important call to community in his work (Putnam 2000, 403, 411, 414). Thus, I propose that there is a seventh way by which community and social capital can be restored by focusing on the individual and encouraging a particular way of spending time alone.

Given technology's increasing prevalence in society and the accompanying increase in potential for isolation, I argue that perhaps the best way to address the demise of community is to

address how individuals spend time alone, that is, how people spend time by themselves, away from the public space of politics. As such, the Internet becomes a way of creating new social capital rather than something that ends community. Such a consideration of how people use the internet is not at all novel. Researchers in the area of communications and American politics typically evaluate the time that people spend online with a schema of sorts, specifically whether one's online activities are politically-, friendship-, or interest-driven, to determine the affects of time online on civic engagement (Cohen and Kahne 2012; Kahne, Lee, & Feezell 2011; Ito et al., 2009).

I suggest that one can understand time spent physically alone as a form of social capital and, therefore, to be understood as either "bridging" or "bonding." Putnam explains these two forms of social capital as follows:

> [O]f all the dimensions along which forms of social capital vary, perhaps the most important is the distinction between *bridging* (or inclusive) and *bonding* (or exclusive). Some forms of social capital are, by choice or necessity, inward looking and tend to reinforce exclusive identities and homogenous groups. Examples of bonding social capital include ethnic fraternal organizations, church-based women's reading groups, and fashionable country clubs. Other networks are outward looking and encompass people across diverse social cleavages. Examples of bridging social capital include the civil rights movement, many youth service groups, and ecumenical religious organizations (Putnam, 2000, 22).

He goes on to explain, "[B]ridging social capital can generate broader identities and reciprocity, whereas bonding social capital bolsters our narrower selves" (23). Thus, bridging social capital is that which involves an openness to others and deliberation whereas bonding social capital is that which involves a cementing of group or individual identity. Both can be normatively good for society, but bridging social capital is the form of social capital understood to help individuals and society advance or "get ahead" (Granovetter 1973; de Souza Briggs 1998).

To develop the idea that solitude can be either bridging or bonding social capital, I first define solitude broadly as a relational experience that one has when physically alone. Then, I proceed to apply this definition of solitude to two thinkers', Ralph Waldo Emerson's and Hannah Arendt's, work and consider how the relationships present within their respective understandings of solitude affect the relationships that develop from solitude. While Arendt engaged directly with Thoreau in "Civil Disobedience" (Arendt 1972), Arendt's reflections on solitude and underlying theoretical connections between friendship, truth, and solitude strikingly parallel Emerson's thought on the essential relatedness of friendship, truth, and solitude.[2] I consider solitude as social capital in Arendt's and Emerson's work because both thinkers understand solitude to yield a certain form of relationship with others, but the relationships that result from their understandings of solitude are notably different. I argue that Arendt's solitude, which encourages beneficial friendship in dialogue, is bridging/inclusive, whereas Emerson's solitude, which encourages utilitarian friendship, is bonding/exclusive. After interpreting their theories as such, I go on to suggest that Arendt's vision of solitude provides a helpful model, insofar as it is bridging, by which people today might spend time alone for the benefit of both themselves and for American society and politics at large. Ultimately, I make practical suggestions, using both Arendt and Communications research, for how applying ideas of bridging solitude makes the Internet a valuable resource for social capital and what it would look like and mean for contemporary American politics. Arendt's theory of solitude provides novel theoretical insight

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[2] This connection between Arendt and Emerson is especially laid out in George Kateb's "Arendt's Individualism" (1994), in which he writes, "In an uncanny resemblance to Emerson's views, Arendt reads Socrates as closely linking the dialogue of friendship with the attainment of truth. Truthful individuals make good citizens" (770-1).

into the empirical findings of recent Political Science and Communications research on how time alone and online can contribute to politics.

Defining Solitude

In this paper, I use "solitude" in the positive sense. That is, I do not use solitude in the sense that it is a punishment. Rather, when I refer to solitude, I draw on the tradition of solitude being something elective. To develop a definition especially useful in the context of this paper, I turn to the definitions of solitude contemporary to Emerson and Arendt. In the 1850 edition of Webster's dictionary, a dictionary contemporary to Emerson, solitude is defined as "1. Loneliness; a state of being alone; a lonely life. 2. Loneliness; remoteness from society; destitution of company. 3. A lonely place; a desert" (Webster 1850). Interestingly, a German dictionary contemporary to Arendt defines solitude (*einsamkeit*) as "being with [or by] oneself; living away from others"[3] (Grimm 1965). Given these two definitions, I suggest that solitude is something that happens when away from other people. Further, I suggest, given the German definition of solitude as the state of being "with (or by) oneself," that it also consists of relationships that develop while physically separate from other people.

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[3] The German definition is under the entry for "einsam," which reads: "mit sich allein; von andernm Lebenden entfert."

Such an understanding makes sense given the long history of thoughts on solitude.[4] I propose, in line with these understandings of solitude, that solitude can best be understood in terms of relationships that one has when physically separate from other people. Hence, the relationships that arise from or in solitude can be with God, gods, other people, nature, thoughts, etc. This means that there are various forms that solitude can take, and it can vary across people. For example, solitude for Thoreau would be understood as one's relationship with nature and self, whereas Merton's solitude would be defined as one's relationship with God. In short, I broadly define solitude as the relationships that define an individual's existence separate from others or a public space, and I will use this definition of solitude to discern the kind of solitude found in Emerson's and Arendt's thoughts.

