

The Democratic Potential of Discursive Practices

Abstract

Deliberative democracy stands at the core of democratic theory. However, the distinction between deliberation and other non-deliberative, discursive practices remains insufficiently theorized. Here I outline a typology for distinguishing between sets of discursive practices—*deliberation, political communication, and non-political discursive practices*—and identify the contributions that different discursive practices make to democracies. The framework for understanding discursive practices presented here clarifies theoretical disputes and empirical mixed findings in the deliberative democracy literature, and offers normative standards for judging the contributions of non-deliberative talk to democracies. This framework also offers insight to practitioners working in the field of democratic engagement interested in using discursive practices to achieve different democratic aims related to incentivizing inclusions or enhancing the quality of public opinion.

Democratic theorists are attentive to the importance of discourse—in particular, the importance of deliberation—for democracy. Furthermore, deliberative democracy has moved beyond its original “theoretical statement” into a “working theory” stage, and now informs an impressive body of empirical research (Chambers 2003, p. 307). Over the last few decades, discussions of deliberation have proliferated across academic subfields and into broader public debates. However, the deliberative democracy canon remains plagued by important unanswered questions and by a number of conceptual “family disputes” and mixed empirical findings (Bächtiger et al. 2010, Neblo 2007). For instance, if equality and a commitment to reciprocity are preconditions to deliberating through moral disagreements (Gutmann and Thompson 1996), then how can deliberation occur in societies marked by social inequalities (Bohman 2000) or deep moral divisions (O’Flynn 2007)? Conceptually, is deliberation about consensus (Mouffe 1999) or should deliberation be defined as disagreement (Gutmann and Thompson 1996)? Why do some researchers find that deliberation mobilizes participatory practices such as voting (Gastil, Deess and Weiser 2002, Knobloch and Gastil 2015), while others purport to find that deliberation suppresses voting (Mutz 2006)?

In this present work, I make the case that distinguishing deliberation from non-deliberative discursive practices offers an elegant solution to a number of unanswered questions, theoretical dead-ends, and empirical mixed findings. Although some attention has been paid to the importance of non-deliberative political talk to democracy (Mansbridge 1999), the distinction between deliberation and non-deliberative communication—and to the democratic potential of non-deliberative discursive practices—remain under-theorized.

I define discursive practices as communication of thought by words and propose posing two questions as criteria for distinguishing sets of discursive practices. I suggest theorists and researchers should ask: firstly, is discourse oriented to issues of collective concern? Secondly, is discourse characterized by reciprocal justification (reason-giving)? These two criteria produce a typology of four sets of discursive practices. *Deliberation* is defined as discourse oriented to issues of collective concern characterized by reason-giving. *Political*

communication is also oriented to issues of collective concern but is not characterized by reciprocal reason-giving. Non-political discursive practices include communication about personal experiences that are not oriented to issues of collective concern. Non-political discursive practices can also be distinguished by whether or not they are characterized by reason-giving (*non-political reason-giving*) or not (*non-political communication*).

In the first section, I make the case for distinguishing between discursive practices and offer a theoretical framework for evaluating the contributions of deliberation, political communication, and non-political discursive practices to democratic systems. I discuss how deliberation allows people to communicatively link their private preferences into collective opinions and agendas (Warren 2017). This helps ensure that people recognize their preferences in collective outcomes, contributing to the legitimacy of collective decisions and helping collectivities approximate the ever-moving demands of justice. However, I avoid the pitfall of judging all discursive practices by the degree to which they achieve deliberative aims and identify the unique democratic contributions of political communication and non-political discursive practices. I consider how, when social inequalities block the forceless force of good reasons, non-deliberative political communication—such as shouting slogans or making statements—are essential for incentivizing political inclusions. Finally, I make the case that non-political discursive practices (characterized by reason-giving or not) are essential for building the kinds of basic, moral inclusions that allow people to navigate the strain of collective rule.

In the second section, I show the usefulness of distinguishing between discursive practices by explaining how my theoretical framework clarifies conceptual confusion and mixed findings, and offers new paths for empirical research. In the third section, I illustrate how identifying the relative strengths of non-deliberative communication relative to the democratic goals of expanding political and moral inclusions clarifies the normative standards by which non-deliberative discursive practices can be judged. Drawing on feminist theory (Davis 2011, hooks 2000, Weldon 2006), I make the case that political communication and

non-political discursive practices should be judged by how well they incentivize inclusions for those at the margins. When agents are empowered to raise validity claims about matters of collective concern, deliberation produces collective opinions and agendas (which feed into collective decisions) that are more just and more likely to be perceived as legitimate by those affected (Young 2000). Finally, I conclude by drawing-out some of the practical implications of my framework. I offer suggestions for political leaders, activists, and practitioners in the field of democratic innovation for engaging members of the public in discursive practices in ways that enhance the democratic capacities of political systems.

Four Sets of Discursive Practices

When I refer to discursive practices I mean using words to intersubjectively express internal processes, such as thoughts or feelings. There are other, non-verbal pragmatic practices that achieve democratic aims—including silence (Rollo 2017) or rituals and embodied practices (Williams and Warren 2014)—but I restrict my present analysis to communication through words. Discursive practices all share several features. First, words can be conveyed in a variety of mediums and styles. In this present work, I focus on the mediums of speaking and listening, but the typology I present can be applied to other discursive mediums including writing and reading or signing and perceiving. Words can also be conveyed in a variety of discursive styles. Discursive styles include legalistic argumentation, rhetoric, greeting, testimony, story-telling, bargaining, and negotiating (Young 2000).

Second, any discursive practice can be analyzed at the micro- (individual) or macro- (societal or institutional) level. Studies of discursive practices such as deliberation often take a micro-level approach, studying individuals in dyads or small-groups over a relatively short timeframe (Beauvais 2018, Chambers 2009). However, studies of discursive practices can also take a macro-level approach, studying institutions or societies over longer time periods.

Finally, and perhaps most controversially, I would like to make the case that all discursive practices—deliberation, political communication, and non-political discursive practices—can vary in the degree to which they are characterized by *discord* or *accord*. At the micro-level of interpersonal communication, I take discord to refer to interpersonal *disagreement* (or *misunderstanding*). At the macro-level of intergroup or inter-institutional communication, discord refers to a sustained dissension that can be describe as *agonism* (cf. Mouffe 1999). At the micro-level, I take concord to refer to interpersonal *agreement*. At the macro-level, concord refers to a concordance of opinion or sustained harmony that can be described as *consensus*.¹ Recognizing that all discursive practices share basic attributes has important implications for democratic theory and political science research—a point I return to after I distinguish between discursive practices and outline the democratic potential of each.

