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Reflections on Hearing the Other Side, in Theory and in Practice

Diana C. Mutz
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Diana C. Mutz

REFLECTIONS ON *HEARING THE OTHER SIDE*, IN THEORY AND IN PRACTICE

ABSTRACT: *In response to my book's finding that there is a tradeoff between two apparently desirable traits—a propensity to participate in politics, on the one hand, and to expose oneself to disagreeable political ideas, on the other—symposium participants suggest a number of reasons why this tradeoff should not trouble participatory democratic theorists. One argument is that electoral advocacy (the type of participation I measure) is not an important form of participation anyway, so we are better off without it. However, those people who do not vote also tend not to participate in politics in other ways, so electoral advocacy is the lowest possible bar for defining participation. Partisans are also more likely to be well informed and to offer coherent reasons for their political preferences. A second argument suggests that deliberative theorists have somewhat contradictory views of social influence, encouraging it in the context of deliberative encounters but perceiving it as pernicious when members of political parties influence their members. A third response is to posit a division of labor between closed-minded partisan advocates and open-minded people who are exposed to cross-cutting debate. However, it is difficult to see how the benefits of cross-cutting exposure will be conveyed to the advocates who participate in meaningful ways.*

My first reaction to the set of essays in this volume was to be extremely flattered to have such a distinguished group of scholars read my book, let

Diana C. Mutz, mutz@sas.upenn.edu, Department of Political Science and Annenberg School of Communication, University of Pennsylvania, 208 S. 37th Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104, is the author, *inter alia*, of *Impersonal Influence: How Perceptions of Mass Collectives Affect Political Attitudes* (Cambridge, 1998).

alone take the time to reflect so thoughtfully on its arguments. It is also quite gratifying to learn that my thoughts have influenced scholars outside of my immediate subfield. Because my work since *Hearing the Other Side* (2006) has been focused on mass media more than face-to-face communication, I have been remiss in following much of the recent writing on deliberative theory. I welcome the opportunity to reconsider my ideas in light of new developments.

These five essays raise many interesting points, more than I can possibly do justice to in a short response, so I have singled out for comment what I find to be the most provocative and potentially fruitful avenues for future work combining political theory with empirical research. I begin by focusing on the perspectives on political participation offered by these essays. Next, I discuss whether a division of labor between deliberators and activists is likely to be an effective solution to the underlying tension I first identified in *Hearing the Other Side*. Finally, I offer my opinions on the most promising avenues for increasing cross-cutting exposure in the future.

Berger's description of the "accidental theorist" is quite fitting in my case. I did not set out to make a contribution to political theory and I am not trained as a normative theorist. I started from a general interest in and enthusiasm for deliberative theory, and a desire to test empirically some of the benefits that had been claimed to flow from deliberative encounters. Because I found definitions of deliberation highly inconsistent across scholars and overly complex for purposes of empirical research, I narrowed my focus to one essential component of deliberation: the extent to which people are exposed to cross-cutting political views. I examined potential benefits that logically might accrue from this particular aspect of deliberation.

For me, this collection of essays highlights further important discrepancies between political theorists' assumptions about mass political behavior and the realities suggested by empirical studies of political behavior. In this sense, it is extremely gratifying to see the conversation between theorists and empiricists continue. An end to that conversation is surely less desirable than a continuation, even if it is one without a resolution.

Political Participation as Partisan Advocacy

In his essay, Ben Berger (2013) notes an almost total neglect of participatory normative theory in my book, a criticism that is well

taken. Because I started out testing hypotheses derived from deliberative theory, I did not pay much attention to participatory theory. By political participation, what I meant in the book was partisan advocacy. In these essays, some authors call it "partisanship" or "partisan activism"; these variations in terminology seem fine to me, so long as we all agree for purposes of this conversation that the term "partisanship" need not necessarily be tied to political parties. Partisanship and partisan activism are suitable synonyms for political advocacy—that is, supporting a controversial cause, party, or idea of some kind. What makes political advocacy different from involvement in the garden club, the bowling league, or Toastmasters is that advocacy demands forming opinions and taking stands on controversial issues. It is, in this sense, inherently unsafe from a social perspective.

The term "civic engagement" is often used to refer to the much broader swath of participation that includes non-controversial civic involvement such as joining the Rotary Club. Who could object to someone raising money for scholarships, volunteering to help keep the highways clean, working with underprivileged youth, and so forth? My point is not that these forms of participation are unimportant, but rather that they are more attractive to many citizens than partisan engagement particularly because they are uncontroversially viewed as worthwhile by others. No one risks that others will think ill of her for working in a soup kitchen or look askance at him for volunteering at the local hospital.

Political advocacy, on the other hand, requires far more courage and more skill to negotiate effectively in a social environment. Thus, when universities promote civic engagement among their students, as is common at the moment, apolitical do-gooding is generally what they have in mind: "giving back" to the community and "getting involved" in helpful ways. As Berger notes in *Attention Deficit Democracy* (2011), as well as in his essay in this volume, civic engagement has become a "confusing catchall" that does not differentiate political, moral and social engagement. I would be very happy to see the term meet its demise in favor of more specific terms, as Berger recommends. Once a definition encompasses everything, it becomes of little use for purposes of communication among scholars, or for purposes of empirical research.

In the research project that led to *Hearing the Other Side*, participation was merely an afterthought, which helps explain (though not excuse) the general neglect of participatory theory in the book. I used measures of participation that happened to be in the data I was analyzing simply

because they were there. I had not anticipated the tension I found between participation and cross-cutting exposure, and thus had not included as many empirical measures of participation as I might have otherwise.