Emerson: Bonding Solitude

Emerson's vision of solitude is most clearly presented in *Nature* when he explains how an individual enters solitude: "To go into solitude, a man needs to retire as much from his chamber as from society. I am not solitary whilst I read and write, though nobody is with me. But if a man would be alone, let him look at the stars. The rays that come from those heavenly worlds, will separate between him and vulgar things" (Emerson 1968, 9). For Emerson, solitude is the most natural state for man, in which the individual frees himself from manufactured, "vulgar" things

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[4] A very abbreviated list of thinkers who engage with solitude includes: Epictetus, Evagrius Ponticus, Montaigne, Rousseau, Thoreau, Nietzsche, Merton, and general monastic thought. Epictetus defines solitude as dwelling within oneself (Epictetus 1995, Book 3, Chapter 13 of *Discourses*). Evagrius Ponticus defines solitude as a spiritual practice in which one frees the self from the world to better understand himself and the world around him (Evagrius Ponticus 2003). Rousseau discusses solitude as a space away from the dominant society in which one engages with nature free from society (Rousseau 2011, Walk 7). In "Of three kinds of association," Montaigne writes, "Solitude of place, to tell the truth, rather makes me stretch and expand outward; I throw myself into affairs of state and into the world more readily when I am alone" (Montaigne 1976, 625). In all these instances, solitude is some kind of relationship, whether it is with self, with another, or with nature.

and embraces the world. Emerson explains the solitary individual as one who is separate from

society, an entity that Emerson describes as "in conspiracy against the manhood of every one of

its members" and destroys the liberty of the individual (Emerson 1841). In solitude, Emerson

argues that the individual preserves his liberty in the face of society and more fully engages with

the life of man than one who is absorbed in society. Solitude, for Emerson, is characterized by

the solitary person's relationship with nature and with self.

Although Emerson seemingly presents solitary experiences as fundamentally separate

from and unrelated to other people, his later reflections indicate that this is not the case. In his

essay, "Friendship," Emerson illustrates his understanding of the individual's solitary experience

as fundamentally and definitionally complementing society via the connection of friendship.

Emerson understands solitude as relational insofar as solitude informs social engagement and

friendship informs the individual's self-realization. He reflects, "I chide society, I embrace

solitude, and yet I am not so ungrateful as not to see the wise, the lovely, and the noble-minded,

as from time to time they pass my gate. Who hears me, who understands me, becomes mine--a

possession for all time" (Emerson 1982, 34). This statement presents Emerson's idea that a

certain society, a society of friendship, is a good society insofar as it is a natural outgrowth of

solitude. For Emerson, it is good because the other person, the friend, becomes a possession and

therefore contributes to the solitary person's quest for self-knowledge and truth. The friend is a

useful person in the quest for self-reliance, and this relationship that develops from solitude is

consequently utilitarian.[5] Acknowledging the relationship between solitude and friendship,

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[5] This understanding of utilitarian friendship is established in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (BookVIII). It is a
relationship that exists for some kind of material benefit for each of the persons involved in the relationship: "Those
who are friends for utility dissolve the friendship as soon as the advantage is removed; for they were never friends of
each other, but of what was expedient for them" (1157a.15). In the case of Emerson, individuals are only friends for
the benefit of solidifying personal truths.

Emerson's understanding of solitude can be expanded to consist of the solitary individual's relationship with nature, self, and other persons whom the solitary person deems useful in the search for self-knowledge and truth.

Emerson explains this idea that relationship with other like-minded persons is present in solitude when he writes,

> A friend is a person with whom I may be sincere. Before him I may think aloud. I am arrived at last in the presence of a man so real and equal that I may drop even those under-most garments of dissimulation courtesy, and second thought, which men never put off, and may deal with him with the simplicity and wholeness with which one chemical atom meets another (Emerson 1982, 43).

Even though as a solitary individual he "chides" society, Emerson holds that his solitude gives him the ability to sense the person who "understands" him and can help him in his quest for the simplicity of truth. In solitude, one develops a relationship with oneself that allows that helps one discern which people can be most helpful in this questioning. Solitude makes it possible for the individual to recognize those who can be dealt with simply and wholly. Emerson therefore argues that solitude helps cultivate a level of social deliberation that he believes cannot exist without solitude preceding and founding its establishment. Emersonian solitude consists of relationships with nature and self that lend to relationships with other similar people who "understand," i.e. people who the solitary person can claim as useful in the search for truth.

In *Society and Solitude* (1870), Emerson details the story of a backwoodsman who identifies a lack of solitude as resulting in a less meaningful kind of society, a society without the friendship described above:

> A backwoodsman, who had been sent to the university, told me that, when he heard of the best-bred young men at he law-school talk together, he reckoned himself a boor; but whenever he caught them apart, and had one to himself alone, then they were all boors, and he the better man. And if we recall the rare hours

> when we encountered the best persons, we then found ourselves, and then first society seemed to exist (Emerson 1870, 11).

Emerson uses the backwoodsman anecdote to explain the idea that friendships are characteristic of solitude. While the backwoodsman encountered groups of men in law school, he reckoned himself a boor because he was not well versed in legal matters. However, when he was able to talk to them individually, the backwoodsman realized that the young men were not capable of meaningful conversation, that is, that the young men were not useful in his search for truth and self-knowledge. Emerson's curious ending to the anecdote, "And if we recall the rare hours when we encountered the best persons, we then found ourselves, and then first society seemed to exist," indicates that Emerson believes individuals who flock in groups and are unable to speak for themselves are individuals who have not engaged in solitude. Consequently, their apparent society of law students is not a society at all, but rather a collective of individuals who do not have the sense of self or the other that solitude cultivates. The relationships that help one on the quest for truth exist characterize solitude for Emerson, and without solitude, those relationships are nonexistent. The law students that the backwoodsman encounters are searching for degrees rather than truth, and they cannot serve the useful purpose of a friend for the backwoodsman who lives a solitary life.