To distinguish between discursive practices, I propose asking two questions: Are discursive practices oriented to issues of collective concern? And, are discursive practices oriented to issues of collective concern characterized by reciprocal reason-giving? The answers to these two questions generate a typology of four sets of discursive practices. First, deliberation, or practical discourse oriented to issues of collective concern characterized by reason-giving. Second, political communication, or discursive practices oriented to issues of collective concern lacking rational justification. Third and fourth are non-political discursive practices. Non-political discursive practices are not oriented to issues of collective concern and can involve reason-giving or not. Because both types of non-political discursive practices achieve similar democratic aims, I mostly consider non-political discursive practices together, regardless of whether they involve reason-giving or not.

¹Note that consensus is not necessarily a good in and of itself. For instance, in certain locales in certain moments of history there has been (or, has seemingly been) wide societal consensus on patriarchal norms that stipulated a woman's rightful place is in the home. This kind of consensus constitutes a symbolic power (the power to make things seen and believed) defining peoples' relation to paid labour in the public sphere and unpaid labour in the private sphere by their gender (Bourdieu 1991)(as well as creating and maintaining a gendered distinction between public and private (Pateman 1988)). This kind of consensus contributes to both harms of oppression and domination (cf. Young 2011).

Table 1: A Typology of Discursive Practices

	Reciprocal reason-giving?		
	Yes	No	
Oriented to collective issues?	Yes	Deliberation	Political communication
	No	Non-political reason-giving	Non-political communication

I consider the respective strengths of deliberation, political communication, and non-political talk relative to the basic democratic aims of *empowering inclusions*, *forming collective opinions and agendas*, and *making collective decisions*. I focus on the contributions that discursive practices make to these three aims because empowering inclusions, enabling collective opinion and will-formation, and collective decision-making are the three basic outcomes a political system must achieve in order to count as democratic at all (Warren 2017). I also consider the respective strengths of discursive practices relative to other goods associated with democracy. Specifically, I consider different discursive practices’ relative strengths in enhancing the epistemological robustness of public opinion and collective decisions (Chambers 2017, Estlund 2009, Knight and Johnson 1997, Landmore 2012, 2013). I also consider which discursive practices are particularly well-suited for promoting cross-cutting social ties between different social groups members (Harell and Stolle 2010) and for promoting other features of bridging social capital (such as intergroup trust and tolerance) (Putnam 2000).

The Democratic Potential of Deliberation

The typology of four discursive practices I have proposed preserves Jürgen Habermas’s original definition of deliberation (practical discourse) as rational discourses about matters of collective concern (Chambers 1996, Habermas 1990, 1984, 1998). Deliberation is rare: rational discourses about matters of collective concern are “islands in a sea of practice” (Habermas 1982, 235). Deliberation involves “highly specialized discussions” that occur when day-to-

day communication is problematized and comes to an impasse, such as when an interlocutor asks for clarification or discursively challenges a validity claim (Chambers 1996, p. 98). I take “rationality” to refer broadly to reciprocal reason-giving in any communicative medium or style. Following the growing convention among deliberative scholars, deliberative reason-giving can, for instance, involve rhetoric, dispassionate argumentation, narrative, greeting, storytelling, bargaining, or negotiation (Gutmann and Thompson 1996, Mansbridge 1999, Neblo 2007, Warren 2017, Young 2000).

Problematized everyday communication is successfully addressed through nothing other than the persuasive force of reasons to the extent that communication is “immune to repression and inequality” (Habermas 1990, p. 88). This immunization is achieved by certain conditions of justification, which Chambers (1996, p. 99) summarizes as “equality, freedom, and fair play.” *Equality* speaks to the prerequisite of inclusion: those affected by discourses should be empowered to influence them, to participate in deliberation and express their preferences (interests, values, opinions, and so on). *Freedom* speaks to the related prerequisite of non-domination: no one who is affected by discourses should be prevented through coercion from exercising their right to inclusion.

Finally, what Chambers calls *fair play*—or what Gutmann and Thompson (1996, 2004) call a *principle of reciprocity*—refers to a commitment to moral inclusion or respect, to a positive motivation to treat others as ends in themselves. Reciprocity is implied in the definition of deliberation as mutual reason-giving. In deliberative processes, interlocutors must listen and take seriously the claims of others if they want their conversation partners to listen and take their claims seriously in turn. Gutmann and Thompson (2004, p. 3) explain that the “moral basis for this reason-giving process” is people should be treated as “autonomous agents who take part in the governance of their society” rather than “as objects of legislation.”

What are the strengths of deliberative practices relative to basic democratic aims and other political goods? Deliberation’s key strengths are well theorized and relate to deliber-

ation's contribution to collective opinion and agenda-formation. All discursive practices—especially deliberative practices—are essential tools for translating the needs and preferences of those with claims to affectedness into collective opinions and wills (Warren 2017). What distinguishes deliberation's normative importance from other discursive practices is the well-theorized relationship between rational discourse about issues of collective concern and the goods of justice and democratic legitimacy.

A collective cannot decide once and for all what is just because justice is a moving target (Manin 1987). Because the demands of justice vary over time and across contexts, “the definition of what is just remains the subject of constant debate” (Manin 1987, p. 262). To the extent that the conditions of justification are met, those affected by collective outcomes use deliberation to publicly reason through the demands of indeterminate justice. Of course, collectives must do more than discursively reason about justice, collectives must also make decisions and resolve conflicts (Manin 1987, Mansbridge and Martin 2013). Deliberation may not be a decision tool, but it is essential for deciding the rules of the game (for instance, deciding how votes should be organized into electoral systems, how laws will be passed, or how laws should be interpreted), and for convincing those affected by collective decisions that the decision rules are reasonable or acceptable (Chambers 1996, Manin 1987). As Manin (1987, p. 262) explains, deliberation “makes room for the indeterminacy of justice and the necessity for decision.”

Discursively reasoning through the always changing demands of justice is essential to democratic legitimacy, where democratic legitimacy is defined as the belief “that the major institutions of a society and the decisions reached by them on behalf of the public are worthy of being obeyed” (Benhabib 1994, p. 27). When people perceive their preferences reflected in collective opinions and wills, they are more likely to perceive collective opinions and wills as legitimate. And when people are convinced by the reasons for the rules that determine how opinions and wills are implemented as collective decisions, they are more likely to view those collective decisions as legitimate (even if the resulting decisions do not always reflect

their preferences) (Chambers 1996, Habermas 1998, Manin 1987).

In addition to the unique role deliberation plays in public opinion and collective will-formation (which feeds into collective decision-making) with respect to promoting justice and securing democratic legitimacy, a large body of research points to the effectiveness of deliberation for achieving other goods associated with democracy. For instance, deliberation is a particularly effective form of discourse for enhancing the epistemic robustness of public opinion and collective decisions (Chambers 2017, Estlund 2009, Knight and Johnson 1997, Landmore 2012, 2013). There is overwhelming evidence that deliberation encourages learning and more informed public opinions (Baccaro, Bächtiger and Deville 2014, Bohman 2006, Esterling, Neblo and Lazer 2011, Fishkin 2003, Grönlund, Strandberg and Himmelroos 2009, Grönlund, Setälä and Herne 2010), and that deliberation strengthens the consistency between citizens' principles and preferences (Fournier et al. 2011).