Perceivably, Emerson does not endorse large groups of friends, as in the tale of the backwoodsman, because such groups present more of a threat to the individual's selfhood than one other person who one can claim as a "possession for all time." Emerson stresses the significance of individual identity within the social outgrowth of solitude, writing, "[T]hough I prize my friends, I cannot afford to talk with them and study their visions, lest I lose my own" (Emerson 1982, 59). Friendship, in Emerson's understanding, is not intended to change the

individual's identity, but rather to cement it. Friendship for Emerson, although it strives for some perceivable higher good, fundamentally strives for that which is good for the individual himself. It is not a dialectical exchange and molding of identity, but rather a useful relationship that helps one know oneself.

Just as Emerson stresses the importance of maintaining an individual identity in "Friendship," he stresses the same in *Society and Solitude*, saying, "The remedy is, to reinforce each of these moods from the other. Conversation will not corrupt us if we come to the assembly in our own garb and speech, and with the energy of health to select what is ours and reject what is not" (Emerson 1870, 12). Solitude illuminates the truth such that the individual develops a capacity to "select" what is properly true and what is not. The backwoodsman represents the solitary person who has this knowledge of truth and is capable of sharing it within the society of friendship that he has come to understand through his individual experience of solitude. Solitude consists of a relationship with self that yields relationships with others, friends, that help the individual to find himself by helping him on the search for truth.

This insight into Emersonian solitude is not entirely novel. George Kateb reflects,

Although a person must depend for various reasons on various relationships in society, only one sort turns out to be from its very nature intrinsic both to self-acquaintance and self-reliance; only one sort of relationship helps solitude accomplish its major work of receiving the world in truth. That is friendship. Finding society means finding the right company; it does not mean looking for the good society (Kateb 1995, 101).

Friendship helps solitude accomplish its task--receiving the world in truth through self-acquaintance. Kateb and I recognize Emerson presenting friendship as not an objective concept, but rather a matter of personal reflection and determination of what is "right" for an individual. The question for the solitary person is, "Who will help me understand myself better?", rather

than, "Who will help me understand universal 'good' truths?" One can only realize one's self-acquaintance and self-reliance in finding another person with whom one can understand the truth of the world. Solitude makes friendship possible, and in Emerson's account, necessarily precedes any society that is worthwhile and can result in the acquisition or comprehension of the important truths of things. Solitude begins with a relationship with oneself and with nature and continues with a relationship with a friend, an individual with whom one can continue to look for truth and know oneself.

The good society can only result when one finds someone that one can possess and, consequently, continue to work for self-reliance. For Emerson, modern society is a means for the ends of individuals, and the friendship described above is a perfect example of Emerson's individualistic focus on society (Kateb 2011, 75). Emerson does not envision the most worthwhile gathering as involving all people, but rather a few people who help one attain self-reliance to find truth. This is not to say, however, that Emerson does not envision or desire all people being equally able to attain solitarily and self-reliant driven friendships. As Turner explains Emerson's thought, "Emersonian self-reliance becomes a politically dynamic ethical ideal, one that can motivate and energize democratic political action Insofar as citizens are interested in being self-reliant, Emerson's example can help us address the problem of civic motivation in the United States--for Emerson illustrates how moral self-examination, avoiding complicity, and political action are essential to self-reliance" (Turner 2011, 28). Emerson's drive for self-reliance does not exclude a concern for others to become equally self-reliant and, therefore, indicates that Emerson endorses the equal opportunity of self-reliance for all. This is why he can be understood as an example of living the responsibilities of citizenship in his

support for the abolition of slavery and for women's suffrage (Gougeon 2011, 214). However, Emerson does not envision all self-reliant people as banning together and forming mass communities. He sees self-reliant people having specific, useful relationships that allow others to do the same; he does not envision an entire country collectively engaging in his vision of friendship.

Given his understanding of friendship, one can understand that Emerson envisions society as functioning more upon the basis of exclusive individuals and friendships. Consequently, I suggest that his understanding of solitude can be understood as *bonding*, that is, exclusive and reinforcing of homogenous groups. Emerson understands solitude to help one create a homogenous group that helps in the quest for self-reliance; it may also compel one to work so that other people can freely develop their own self-reliant existences, as Emerson's own civic engagement indicates. Emersonian solitude is that which opens one to relationships with nature, with oneself, and with other likeminded people who can become one's "possessions," all of which contribute to one's self-reliance. Solitude does not open one up to networking and new connections but rather cements one's identity and encourages small-group homogeneity and a society of multiple homogenous groups.

Arendt: Bridging Solitude

Like Emerson, I argue that Hannah Arendt presents solitude as relationships that arise out of a time away from society or the public space. However, unlike Emerson, I suggest that Hannah Arendt's understanding of solitude is bridging, that is, one that entails relationships that are neither homogenous or self-reflecting. While Roger Berkowitz has grappled with Arendt's

understanding of solitude by presenting solitude as a space in which thinking occurs, I argue that

Arendt does more than provide solitude as a space of thought (Berkowitz 2010). I understand

Arendt to present solitude as the relationships that define an individual's time alone and inform

an individual's time with others.

Arendt most clearly presents the relationality of solitude in her comparison of solitude

with isolation. While one may understand the isolation that totalitarianism breeds to be solitude,

Arendt maintains that this is not the case. She describes the experience of solitude, and

differentiates it from isolation, as follows:

> In solitude, in other words, I am "by myself," together with my self, and therefore
> two-in-one, whereas in loneliness I am actually one, deserted by all others. All
> thinking, strictly speaking, is done in solitude and is a dialogue between me and
> myself; but this dialogue of the two-in-one does not lose contact with the world of
> my fellow-men because they are represented in the self with whom I lead the
> dialogue of thought (Arendt 1966, 476).

Arendt holds that solitude is distinct from isolation because it allows others' individualities to

present themselves to and engage in dialogue with the solitary individual. In Arendt's

conception, a person practicing solitude is physically separate from the world, but nonetheless

open to and able to communicate rationally with his fellow-men, much as he would be able to do

in a political community. Solitude is the thoughtful relationships with others that arise and are

made possible when one is alone.

To illustrate the relationships that Arendt sees being made possible in solitude, it is

helpful to consider her essays on Gotthold Lessing in *Men in Dark Times.* Writing on Gotthold

Lessing, Arendt focuses on his contributions as a German critic and advocate for intellectual

freedom. Lessing is one of Germany's great dramatists and critics. He lived from 1729-1781, and

he reflected on the Seven Years War's affects in his works. In *Minna von Barnheim,* Lessing used

the work to speak against the mass militarization that happened during the Seven Year's War. Later, in *Emilia Galotti*, Lessing voiced his opposition to absolute government. While his play's criticism escaped attention and repercussions, his endorsement of freedom of speech evident in defending an article with anti-Christian sentiments led to his loss of publishing rights in 1772, after which Lessing published independently and pled for intellectual tolerance in his works (Sime 1878).

Perhaps the most intriguing idea that becomes clear in her writing on Lessing is that Arendt identifies solitude as providing a kind of mobility that isolation prohibits. She writes, "Lessing retreated into thought, but not at all into his own self; and if for him a secret link between action and thought did exist (I believe it did, although I cannot prove it by quotations), the link consisted in the fact that both action and thought occur in the form of movement and that, therefore, freedom underlies both: freedom of movement" (Arendt 1968, 9). Arendt interprets Lessing as embracing a dialogue and discourse that does not seek truths, but rather is constantly moving and encouraging of friendship, which Lessing only found possible when people reject the idea of universal or objective truths and engaged in discourse (Arendt 1968, 26, 30). Lessing demonstrates that thinking allows one to engage in discourse, a discourse that is moving and changing, in the face of a totalitarian ideology that is stagnant and discouraging of change. Such dialogue provides an intellectual relationality that is absent from isolation and, therefore, unique to solitude.

Arendt goes on to write, "Lessing's greatness does not merely consist in a theoretical insight that there cannot be one single truth within the human world but in his gladness that it does not exist and that, therefore, the unending discourse among men will never cease so long as

there are men at all" (Arendt 1968, 27). Arendt indicates that Lessing's solitary thoughtfulness opened him to the possibility of friendship, a friendship that is "the unending discourse of men," but his openness to friendship remained unreturned. Lessing's place in history precluded the possibility of friendship, because other people were unable or unwilling to enter solitude so that such thought-driven openness to unending discourse could happen (Arendt 1968, 30). While Lessing was open to the possibility of movement in dialogue that does not seek truths, but rather encourages friendship, his courage was unmatched by those around him who were unable, or perhaps unwilling, to part ways with stagnant ideology in favor of destabilizing thinking and friendship. Lessing's peers were isolated, unable to create a stoic space of sovereign independence from the outside, totalitarian world. Lessing engaged in solitude, which opened him to dialogue and friendship, but he was unable to find another person equally open to dialogue and friendship.

Although Lessing remained physically separate from his contemporaries and intellectually alone in his thoughts, he was solitary such that he had relationships with others and was open to the possibility of relationship with others such that he was open to dialogue and discourse with a much broader range of people than his contemporaries. I suggest, therefore, that Arendt understand solitude to be *bridging* insofar as it consists of a relationship with the world and with other people that strives for plurality rather than consensus. Solitude bridges by allowing and contributing to an individual's acceptance and embracing of plurality.

Arendt's Bridging Solitude: Plurality in Politics

This understanding that solitude contributes to dialogue and friendship is made explicit in Arendt's posthumously published essay, "Philosophy and Politics." She writes, "Only someone who has had the experience of talking with himself is capable of being a friend, of acquiring another self. The condition is that he be of one mind with himself, in agreement with himself...because somebody who contradicts himself is unreliable" (Arendt 1990, 85). Arendt understands a friend as someone with whom one can openly express his own *doxa,* one's uniqueness, and understand the *doxai* of others (Arendt 1990, 80). Ultimately, this understanding of solitude as contributing to the active life points to the affects of solitude on the political community and vice versa. George Kateb reflects, "I suppose [Arendt] means that in speaking truthfully, in eventually being able to say what is really on one's mind and how one judges objects and events and conditions in the common world, one can be (if barely or incompletely) oneself. Different (embodied) truths multiply the world and make it magnificent" (Kateb 1994, 772). Thus, the revelation of an individual's *doxa* creates plurality in Arendt's world and solidifies the individual's self-identity, thereby making the world "magnificent" and allowing politics to happen. It is this dialogue in friendship that makes truth-seeking possible for Arendt.