As I have suggested, deliberation is only possible—and so only successful in achieving goals related to informed, legitimate, and just collective outcomes—to the extent that the conditions of justification are met. Discursive conflict resolution can be difficult. People do not always enjoy having their preferences challenged, hearing contrary opinions or evidence, or being asked to publicly justify themselves. Under conditions of inequality and exclusion, domination, or where a commitment of reciprocity is lacking, people may be unwilling to offer justifications when challenged, to take their interlocutors' utterances seriously. This raises two centrally important, related questions that have been unsatisfactorily addressed in the literature, but which I argue can be answered by theorizing the distinct democratic contributions of non-deliberative talk.

First, how is deliberation possible in unequal societies characterized by group-based—including gendered, racialized, cultural, or class-based—hierarchies? As Bohman (2000, p. 383) notes, it is important to consider how “actual relations of power and other social asymmetries undermine the conditions of successful discourse.” Inequalities of power and social standing translate into political exclusions and harms of oppression and domination

(Young 2011). Under these conditions, it is possible that “communication itself becomes so restricted that it is no longer cognitively reliable or normatively appropriate” (Bohman 2000, p. 382). Bohman (2000, p. 382-3) describes this as the problem of “when water chokes.” When you choke on water, drinking more water rarely helps. If social power asymmetries block disempowered group members’ ability to participate in reason-giving or undermines their discursive influence, then prescribing more reason-giving is unlikely to help. The problem of empowering political inclusions must be solved *before* deliberation can help people respond to problems of collective action by reflectively and rationally linking personal preferences into collective opinions and agendas.

The second related question that has been unsatisfactorily addressed is the possibility of deliberation in societies divided over deep moral conflicts. Gutmann and Thompson (1996) argue deliberation can be extended to deep moral disagreements as long as a precondition of commitment to reciprocity is met, because this should induce both sides to make reasonable arguments the other could accept. One of the problems with this claim is that it is not clear where this psychological predisposition—the pre-commitment to reciprocity—comes from (Dryzek 2005, O’Flynn 2007). The problem of fostering basic, moral inclusions must be solved *before* deliberation can help people respond to problems of collective action by reflectively and rationally linking personal preferences into collective opinions and agendas. Identifying the democratic potential of political communication and non-political talk clarifies how we can achieve the requisite political and moral inclusions necessary for effective deliberation.

The Democratic Potential of Political Communication

Like deliberation, political communication refers to conversations about issues of collective concern. However, following my proposed typology, political communication does not satisfy deliberative standards of reason-giving. Political communication is most common when conversation partners enjoy a shared framework of mutual understanding and so do not need

to offer mutual justifications. The ways in which social conditions structure similarly situated agents' life chances combined with self-selection into relations with similar others produces communication networks characterized by a high degree of homophily (social similarity) (Bourdieu 1977, 2000, Kossinets and Watts 2009, McPherson, Smith-Lovin and Cook 2001).

That social structure and agency contribute to homophily in communication networks means that, at the micro-level, agents often find themselves in conversation with others who are "on the same page." People formed under the same conditions or who have selected into social networks with similar others tend to share many normative understandings, habits, and preferences (including political preferences) with their conversation partners. Homophily in conversation networks means that most discussants tend to be co-partisans, and so the potential for disagreement in political communication tends to be low (Huckfeldt, Ikeda and Pappi 2005, Klostad, Sokhey and McClurg 2013). These micro-level processes produce an emergent concordance of opinion within social groups at the macro-level that is revealed as statistical regularities; for instance, as correlations between social group membership and political preferences or cultural taste (Bourdieu 1984, 2000, Huckfeldt 1984).

Political communication—issuing slogans, declarations, polemics, accusations, and other assertions without justification—is the most effective tool for calling people to arms, "to capture their interest, focus their energies, draw them tightly together" (Walzer 1999, p. 60). Shouting slogans or making statements is often not deliberative, since slogans and statements are typically shouted or made as assertions without accompanying justifications. Because political communication is an effective tool for calling people to arms, political communication links with other political practices in important ways. Political communication is important for the practices of voting (and related participatory institutions like party systems and elections) and resisting. Political communication helps parties mobilize partisans during elections and helps activists mobilize protestors and demonstrators. The kind of concord that co-occurs with political communication increases the ability for political communication to achieve democratic aims related to empowering political inclusions.

Like deliberation, non-deliberative political communication can enhance the epistemological robustness of public opinion and collective decisions and can help people connect their personal preferences to collective opinions and agendas. However, political communication is less effective than deliberation for achieving these goals. Although people develop many of their political understandings by talking politics with family members and members of their cultural milieu, the kind of political communication through which family socialization occurs often looks more like indoctrination than rational persuasion (Walzer 1999) and political communication with similarly situated interlocutors tends to be heavily influenced by tradition and unthinking habit (Bourdieu 1990). Relying on indoctrination, tradition, and habit (instead of rational persuasion) to link preferences into collective opinions and wills means the resulting collective outcomes will be less likely to keep up with the shifting demands of justice and so will not have the same legitimacy (Habermas 1998).

As I started to explain, the boundary between political communication and deliberation should easily be punctuated with a challenge or a request for clarification. To the extent that conditions of justification are met, requests for clarification prompt deliberative reason-giving (Chambers 2017). When someone asks, “why?” or “what do you mean?” their interlocutor should switch from the practice of political communication to the practice of deliberation (and offer compelling reasons). However, asymmetrical power relations can block rational discourse, preventing misunderstanding or disagreement from being addressed through the compelling force of good reasons. The importance of distinguishing between political communication and deliberation is illustrated precisely in the moments when political communication is problematized by misunderstanding or disagreement but fails to become deliberation.

Consider the power asymmetries between employers and their employees. When an employer expresses a political opinion, an employee who disagrees might not be emboldened enough to challenge the employer at all. Even if the employee does challenge the employer, the employer might take advantage of their position of authority to ignore or scoffed-off

the employee's challenge. Of course, not all idiosyncratic power asymmetries undermine democratic health.² But a problem arises when structural inequalities—inequalities between salient social groups in a society—systematically prevent disempowered social group members' discursive challenges from receiving uptake. For instance, in capitalist societies characterized by racialized and gendered class-hierarchies, men and White people are more likely to be employers (who give orders) and women and people of color are more likely to be employees (who receive orders) (Davis 2011, Young 2011).

When structural inequalities prevent disempowered social group members from challenging empowered group members' utterances, political communication is systematically blocked from becoming deliberation. If collective opinions and wills (which feed into collective decisions) do not reflect the preferences of disempowered group members, these collective outcomes are less likely to be just and are less likely to be perceived as legitimate by those who have been excluded from influencing them (Young 2011). To the extent that the conditions of justification have been met, deliberation helps collectivities approximate the moving demands of justice and achieve outcomes that are perceived as being legitimate by those affected.

However, when structural inequalities entail political exclusions, disempowered group members are prevented from influencing others with reasons. When the conditions of justification are insufficiently met and deliberation blocked, it is time to start making accusations, issuing declarations, and shouting polemics. Non-deliberative political practices—including political communication and other pre-figurative, non-discursive acts (Rollo 2017, Williams and Warren 2014)—contribute to democratic systems when they incentivize political inclusions.

²There may be examples where inequalities are acceptable—such as when interests are identical (Mansbridge 1977)—but democratic systems typically involve competing interests, and justice requires that people can raise and challenge validity claims on topics that affect them.

The Democratic Potential of Non-Political Discursive Practices

Of course, not all communication is oriented to collective issues. I refer to discursive practices not oriented to issues of collective concern as non-political discursive practices. In this section I first consider non-political discursive practices—both non-political reason-giving and non-political communication not characterized by reason-giving—together because both sets of discursive practices share commonalities. At the end of this section I specifically consider non-political reason-giving and discuss how non-political reason-giving helps agents practice rhetorical and rational capacities in lower stakes settings.

Non-political discursive practices might be oriented to establishing interpersonal connections, developing self- or collective identities, or might be purely expressive. Non-political talk can be about matters the public *should* care about but differs from political talk because it is not framed as such. Rather, non-political talk is framed as a personal or private experience (a feature of personal biography), rather than as a public or collective issue (a feature of society and collective history). Understanding the distinction between framing something as personal experiences “of the milieu” versus framing something as “public issues of social structure” (Mills 2000, p. 8) is the key to understanding the distinction between non-political and political talk.

A person may complain about being unemployed and how painful they find the experience of rejections by hiring committees. But so long as they frame this as a personal experience without relating the experience of their milieu to structural features of the economy, they are engaging in non-political talk. When the unemployed speaker makes the connection between their personal experiences looking for work and the machinations of history or structure of society by drawing their interlocutors attention to the unemployment rate, or to the historical exclusion of members of their social group from their field of work, they are participating in political communication or deliberation.

What people need to make the leap from non-political communication (oriented to personal experiences) to political communication (oriented to issues of collective concern) is a

quality of mind we might call the *political imagination* (cf. Mills 2000).³ When feminists say “the personal is political” they are asking people to use their political imaginations. “The personal is political” asks people to look at women’s experiences as public issues, to make the link between biography and history, to shift from non-political communication to political communication (cf. Mansbridge 1999). Ideally, communication shifts easily from non-political talk to either political communication (or deliberation) by engaging the political imagination and shifting the framing from personal experiences to collective issues (and in the case of shifting to deliberation, offering rational justifications).

Being able to engage the political imagination and shift the frame from biography to society is important. Unfortunately, structural power asymmetries can systematically undermine disempowered group members’ ability to adopt this frame of mind and thus block the shift from non-political communication to an orientation to collective issues. Consider again how the historical exclusion of women (and issues disproportionately affecting women) from the public sphere meant people were more likely to see issues such as workplace harassment or control over reproductive health as private problems—necessitating feminists’ entreaty to see the personal as political.

What are the strengths of non-political communication relative to basic democratic functions and other goods associated with democracy? Non-political communication is essential for achieving moral inclusions and for developing deontic commitments (webs of reciprocal obligations). When I say that talking develops deontic commitments, what I mean is that talking involves raising and responding to utterances, which always requires making and responding to requests or bids for connection (Driver and Gottman 2004, Gottman and Driver

³Of course, Mills (2000, p. 19 see footnote 2) famously refers to this quality of mind as the “sociological imagination.” However, as Mills admits, the term “political imagination” can be used just as well to refer to the same idea. I use political imagination because it makes more intuitive sense in a framework analyzing the democratic potential of discursive practices. Aside from using the term political imagination instead of sociological imagination, I more or less faithfully use Mills’s original distinction between personal experiences (what Mills calls personal “troubles”) and issues, as well as Mills’s original description of the state of mind required for linking biography to history).

2005). When I respond to a speaker’s utterance—when I affirm my interlocutors bid for connection—this creates an expectation that my interlocutor will respond to my utterance in return.⁴ The basic reciprocal obligations created from raising and responding to utterances form the basis of the precondition of a commitment to reciprocity that underwrites social cooperation. Deontic commitments enable the development of higher-order reciprocal attitudes—such as trust, tolerance, and mutual respect—which are essential to collective rule.

Ideally, all discursive practices (whether about collective issues or not) create constellations of commitments and entitlements that put agents into relations of reciprocal interdependence (Brandom 1998). Unfortunately, in societies marked by social or moral conflicts, talking about collective issues across intergroup boundaries is difficult and may worsen conflicts. In divided societies, agents may approach interlocutors as representatives of social groups with competing collective interests, rather than as moral equals worthy of respect. As a result, rather than creating deontic commitments, intergroup communication about collective issues in divided societies can contribute to greater attitude polarization and worsen intergroup animosities (Dryzek 2005, Mendelberg and Oleske 2000, O’Flynn 2007, Sunstein 2002).

It is precisely because non-political communication is not oriented to collective issues that non-political communication is particularly well-suited for encouraging agents to engage *qua* speakers rather than *qua* group members with opposing collective interests. Because of this, non-political communication across intergroup boundaries is especially effective for promoting reciprocal attitudes such as mutual respect and greater tolerance for outgroup members (Allport 1954, Christ et al. 2014, Schmid, Ramiah and Hewstone 2014), particularly when these conversations entail self-disclosure and perspective taking (Broockman and Kalla 2016, Davies et al. 2011). Non-political communication is particularly effecting for incentivizing

⁴This is similar to the process of gift-giving, where the act of giving a gift creates an expectation that the act will be reciprocated. As Bourdieu (2000, p. 198) notes, “the gift is expressed in language of obligation... it creates obligations, it obliges.”

moral inclusions. Moral inclusions comprise the building blocks of higher-order reciprocal attitudes—including trust, tolerance, and mutual respect—which support practices necessary for self-rule, including the illocutionary aspects of discursive conflict resolution.

As I explained, deliberative theorists maintain that deliberation can be extended to deep moral disagreements so long a kind of moral psychology—a commitment to reciprocity—is met on all sides (Gutmann and Thompson 1996). Dryzek (2005, p. 225) starts to get at where this precondition comes from by acknowledging the benefits of “rituals and indirect communication (as opposed to confrontation)” that *precede* deliberation. My discussion more fully clarifies where the precondition of a commitment to reciprocity comes from. Non-political discursive practices are a tool that connects people without priming group-based threats, which expand moral inclusions by developing reciprocal obligations across social divides. Developing reciprocal attitudes ultimately helps interlocutors withstand the strain of disagreement endemic to deliberation. Non-political discursive practices are essential to democratic systems when they incentivize moral inclusions by motivating interlocutors to reciprocally treat one another as capable and worthy of self- and collective-rule.