While the essay "Philosophy and Politics" is admittedly distinct from themes in Arendt's *oeuvre*,[6] I suggest that this idea of solitude relating to action can be understood and established in her discussion of judgment, which establishes the idea that solitude contributes to a dialectical

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[6] In his piece, "Arendt's Individualism," Kateb (1994) repeatedly mentions how Arendt's thoughts in this essay are distinct from her body of work, most notably her understanding of Socrates and her focus on solitude. Kateb writes: "The fact is that Arendt delivers in this unpublished piece an espousal of solitude that is not confined to its good conscientious effects, just as her espousal of speaking of one's *doxa* truthfully is not confined to its citizenly effects but also generously accommodates its individualist significance. Solitude is the opening into every human plurality as such" (772). Arendt's explicit understanding of solitude's political relevance is novel, but as I suggest, this importance is clearly hinted at in her understanding, and again, somewhat underdeveloped understanding of judgment.

plurality in both thought and, eventually, political participation.[7] Here, I do not claim that

solitude and action collapse into one in Arendt's theory, but rather that the plurality embraced in

solitude is realized in the public space via the faculty of judgment.[8] Exploring the relationship

between solitude and political participation is something Arendt acknowledges as being

important, but never goes on to explore herself. She writes, "What matters is the unabridgeable

abyss that opened and has never been closed, not between the so-called individual and the so-

called community (which is a late and phony way of stating an authentic ancient problem), but

between being in solitude and living together" (Arendt 2005, 85). Understanding Arendt's

concept of judgment helps us comprehend the apparent abyss between solitude and living

together.

Arendt defines judgment as that which grounds one's interactions with others. She

explains,

> That the capacity to judge is a specifically political ability in exactly the sense
> denoted by Kant, namely, the ability to see things not only from one's own point
> of view but in the perspective of all those who happen to be present; even that
> judgment may be one of the fundamental abilities of man as a political being
> insofar as it enables him to orient himself in the public realm, in the common
> world—these are insights that are virtually as old as articulated political
> experience (Arendt 1978, 221).

Arendt assumes judgment to be a human faculty that is essential to both the individual

deliberating and to the political experience itself. Further, Arendt asserts that judgment "enables

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[7] This dialectical understanding of relationships can be explained in Gadamer's understanding of dialogue and questioning as a relationship between "I and thou" in *Truth and Method.* Gadamer explains, "In human relations the important thing is, as we have seen, to experience the Thou truly as Thou--i.e., not to overlook his claim but to let him really say something to us" (Gadamer 1995, 361). In dialogue the "I" and the other, "Thou," contribute equally to dialogue so that questioning and consciousness can arise, and this is the same end of plurality and friendship envisioned by Arendt.

[8] Dana Villa (1999) particularly problematizes the tendency to collapse thinking and action in Arendt's thought. Here, I try to avoid that collapse and provide a new way to consider how solitude contributes to public opinion sharing.

him [the individual] to orient himself in the public realm, in the common world." This indicates that judgment is essential to the political actor participating in the public realm insofar as judgment allows the individual to locate and identify himself in the political community. Judgment allows individualism to exist even in communal gatherings when one is susceptible to lose subjectivity.

Arendt argues that the faculty of judgment that arises because of and within the relationships that define solitude extends to the individual's judgment in public, political situations. Having established judgment as allowing the individual to locate himself in the political, Arendt goes on to elaborate on how judgment determines public interactions in political communities. The individual who judges does not solely judge history and actions but also judges other people around him. She writes,

> We all know very well how quickly people recognize each other, and how unequivocally they can feel that they belong to each other, when they discover a kinship in questions of what pleases and displeases. From the viewpoint of this common experience, it is as though taste decides not only how the world is to look, but also who belongs together in it (Arendt 1978, 223).

Arendt indicates that personal judgments, here described as the Kantian judgment of "taste," one makes with respect to subjective tastes help determine with whom one interacts and, ultimately, the communities that form and in which people partake. Hence, the subjective experience of judging something as simple as whether an object is appealing or not is an indicator of an individual's interactions with other people. Similar judgments contribute to the formation of groups of people and "decide who belongs together." Although Arendt does not extensively elaborate on the idea that judgments play an important part in human fellowship, she clearly

establishes its influence on human interactions. Consequently, judgment inevitably influences the political community with which one engages.[9]

Through judgment, through considering right and wrong and reflecting on the past as well as the opinions and experiences of others, people can come together and engage in conversation—engage in politics. Arendt writes, "The more people's standpoints I have present in my mind while I am pondering a given issue, and the better I can imagine how I would feel and think if I were in their place, the stronger will be my capacity for representative thinking and the more valid my final conclusions, my opinion" (Arendt 1978, 242). Judgment validates the individual actor's importance in the political realm while not undermining the importance of dialogue and communication with others. Judgment fosters and encourages plurality. Arendt maintains,

> The power of judgment rests on a potential agreement with others, and the thinking process which is active in judging something is not, like the thought process of pure reasoning, a dialogue between me and myself, but finds itself always and primarily, even if I am quite alone in making up my mind, in an anticipated communication with others with whom I know I must finally come to some agreement (Arendt 1978, 220).

This statement illuminates Arendt's understanding of politics not as the coming together to form a consensus, but rather as the coming together to engage in a dialogue and a debate that embraces the plurality that is an inherent part of the human condition. Judgment, like politics, depends on the sharing of freely-formed opinions and the potential to persuade. As Dana Villa notes, judgment is therefore not easy, which is perhaps why Arendt locates opinions and judgments

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[9] An example of this can be found in Arendt's take on Eichmann, whose inability to think led him to elect to be in the company of ideology rather than pluralistic society. Eichmann's participation in the Holocaust, according to Arendt, was mandated by the reigning Nazi ideology rather than by his own, personal judgment. In *Eichmann in Jerusalem,* Arendt reflects specifically on the Nazi regime's ideology and laws as transforming its followers into people who obeyed inhumane laws rather than their most basic instinctive respect for human dignity (Arendt 2006, 149-50).

only existing in some form of Socratic friendship in "Philosophy and Politics" (Villa 1999, 106). These opinions are created in solitary thought, in which one can commune with others, and then translated to public discourse via friendships. Interestingly, solitude, like judgment, requires logic and reason of people to persist to permit the free sharing of ideas and thoughts to strive for a consensual action's determination. Both Arendtian solitude and judgment require the individual to intellectually engage with the opinions and perspectives of others while also requiring that the solitary or judging person maintains his own subjective take on the world, founded in experiences.