Thus far I have considered non-political discursive practices together (whether they involve reason-giving or not), but it is worthwhile to note the special importance of non-political reason-giving. Non-political reason-giving allows speakers to develop their rhetorical reason-giving capacities in relatively low-stakes fields of social play. For instance, consider a speaker asking me to justify my choice of a favorite ice cream. In this situation, I can play with words and think of clever or amusing retorts without worrying that my responses matter to anything larger than me and my interlocutor in this moment of banter. Developing my reason-giving and rhetorical skills in a field of social play where the stakes are lower helps prepare me for the potential moment my interlocutor employs their political imagination and makes the shift to deliberation. For instance, if my interlocutor asks me where I stand on public subsidies to dairy farmers that keep down the cost of unhealthy ice cream treats. Now I must continue the practice of discursive reason-giving, but make the leap to

collective issues. Suddenly, the stakes are higher; and I might be glad for having sharpened my reason-giving skills through non-political banter.⁵

As my discussion shows, distinguishing deliberation, political communication, and non-political discursive practices and identifying their strengths relative to democratic goals helps clarify unanswered questions in the deliberative democracy canon. However, I also wish to make the case that distinguishing between discursive practices helps clarify mixed empirical findings and opens-up a fruitful research agenda. Furthermore, I wish to show that identifying the strengths of political communication and non-political talk in relation to different democratic aims offers useful normative benchmarks for judging these discursive practices.

Clarifying Conceptual Confusion and Mixed Findings

Ignoring non-deliberative discursive practices runs the risk of over-extending the concept of deliberation, and the danger that “almost every communicative act may qualify as ‘deliberative’ (at least in function), leading to the problem of concept stretching” (Bächtiger et al. 2010, p.48). Concept stretching reduces conceptual clarity and worsens the problem of “family disputes” where theorists talk past one another, and theorists and empiricists fail to engage one another (Neblo 2007). Extending the concept of deliberation to include any

⁵Of course, non-political talk is not always banter—non-political discursive practices include serious, difficult, and deeply important topics. For instance, it would be incredibly difficult for me to disclose to a friend, loved one, or therapist that I had been sexually assaulted and the personal stakes could be incredibly high. However, I would still make the case that the stakes of framing this as a personal experience are lower than shifting to political communication or deliberation and drawing my listener’s attention to social structure—for instance, to the normalized rape culture than made the assault possible and the norms regulating my behaviour that encouraged me to keep it secret. Shifting from biography to social structure implicates more people and implies a collective problem and the need for collective action. Suddenly, my utterances matter for more than me and my interlocutor in this moment of self-disclosure. Processes of talking about and reasoning through personal experiences in low stakes settings can help us develop our capacities as speaking and thinking subjects and prepare us for when the time to link our personal experiences to collective issues arrives.

practice—even anti-democratic practices such as hate speech⁶—also risks untethering the concept of deliberation from its normative moorings (Owen and Smith 2015).

Distinguishing discursive practices on the criteria I outlined and identifying features shared by all discursive practices offers greater conceptual precision and helps clarify mixed findings in empirical research. For example, there is the ongoing “family dispute” among democratic theorists about the relationship between deliberation and discord (Neblo 2007). On the one hand, agonists criticize deliberative democracy for what they see as an ill-advised and unrealistic attempt to eliminate disagreement in favour of societal consensus (Mouffe 1999). On the other hand, deliberation has been defined *as* disagreement (Gutmann and Thompson 1996, Mutz 2006, Thompson 2008). Mutz (2006) operationalizes deliberation using an index measuring whether participants explicitly recognize fairly intense, sustained political disagreement in their conversation networks.⁷ Interestingly, in the aggregate, Mutz’s (2006) measure of “deliberation” as sustained disagreement in conversation networks looks a lot like Mouffe’s (1999) description of agonism, which Mouffe presents as an *alternative* to deliberation.

Following my proposal to recognize accord and discord as features of all discursive practices—including, but not limited to deliberation—clarifies this conceptual confusion. It is true that the presence of disagreement might be expected to co-occur more frequently with deliberative practices. After all, people are more likely to challenge norms or utterances they disagree with and these challenges should prompt processes of rational justification. However, people can disagree about issues of collective concern *without* engaging in reason-giving. Furthermore, people can disagree about matters related to their personal experiences *without* relating the experiences of their milieu to the workings of history or structure of society.

Furthermore, deliberation does not always entail disagreement. People also participate

⁶See Dryzek (2010) discussion of the “systemic effects” of Australian populist politician Pauline Hanson’s racist rhetoric, and the critique by Owen and Smith (2015).

⁷See Klofstad, Sokhey and McClurg (2013) for a discussion of measuring disagreement in conversation networks.

in processes of rational discourse about issues of collective concern when there is simply an absence of understanding. For instance, consider the consensus conferences on biotechnologies convened by Danish policy-makers to gauge public opinion on unfamiliar scientific innovations (Joss 1998, Joss and Durant 1995). People must deliberate the benefits and risks of unfamiliar technologies not only if they have different opinions, but also because they have not yet formed opinions. People may also challenge validity claims and trigger deliberation to satisfy their curiosity or need for cognition, or as a Socratic teaching device (Jarvis 2006).

Conceptually clarifying that discord and accord are features of all discursive practices helps explain mixed findings in empirical research. For instance, the contradiction between Mutz’s (2006) findings that “deliberation” demotivates engagement in other political practices such as voting, and the findings by Gastil, Deess and Weiser (2002) and Knobloch and Gastil (2015) that deliberation motivates voting. Recall that Mutz is operationalizing “deliberation” as fairly intense, sustained disagreement in political conversation networks. Recognizing that discord is a variant feature of all discursive practices (and that disagreement does not define deliberation) suggests an explanation for these mixed findings. Specifically, that Mutz is actually measuring the effect of experiencing disagreement in political communication that fails to be addressed⁸ by deliberation—probably because power asymmetries constrain speakers’ abilities to effectively raise reciprocal validity claims. Mutz’s (2006) analysis shows that intense, sustained disagreement in communication networks is more common among the disempowered: in the United States, people of color, the poor, and the least educated perceive the most sustained disagreement in conversation networks.

By contrast, Gastil, Deess and Weiser (2002) and Knobloch and Gastil (2015) operationalize deliberation as the discursive processes organized in high-quality discursive forums

⁸Note I say disagreement is “addressed” not “solved.” Deliberation may not result in a solution per se (i.e., may not result in interpersonal agreement or societal consensus). However, deliberation still addresses conflict in the sense that agents clarify and gain a better understanding of the reasons justifying their own positions, the reasons justifying their interlocutors’ positions, and the nature of the discord. Ultimately, discord may persist (as interpersonal disagreement or ongoing agonism), but agents will have a better understanding of the nature of (and reasons for) discord.

(juries and deliberative mini-publics) organized to address matters of collective concern. It is possible that in societies marked by racialized and class-based social hierarchies, organizing disagreement into deliberative institutions such as juries (Gastil, Deess and Weiser 2002) or mini-publics (Knobloch and Gastil 2015) helps neutralize inequalities in these institutional settings. This better ensures problematized political communication is addressed through rational discourse—even among the disempowered—and that addressing problematized political communication through discursive reason-giving has a mobilizing effect. Future empirical research could more explicitly test how addressing disagreement about collective issues through deliberation (e.g., by organizing disagreement into deliberative institutions) impacts civic engagement as compared to leaving disagreement about collective issues unaddressed in the mass public.

Distinguishing between discursive practices and identifying their strengths in achieving different democratic aims also clarifies mixed findings on the effects of intergroup communication. For instance, Mendelberg and Oleske (2000) claim to show that intergroup deliberation is ineffective or may worsen intergroup tensions, while Grönlund, Herne and Setälä (2015) claim deliberation can increase tolerance for out-groups. Like in my first example, this apparent contradiction is likely highlighting the distinction that should be made between disagreement in political communication networks (that fails to be unaddressed through deliberation) and disagreement that is addressed through the kind of reciprocal reason-giving that occurs when the conditions of justification are sufficiently met.

The willingness to address disagreement through reason-giving requires a shared psychological commitment to reciprocity (Gutmann and Thompson 1996). In the absence of cross-cutting ties and reciprocal attitudes in the mass public, empowered social group members are less likely to hear and take seriously the utterances of disempowered social group members. What Mendelberg and Oleske (2000) show is that White residents from a wealthier, homogeneously White neighborhood who used coded racial language to resist school integration were impervious to Black speakers' complaints that their arguments were racist.

What Grönlund, Herne and Setälä (2015) show is that—even among White people who may not have developed feelings of moral obligation toward outgroup members (in their study, toward immigrants)—disagreement over policies impacting immigrants can be organized into high-quality, deliberative institutions where the commitment to reciprocity is fostered by facilitators priming democratic norms.

High quality participatory and deliberative forums (such as mini-publics, townhalls, or participatory budgeting) are excellent vehicles for addressing disagreement and misunderstanding through deliberation, and range of institutional designs exist for fostering a commitment to reciprocity and incentivizing moral inclusions (cf. Beauvais and Bächtiger 2016). However, these kinds of institutional forums are rare (Chambers 2009), and a commitment to reciprocity must also be developed in the unstructured mass public. As I have started to explain, in the mass public deontic commitments are fostered through cross-cutting social ties (“intergroup contact”) between members of different social group under favorable conditions⁹ (see findings on intergroup contact, e.g., Allport 1954, Brown and Hewstone 2005, Davies et al. 2011, Pettigrew 1998). Mendelberg and Oleske’s (2000) also shows that White residents from *integrated* neighbourhoods heard and respected Black speakers’ complaints that arguments against school busing rested on coded racial appeals.

When empowered group members (such as wealthy White people) only forge bonds of reciprocal obligation with members of their own social groups, there is less motivation to treat disempowered out-group members as equally worthy of authoring collective decisions, and so may be less motivated to take disempowered out-group members’ arguments seriously. When people forge social ties and develop deontic commitments across intergroup boundaries—which is more likely to occur in integrated neighbourhoods where Black and White residents have more opportunities to meet and chat—different social group members will be more motivated to take their interlocutors claims seriously and treat them as moral equals, helping

⁹By “favorable conditions” I am referring to Allport’s conditions for successful intergroup contact, namely: conditions of equal status, cooperation, and shared goals supported by social and institutional authorities (see Pettigrew 1998, for a review).

to neutralize the ways in which ongoing racialized and class-based hierarchies distribute asymmetrical empowerments. The roles that social context and social interactions play in shaping intergroup attitudes has been studied extensively by social psychologists and political scientists interested in intergroup tolerance and social trust (Allport 1954, Brown and Hewstone 2005, Christ et al. 2014, Davies et al. 2011, Pettigrew 1998, Stolle, Soroka and Johnston 2008).

According to my theoretical framework, researchers interested in deliberation should also attend to these questions, because positive intergroup interactions—which require the kinds cross-cutting social ties and non-political discursive exchanges that promote reciprocal attitudes—incentivize moral inclusions and support deliberation. Drawing on existing empirical work indirectly supports this claim. For instance, there is evidence that schools board meetings in neighbourhoods with lower racial conflict and greater minority empowerment are more deliberative, while school board meetings in neighbourhoods with greater racial conflict or lower minority empowerment are less deliberative (Collins 2018). Future empirical research could try and more explicitly examine how cross-cutting social ties and regular participation in non-political talk across intergroup boundaries impact the ability for different group members to address disagreement or misunderstanding about collective issues through deliberation.

Clarifying Normative Standards

Distinguishing discursive practices and identifying their unique strengths relative to basic aims of democracy also helps clarify normative standards for evaluating discursive practices. As I have explained, the normative standards for evaluating deliberation are well-theorized. Insofar as the conditions of justification are met, deliberation produces better collective outcomes: collective opinions and agendas (which feed into collective decisions) that are more just and more likely to be perceived as legitimate by those affected. Deliberation

should also produce more informed and well-reasoned opinions. Deliberation can be judged by how well it promotes justice, perceptions of legitimacy, and epistemically-sound collective opinions and agendas.

Because democratic theorists have paid less attention to non-deliberative discursive practices less effort has been made to theorize standards for judging non-deliberative talk. I wish to warn against judging all discursive practices by the degree to which they achieve deliberative aims, and make the case that different sets of discursive practices should be judged for their unique strengths relative to basic aims of democracy. For instance, political communication—issuing slogans, accusations, and other assertions without justification—should not necessarily be judged by the degree it contributes to the deliberative outcome of more perceived legitimacy. Rather, non-deliberative political talk should be judged by the degree it incentivizes political inclusions.

Following my framework, it makes little sense to criticize activists using political communication to mobilize followers for being perceived as “hostile, unconventional, or unpleasant” (Bashir et al. 2013, p. 614). Non-deliberative political talk—issuing slogans, declarations, polemics, accusations, and other assertions—should not necessarily be criticized if it is perceived as illegitimate by intended audiences. In the 1960s, many civil rights activists’ words and deeds were perceived as illegitimate by their intended audiences. For instance, according to an October 1963 poll, a full 73 percent of Americans believed Black Americans “should stop their demonstrations now that they have made their point even though some of their demands have not been met” (*Gallup Poll - Civil Rights* N.d.). Note that this poll was conducted before the passing of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and Black Americans’ unmet demands included voting. Civil rights activists’ speech and actions were important *not* because they were perceived as acceptable by White Americans in the early-1960s. Civil rights activists’ political communication and mobilization was important because it helped empower the inclusion of Black Americans in social and political life. Disruptive words and actions expanded the possibilities for Black citizens’ participation in political practices such

as voting and deliberating.