Understanding judgment as an entity that allows people to exist together in the political realm immediately reveals the established tension in Arendt's understanding of judgment. While judgment occurs within the life of the mind and is informed by political dialogue, its role definitionally extends beyond the intellect to contribute to human plurality. Herein lies judgment's underlying connection to solitude. Just as solitude necessarily involves a "two-in-one" internal dialogue, judgment similarly places the individual's subjective experiences in conversation with other people's own subjective experiences. As revealed in the experience of thinkers such as Lessing described in *Men in Dark Times*, solitude makes plurality and the consequential "endless discourse" possible. Solitude internally creates a community of dialogue among subjective actors, and judgment intends to do the same. Solitude and contemplative judgment require actual political dialogue with others to give the person the ability to create a dialogue in which other opinions thrive. Claiming that learned judgment has consequences in the political clearly echoes her conversation on judgment in "The Crisis in Culture" when she states,

"[J]udgment may be one of the fundamental abilities of man as a political being insofar as it enables him to orient himself in the public realm, in the common world" (Arendt 1978, 221).

From this discussion, it should now be obvious that Arendtian judgment exists in two forms: as an individual's personal "two-in-one" dialogue that establishes his understanding of the world and events, and as an individual's contribution to the political by sharing thoughts and acting in public. While understanding judgment as two seemingly distinct entities is initially illogical, it should now be clear that Arendt's lack of clarity demonstrates a general tension in her thought between the communal and the solitary. Just as solitude counterintuitively involves a "two-in-one" conversation, judgment counterintuitively involves both the individual's solitary thought and communal involvement. Arendt never philosophically reconciles the two facets of judgment but rather constantly struggles with the tension latent in her understanding, most likely because she could not determine a way to reconcile her concept of solitude with her foundational focus on action. Rather than accepting this tension as a philosophical flaw, through comprehending judgment's similarities to solitude, it can be ascertained that this tension between the individual and the community is simply part of Arendt's understanding of the human condition.[10]

Just as the solitary person definitionally imaginatively engages with the minds of other people to establish an internal dialogue that is not totally removed from the human community, a person in the process of establishing a judgment "does so by making present in one's imagination

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[10] Arendt writes, "The question is not how to abolish discrimination, but how to keep it confined within the social sphere, where it is legitimate, and prevent its trespassing on the political and the personal sphere, where it is destructive" (*Responsibility* 206). Such an understanding of the issue at Little Rock reveals the importance of the separation an individual must maintain from society. The exercise of judgment is one cultivated separately from the community's general interactions—it is nourished by churches, families, and solitude rather than by the laws. When the line between the social and the political is muddled, so, too, is the capacity to judge.

those who are absent" (Arendt 1982, 92). The ability to make the thoughts of others present in the judger's mind is requisite for Arendt's earlier concept of active judgment as well as her later concept of judgment in thought; the internal dialogue extends to both the active and the contemplative forms of judgment. To even imagine another individual's thoughts to make a judgment, one has to have, or have had, interaction among other people. The act of contemplative judging, while solitary in nature, has undeniably communal roots insofar as the imaginative dialogue requires some sort of interaction with others and is founded in the singularity established in the individual's experience in family.[11] This solidifies Arendt's idea of judgment as an exemplary example of her understanding of solitude, which is especially important since it is much easier to understand how judgment can potentially unite the solitary with the political (*vita activa*). For the contemporary individual, one's judgment is typically understood as ultimately having consequence in the political, whether it determines with whom one interacts, how one votes in an election, or the type of job one acquires. Arguably, it is the revelation of judgment in the political that transforms an individual's thought or opinion into an active, rather than passive, judgment.

Hence, Arendtian judgment is closely related to solitude. In the contemplative life, judgment is in fact identical to Arendtian solitude and, as such, inherently apolitical. In the active life, judgment is a political and physical realization of the imagined "two-in-one" dialogue among other people's thoughts and ideas, a kind of political expansion on the family in which one presumably learns how to judge in the first place. Arendtian solitude, therefore, bridges both

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[11] D'Entrèves illuminates a similar point in his essay, "Hannah Arendt's theory of judgment." He asserts that spectators themselves are never alone and that the *vita activa* and the *vita contemplativa* are always somehow interconnected for the individual. People must have the ability to act and to contemplate in order to be any kind of judge (D'Entrèves 1994, 132). Thus, whether one judges as a spectator or an actor, the communal aspect of the dialogue leading to the ultimate judgment unites Arendt's earlier and later conceptualizations of judgment.

in thought and practice. Arendt herself expresses this idea, writing, "[Philosophers'] experience in solitude has given them extraordinary insight into all those relationships which cannot be realized without this being alone with one's self, but has led them to forget that perhaps even more primary relationships between men and the realm they constitute, springing simply form the fact of human plurality" (Arendt 1994, 360). Arendt understands loneliness to be the ignorance of plurality, whereas solitude is both the embracing and encouragement of plurality through dialogue. In solitude, one asks important questions, and then in interacting with others, the individual forms and contributes to plurality. Bridging solitude opens one to the possibility of unending discourse in friendship and can be enacted as judgment in the political sphere that allows plurality, and therefore politics, to happen.

Bridging Vs. Bonding Solitude: Applying Emerson and Arendt today

As Putnam and others explain, neither bridging nor bonding social capital is normatively better or worse than the other. However, it is generally accepted that bridging social capital contributes to economic and social progress and, therefore, is accepted as more helpful politically (Putnam, 2000; de Souza Briggs, 1998; Granovetter, 1973). Given this fact about bridging social capital, I suggest that Arendt's understanding of solitude is more utile in developing alone time as a form of social capital today insofar as it lends itself to the progress and openness that Putnam encourages. This is not to say that Emerson's vision of solitude is entirely bad, but rather that the focus on heterogenous relationships and plurality as part of solitude is more helpful in resolving the problem of "bowling alone" in the United States today. In fact, I suggest that it is helpful to differentiate between bonding and bridging solitude if only

to better understand the multiple ways that one can be physically alone, yet have relationships with oneself, nature, and others. Bonding solitude helps solidify self-identity that can ultimately yield, as in Emerson's own life, political action and engagement, and bridging solitude opens one up to dialogue and plurality in such a way that politics, as Arendt and deliberative democrats (Gutmann and Thompson, 2004; Mouffe, 2009; Rancière, 2011) understand the term, becomes possible.

So, one might ask, what is the upshot of Arendtian *bridging* solitude? How can we learn from Arendt and apply this idea of bridging solitude to spending time alone today? Drawing on Arendt's understanding of solitude's relationship to plurality and on recent literature on participatory politics, I argue that Arendt provides us with three practical means of engaging in bridging solitude given today's technology: Using common language in communication, educating youths on how to find divergent views online, and encouraging participation in interest-driven online activities. Arendt's bridging solitude, understood as time alone that embraces plurality and dialogue with others, elucidates how spending time alone online can involve relationships, plurality, and dialogue, thereby encouraging and affecting pluralistic politics. Her theory provides new insight into how and why time spent online can encourage civic engagement.

Using Common Language

Exploration of communications via online mediums indicates that online conversations do not only serve as places where opinions are shared, but also as places where opinions are formed (Price, Nir, & Cappella 2006; Burnstein & Vinokur, 1977). That is, there is an

understanding that political engagement online involves some kind of shared language such that individuals can both share opinions and contemplate the opinions of others. This methodological understanding that online communication that has observable affects on opinion indicates the importance of language in any kind of communication, especially that done when physically separate from public space, insofar as it determines whether the communication can have any affect beyond one's mind or communication when physically alone. I suggest that Arendt provides an important theoretical grounding upon which to understand the need for all communication or dialogue when alone to approximate conversations and dialogue that happen in public.

Arendt teaches us that if solitude is understood to represent the political realm in which people naturally thrive, we must recognize solitude itself as entailing characteristics specific to political dialogue. The language of politics is definitionally distinct from the language, for example, that one would use when discussing matters of science. Since solitude is an individual's manifestation of the plurality that defines the human experience, this solitary experience must necessarily entail the language typical of politics. To illustrate this point, it is helpful to consider the differences between the alone experiences of the scientist and the alone experiences of one in solitude. Although the scientist may appear to be a person who engages in solitude while researching and considering counter-opinions and results, his conversation is recognizably apolitical. His vocabulary consists of mathematical symbols and chemical notations rather than that of quotidian conversations. As Arendt teaches us, politics is not a dialogue of simply *any* vocabulary. She reflects on the dialect of politics in contrast to the dialect of science, writing, "The scientist has not only left behind the layman with his limited understanding; he has left

behind a part of himself and his own power of understanding, which is still human understanding, when he goes to work in the laboratory and begins to communicate in mathematical language" (Arendt 1978, 268-9).

Although the scientist constantly engages in an internal dialogue as he strives to answer questions and determine truths about nature, Arendt importantly points out that his language remains uncommon and consequently unrepresentative of the human condition itself. He engages with theoretical ideas rather than the reality of human experiences, much like Emerson's solitary man. The scientist's time alone is ultimately isolating since it first limits the kinds of hypothetical opinions he includes insofar as they must speak in his craft's uncommon language and then limits his ability to relate his dialogue's conclusion in the political. Since solitude is an individual's internalization of the political, solitude must include the very language that is unique to the human condition.

The individual who engages in a dialogue alone, separate from politics, that does not reflect the language and experience of politics does not think in solitude. Rather, such a person is ultimately isolated from the human experience. He dwells in thought completely separate and distinct from the human condition that simultaneously embraces the individual's distinctness and humanity's commonality. In the case of the scientist, his internal dialogue is not informed social interactions, but rather by equations, symbols, and matters completely distinct from politics. He engages in an intellectual conversation with notations instead of other people. The scientist is unable to partake in politics because he is unable to contribute his singularity to the political plurality; his vocabulary and aloneness sever him from politics insofar as they are distinct from and uninfluenced by politics.

Undeniably, the individual who thinks in a dialect that uses a vocabulary so distinct from the human condition into which he is born separates himself from his instinctive sociability. We might understand his departure from individual experiences and entrance into a vocabulary grounded in something other than the human condition as damaging to his very engagement in the political. An internal dialogue that does not accurately reflect the politics in which the human condition presents itself is not one of bridging solitude, but rather a separating dialogue that pertains to bonding solitude. Bridging solitude embraces the pluralistic nature of politics and prevents such departure from the political space in which people thrive. Bridging solitude corrects the isolation and loneliness possible in time alone by ensuring the individual's constant intellectual engagement with actual others' ideas and experiences. It ensures the individual's intellectual engagement with other political actors, not apolitical experiments and mathematical notations that sever the individual's ties to the political as evidenced by the scientist. Bridging solitude allows the person to experience time alone and away from politics while remaining truly worldly in thought.