Identifying the democratic aim of incentivizing political inclusions also helps distinguish normatively better (and worse) political communication. Supporters of the Movement for Black Lives (an anti-racism movement) shout slogans and issue statements to incentivize political inclusions. Supporters of White nationalist movements also shout slogans and issue statements, but with the aim of reinforcing a racialized hierarchy that entails the social and political exclusion, oppression, and domination of non-Whites. Both anti-racism movements and White nationalist movements use the same generic political practices—political communication—but we can judge their contributions to democratic systems based on how well they achieve the democratic aim of empowering political inclusions. Since supporters of White nationalist movements aim to reinforce *exclusions*, we can judge their use of political communication as harmful to democratic health.

The comparison of the Movement for Black Lives and White nationalist movements offers an unambiguous example of how activists can use political communication to incentivize inclusions or reinforce exclusions, and an unambiguous example of normatively better and worse political communication. The world is rarely so unambiguous. In reality, agents always belong to multiple social groups simultaneously, and can experience the intersection of (dis)empowerment in many ways (Weldon 2006). Social movements that aim to incentivize the political inclusion of certain disempowered social group members may ignore or actively work to disempower other social group members.

During the 1860s Reconstruction Era in the United States, after the Thirteenth Amendment abolished slavery, a tension arose between suffragettes, who were disproportionately White, bourgeois women seeking the vote for themselves and former abolitionists who were seeking the vote for Black men (Davis 2011). Many White suffragettes loudly opposed both the Fourteenth Amendment, which granted only male citizens the ballot, and the Fifteenth Amendment, which prohibited disenfranchisement based on race but not based on sex. For instance, when Elizabeth Candy Stanton, a leading figure in the early women's

rights movement, was asked whether she would support Black men's enfranchisement before the enfranchisement of women she replied: "I say no; I would not trust him [a Black man] with my rights... If women are still to be represented by men, I say let only the highest type of manhood stand at the helm of the State"(cited in Davis 2011, p. 83).¹⁰

Frederick Douglass, a leading abolitionist who had been one of the earliest proponents of women's enfranchisement, advocated passionately for both the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments despite the provisions which would continue to exclude women from the vote. Douglass argued that the empowerment of Black men and ongoing exclusion of women was justified due to the urgency of granting some political power to Black Americans who regularly experienced a level of violence that White, middle-class women did not have to fear (Davis 2011). Black suffragette and anti-abolitionist, Sojourner Truth, objected to the Fourteenth Amendment and to a debate that largely ignored Black women, noting that "if colored men get their rights, and not colored women theirs, you will see colored men will be masters over the women, and it will be just as bad as it was before" (cited in Davis 2011, p. 83).

I have said that political talk should be judged by the degree to which it incentivizes political inclusions, but the question of inclusion is complicated by intersectionality. Stanton's speech and activism aimed to incentivize political inclusions for White women but was also motivated to maintain a racialized hierarchy that guaranteed her White privilege. Douglass's speech and activism aimed to incentivize political inclusions for all people but he was ultimately willing to sacrifice the inclusion of women to expand political inclusions for Black men.

The question of what kind of inclusion is normatively best has been most fully developed in Black feminist thought on centring the margins (hooks 2000). The concept of "margins to center" refers to the idea that creating a context where political practices can contribute to

¹⁰To make their point clearer, in *History of Woman Suffrage, vol. 2* Stanton et. al (1887) write: "Who can hesitate to decide, when the question lies between educated women and ignorant negroes?" (cited in Davis 2011, p. 83).

just and legitimate outcomes requires first empowering the inclusion of the most marginalized. This idea echoes in Sojourner Truth’s opposition to the Fourteenth Amendment “because it effectively denied the franchise to *Black* women” (Davis 2011, p. 83). The goal of centring the margins can be thought of as a regulative ideal. That is, the regulative standard to which real efforts at inclusion should aspire even if centring the margins may be difficult or impossible to fully achieve in practice (since marginality is a context-dependent and always moving target). According to a margins-to-center standard for judging efforts to incentivize inclusions, political speech that seeks to incentivize inclusions for only White women or only Black men fall short of the ideal (though they may differ in how far they fall from this ideal).¹¹

Similarly, aspiring to empower moral inclusions among the marginalized offers a benchmark for distinguishing normatively better non-political discursive practices. In hierarchical societies, non-political discursive practices that are restricted to empowered social group members (such as White people or men) does little if anything to *expand* moral inclusions. Of course, it does not *necessarily* undermine democratic health when, for instance, non-political discursive practices among White people promote bonds of reciprocity and mutual respect among White people.¹² However, White people developing deontic commitments

¹¹I would like to stress that I am not trying to create to create an equivalence between Stanton’s advocacy of empowering women and maintaining White privilege (which was motivated by racist ideology) and Douglass’s advocacy of empowering men even if it meant maintaining men’s privilege (which was motivated by a fear for Black lives). Political practices, including discursive practices, can be judged on a spectrum by how close they come to centring the margins. There is a strong case for the intuition that empowering Black men who wanted political rights to try and save lives (e.g., so Black men could serve on juries and potentially convict those guilty of lynching to dissuade the practice) comes closer to the ideal of centring the margins (even as it falls short) as compared to empowering middle-class White women who wanted to enjoy the same privileges as White men (privileges which depended upon maintaining a racialized social hierarchy because they *included* White privilege).

¹²Although non-political talk in homogeneous communication networks among empowered group members in hierarchical societies *can* undermine democratic health. Recall the finding that White residents from homogeneously White neighborhoods using coded racial language to resist school integration were impervious to Black speakers’ complaints that their arguments were racist (Mendelberg and Oleske 2000). However,

with other White people does little to expand moral inclusions in the sense that, in societies marred by White racism, White people's moral worth is already affirmed by a social hierarchy that uses people of color to demarcate where the bottom is (cf. Baldwin 1985).

However, in hierarchical societies, enclave communication among the disempowered *does* expand moral inclusions and so makes larger contributions to democratic systems. Enclave non-political discursive practices among the disempowered helps disempowered group members affirm one another's worth in social systems that otherwise deny them moral standing.¹³ Finally, as I have explained, *cross-cutting* non-political discursive practices—non-political discursive practices occurring between different social group members—is essential to the health of democratic systems. Cross-cutting non-political talk expands moral inclusions by developing deontic commitment across intergroup boundaries.

Conclusion

Deliberation plays an essential role in democratic systems. Insofar as the conditions of justification are met, deliberation helps people link their private preferences into collective opinions and agendas. When people perceive their preferences reflected in collective opinions and wills, they are more likely to perceive collective outcomes as legitimate (Chambers 1996, Habermas 1998, Manin 1987). However, focusing singularly on deliberation—or stretching the concept of deliberation to include all discursive practices that serve democratic aims—

White residents from integrated neighbourhoods recognized that arguments opposing school integration rested on coded racial appeals. When empowered group members only forge bonds of mutual respect with members of their own group, there is less motivation for them to treat out-group members as equally worthy of authoring collective decisions, and so less motivation to take out-group members' arguments seriously.