Today, bridging solitude, therefore, entails the use of a common language that all can understand and engage in. Given this understanding, online interactions that involve language that only a minority of people can understand constitutes bonding solitude. The language of bonding solitude cements a particular group's homogeneous identity and does not encourage an extension of the conversation in the public space. Unlike bonding solitude, bridging solitude entails relationships that use the same language as that used in the public space, therefore allowing conversations to easily translate to the public space. Practically, then, to encourage

bridging solitude, we might encourage people to partake in online relationships that reflect, rather than ignore, the dominant language of communication.

Finding Divergent Opinions

In recent research on the effects of online activity on actual political and civic engagement, scholars have found that the participation within the Internet remains remarkably biased by age, race, and socioeconomic status (Cohen and Kahne, 2012; Lehman Schlozman, Verba, & Brady, 2010). Given these findings, scholars have called for an increased awareness among both researchers and Internet users of the lack of divergent opinions on most social media websites. Just as Arendt encourages individuals to enlarge their mentalities in solitary thought, we can understand that individuals participating in online conversations can be encouraged to find online conversations that broaden, rather than narrow, the opinions made available to people. Thus, given recent studies and Arendt's theory that a certain kind of solitude that is "enlarged" yields plurality, we can understand the need to encourage the encountering of divergent opinions online. While this recommendation makes sense, the question then arises as to how this can best be encouraged.

Encourage Interest-Driven Participation Online

Perhaps the best way to encourage the encountering of divergent opinions and ideas is to encourage a particular form of online participation. Ito, et al. (2009) provide a basic schema of participation: politically-driven, interest-driven, and friendship-driven. Politically-driven participation consists of online activities that are explicitly political (such as visiting campaign websites or political blogs); interest-driven participation consists of activities that allow people to

pursue hobbies, interests in popular culture, etc. online; and friendship-driven participation consists of contact with people regularly encountered daily, such as friends, peers, and family, via the Internet. While one might imagine that politically-driven participation would have the largest effect on actual civic engagement (Bimber, 2003; Jennings & Zeitner, 2003; Mossberger, Tolbert, & McNeal, 2008; Shah, Cho, Eveland, & Kwak, 2005), recent literature on the matter of actual civic engagement's relationship to online activities indicates that interest-driven participation online has the largest effect on actual civic engagement (Cohen and Kahne, 2012; Kahne, Lee, & Feezell, 2011; Zuniga, Veenstra, Vraga, & Shah, 2010).

Kahne, et al. (2011) explain that participation in these interest-driven online communities helps individuals generate real skills for organization and networking that eventually carry over to offline civic engagement. Perhaps most interestingly, Cohen and Kahne (2012) also stress that these interest-driven participatory communities online reach outside of the individual's typical social network not only by expanding the geographical proximity of connections but also by exposing the individual to new ways of thinking that would otherwise be impossible. Such an understanding of online participation as yielding plurality within the individual's thought process, physically separate from other people, indicates that interest-driven participation online represents the bridging solitude that Arendt calls for. In contrast, friendship-driven participation represents Emerson's bonding solitude that does not yield plurality or discourse but rather homogeneity and, as empirically demonstrated, no observable offline political engagement. Thus, given recent communications research and Arendt's theoretical assertion of bridging solitude yielding a politically productive plurality, interest-driven participation should be

encouraged among youths to encourage the development of civic engagement both on and offline, thereby invigorating politics through the fostering of plurality in solitude.

To most effectively encourage bridging solitude, and therefore the transformation of time physically alone into a valuable form of social capital, these three suggestions should be taken in concert. Educators and policymakers, as Cohen and Kahne (2012) urge, should encourage online involvement in interest-driven groups to foster skills that contribute to civic engagement. Further, these groups should involve language that easily translates to face-to-face relationships and include a focus on diversity and exposure to divergent opinions. Arendt's bridging solitude, along with recent communications research, points to the value and social capital of time alone and indicates how the internet should not be feared as that which disintegrates the political but rather a new means of encouraging the plurality that Americans and Arendt find so vital to political engagement. Arendt's theory helps us understand that when the Internet is used with attention to plurality and language, the Internet encourages rather than discourages politics.

Conclusions

Arendt reminds us of human beings' very social condition, writing, "Plurality is the condition of human action because we are all the same, that is, human, in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives, or will live" (Arendt 1998, 8). If our understanding of solitude were to ignore the human condition, the theoretical solitary experience would be distinct from the human experience and of virtually no importance when considering its relationship to the political. This understanding of solitude as reflective of humanity's natural interdependence is nicely explicated by Arendt in "Truth and Politics" when she claims, "[E]ven if I shun all company or am completely isolated while forming an opinion, I am not simply

together only with myself in the solitude of philosophical thought; I remain in this world of universal interdependence, where I can make myself the representative of everybody else" (Arendt 1978, 242). As Arendt reminds us, for solitude to be of any relevance to the political, it must entail a pluralistic characteristic based in real human experiences and not just imagination without any connection to the political world in which humans dwell freely. Insofar as we might understand solitude as an internalization of the political, we can come to grasp solitude as more than an imaginative dialogue—solitude is an interiorization of the human condition itself. Bridging solitude, therefore, not only entails relationships and networking, but also a connecting of one's political life with one's interior life, and this is the realization and understanding that individual Americans must have so that we can not just bowl, but also live and participate in politics, together rather than alone.

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