¹³This is why Whites-only social clubs or events can be judged as making dubious contributions to democratic systems, while the associations and meetings in the Black public sphere can be judged as making positive contributions to democratic systems. This is not a double standard; it involves applying the same standard (expanding moral inclusions). The principle of centring the margins also applies: enclave non-political discursive practices that promote deontic commitments and incentivize the moral inclusion of the most marginalized groups make the greatest contributions to democratic systems.

introduces conceptual ambiguity and contributes to a situation where researchers talk past one another. It has also consequences for normative theory, because it confuses the standards by which we should judge the contributions of different discursive practices to democratic systems.

I have proposed two central criteria for distinguishing between discursive practices: whether discursive practices are oriented to issues of collective concern and whether discursive practices are characterized by reciprocal reason-giving. These two criteria produce a typology of four sets of discursive practices: deliberation, political communication, non-political reason-giving, and non-political communication. The normative importance of deliberation—the connection between reciprocal reason-giving and the goods of justice and democratic legitimacy—is well-theorized. The central contribution of my present work to the democratic theory canon is identifying the distinct contributions that political communication and non-political talk make to democratic systems.

Political communication contributes to democratic systems to the extent that political communication empowers political inclusions. Specifically, the degree to which political communication contributes to democratic systems should be judged by to the extent to which it empowers the political inclusion of the most marginalized. Non-political discursive practices contribute to democratic systems to the extent they promote reciprocal attitudes and incentivize moral inclusions. Non-political reason-giving is also important for developing rhetorical and cognitive capacities in lower-stakes settings. In terms of contributing to democracies, non-political talk is particularly beneficial when it promotes reciprocal attitudes and moral inclusions across salient social divides in pluralized societies and when it expands moral inclusions by allowing disempowered group members to mutually affirm one another's moral worth by discursively affirming one another's bids for connection.

Distinguishing deliberation, non-deliberative political communication, and non-political talk lends insight into unanswered questions in the deliberative democracy canon related to how the requisite political inclusions and commitments to reciprocity are developed in

societies marred by social hierarchies or deep cultural divisions. As my discussion clarifies, political systems where asymmetrical power relations systematically block deliberation, non-deliberative political communication—such as shouting slogans and making statements—are essential for incentivizing political inclusions. In societies marked by deep divisions, non-political communication is essential for building the kinds of deontic commitments that enable members of different social groups to navigate the strain of collective rule by supporting the illocutionary aspects of discursive conflict resolution.

The purpose of my work is not simply descriptive, to help with conceptual clarification; my work is also prescriptive, to help researchers and practitioners make judgments about which discursive practices are best suited for deepening the democratic capacities of political systems. My discussion has implications for democratic practitioners—for instance, local decision-makers, activists, and practitioners in the field of democratic innovation—interested in engaging members of the public in discursive practices to promote more informed public opinion, expand political inclusions, or promote reciprocal attitudes and moral inclusions. Democratic practitioners should be attentive to the problems of democracy that need to be solved in order for a given engagement process to be successful. For instance, polarized public opinions in segregated societies with little intergroup contact might be organized into carefully designed institutional forums to encourage participants to reach more fully informed opinions through deliberation.¹⁴ Even within these institutional forums, practitioners should begin engagement processes with exercises aimed at promoting low-conflict, interpersonal interaction (intergroup “contact”) *before* attempting deliberation about matters of collective concern. For instance, opening participatory practices with ice-breaking exercises that entail self-disclosure and perspective taking, and engaging participants in

¹⁴To reiterate, deliberation can help people link preferences into collective opinions and agendas *without* producing interpersonal agreement or societal consensus. Deliberation successfully helps people link preferences into collective opinions and agendas (and produces more fully informed public opinion) insofar as deliberation helps people understand where they stand and why, where people with opposing preferences stand and why, and a better understanding of where and why dissensus exists.

group tasks that are solved through cooperation.

Studies of micro-institutional deliberative forums have made invaluable contributions to deliberative research, and these kinds of micro-institutional forums play an important role in democratic systems. However, small-scale, high quality institutional forums cannot replace deliberation in the unstructured mass public (Beauvais 2018, Chambers 2009). One of the reasons scholars have neglected deliberation in the mass public is that it is hard to measure deliberation; it is hard to operationalize the concept of reciprocal reason-giving about collective issues. As I have shown, operationalizing the concept of “deliberation” using a measure of intense political disagreement is problematic. Not only can deliberation occur in the absence of disagreement (agents also deliberate issues they have few or no opinions on), but agents can also experience intense disagreement that is never addressed by reason-giving because inequalities, domination, and the absence of reciprocity block deliberation. Evidence of this comes from research showing that disagreement in communication networks is more common among the disempowered—among people of color, the poor, and the least educated (Mutz 2006).

Jacobs, Cook and Delli Carpini (2009) have also tried to study deliberation in the mass public with a nationally-representative sample of U.S. respondents. The authors operationalize “face-to-face deliberation” with a variable that asks respondents whether they attended a meeting to talk about local, national, or collective issues. While this is a more promising measure, this variable still does not strictly measure deliberation insofar as deliberation must involve reason-giving. This variable is a more general measure of participation in face-to-face public discourse that does not distinguish between deliberative and non-deliberative political communication.¹⁵

Clearly, empirically measuring deliberation in the unstructured mass public is fraught with challenges. I would propose that a fruitful avenue for future research might be to focus less on measuring actual moments of discursive reason-giving in the mass public and

¹⁵It also maintains the focus on micro-level processes and is not useful to researchers interested in studying macro-level deliberative processes (e.g., between institutions or over time).

to focus attention on the extent to which conditions of justification are met. What really matters is that agents *can* deliberate—that they are empowered to participate in discursively influencing others with nothing other than the force of reasons—should the need arise.

Recognizing that unstructured deliberation in the mass public is only successful to the extent that the conditions of justification are met highlights the systemic relationship between discursive practices and structural features of political systems—including legacies of historical political exclusions, ongoing structural inequalities and group-based social hierarchies, and patterns of residential and social segregation. This highlights a central claim from the critical theory canon: that political systems must promote a degree of social justice through redistribution and mechanisms for promoting social integration (to promote socio-economic and moral equalities) to support the democratic aims of empowering political inclusions, forming collective opinions and agendas, and making collective decisions.

As my discussion shows, distinguishing deliberation, political communication, and non-political discursive practices and identifying their strengths relative to democratic goals helps clarify unanswered questions in the deliberative democracy canon. Distinguishing between discursive practices helps clarify mixed empirical findings and opens-up a fruitful research agenda. Furthermore, identifying the strengths of discursive practices relative to different democratic aims offers useful normative benchmarks for judging these discursive practices. The research agenda and normative standards I propose will benefit scholars and practitioners interested in studying or organizing deliberation to promote more just and legitimate collective opinions and agendas, non-deliberative political communication (including disruptive speech) to incentivize political inclusions, and non-political discourses to incentivize moral inclusions.

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