All of the participation measures fit under the traditional election-oriented definition of political participation as political advocacy—voting, donating time or money to campaigns, promoting one candidate over another, displaying bumper stickers, and so forth. Had the participation items instead tapped the broader kind of activities I call civic engagement above—membership in the Rotary or in garden clubs, for example—I doubt I would have found the same relationships; outside of competitive advocacy involving contentious groups, there would be no logical reason for participation to pose risks to social harmony in people's relationships. So long as a form of political participation does not generate any opposition, it should not have potential social costs.

This distinction forms the core of the differences of opinion expressed in these essays. For example, Simone Chambers (2013) suggests that the participation scale I use is "problematic" and "voting-centric." The latter is most certainly true; it included the traditional participation questions that are asked in election studies. They all involved the advocacy of one side over another in competitions of people and ideas. Nonpartisan forms of participation should not generate the same tension between social harmony and a highly participative citizenry because they are not controversial.

But far from being the wrong kind of participation in the context of my study, I continue to think that partisan participation is precisely the form of participation that should be cause for concern when we observe that it is engaged in primarily by those who have little cross-cutting exposure. Controversy and competing ideas are the *raison d'être* for deliberation. Reason giving and a shared understanding of differences are most important when there is controversy; it is much less critical to engagements of the non-controversial sort.

Differentiating Desirable Forms of Participation

Chambers questions whether we really want political activists at the top of a participation scale. I am not sure what she has in mind instead; perhaps some indicator of the quality of participation? Among empirical scholars, citizens who participate most actively and energetically are

generally held in high esteem as the "good citizens" of American politics. Chambers (2013, 203) suggests that "low voter turnout does not necessarily mean lower political participation." However, empirically speaking, it usually does mean exactly that. If people do not bother to vote, then it is extremely unlikely that they will engage in more demanding forms of political participation. Large-scale analyses have demonstrated time and again that it is not very fruitful to ask a representative sample of Americans about other forms of political participation because very small percentages of the general population engage in them, and they are a subset of those who already vote.

Based on these essays, my impression is that theorists are perhaps overly dismissive of partisan activism and under-concerned about the need to promote it. Instead of valuing this form of participation, it is presented as an extremely ugly stepsister to the "good" kind of participation. As Hélène Landemore (2013, 221) suggests, "We need to reinvent democratic institutions in ways that foster, or are at least compatible with, critical-deliberative involvement rather than partisan activism."

The intended distinction between critical-deliberative involvement and partisan advocacy is not entirely clear to me. Partisanship is characterized here as a source of "polarization and groupthink in segregated groups of citizens" and of "mindless voting." As Landemore (2013, 223n7) continues, "At its worst, one might even argue that partisan activism for its own sake (as in 'voting early,' no matter how mindlessly) simply 'encourages the bastards.'" I am not entirely certain who the bastards are here, but empirical political science tells us that early voters tend to be extremely well informed as well as very politically active. Thus, characterizing them as "mindless" simply does not jibe with empirical reality.

If partisan advocacy is the bad kind of participation in the eyes of many theorists, then what is the better alternative? As Landemore (2013, 218, emph. added) explains further,

> What I call "critical-deliberative involvement" consists in participating as an *autonomous* and reasoning agent in the life of the community. . . . Critical-deliberative involvement can also consist in acting within traditionally representative institutions, including by *voting in an informed manner*. It can mean supporting parties and political leaders, *but in a conditional and mindful way*. It can mean running for office, to the extent that one does not jeopardize one's moral integrity and *independence of*

judgment. It demands at all times an acute awareness of the instrumental nature and fallibility of political institutions and an ability to maintain one's *independence of judgment*, even as one looks to opinion and party leaders as sources of information.

I struggled to understand why partisan activism is regarded so derogat-orily whereas "critical-deliberative involvement" is seen as crucially different. Based on the description above, the difference lies not in whether participation is through traditional institutions or whether it involves political parties. Instead, Landemore contrasts "carefully thought-out personal beliefs" against "the instructions of a party" and emphasizes the importance of autonomy and independence of judgment at several junctures. However, if one believes that it is fundamentally better for people to make up their minds autonomously and indepen-dently, that is, without being influenced by others, then deliberation would seem an odd choice as a preferred model of participation. The whole point of deliberative encounters is for people to influence one another. If they are not going to change one another's minds, what would be the point of bringing them together? Deliberation, by definition, involves situations with rampant potential for social influence.

Instead of changing viewpoints, the point of deliberation could be information acquisition. Landemore emphasizes that the form of parti-cipation she has in mind must occur "in an informed manner" and in a "mindful way." But here again, the empirical evidence tells us that partisans are on the high side of levels of information. From the time scholars began measuring party identification, it has always been the case that partisans are the most informed segment of the citizenry. They are not voting mindlessly, at least not relative to their non-partisan compatriots. They are more resistant to influence from political advert-ising, more knowledgeable about the reasons for their issue positions and candidate choices, and more consistently politically involved. What's not to like?

Perhaps social influence is seen negatively only when it comes from an organized interest group such as a political party? As Nancy Rosenblum (2008, 321) points out in *On The Side of the Angels*, making choices independent of political parties is neither obviously better nor worse; people "sometimes act independent of parties from good motives, sometimes from bad motives." Moreover, these days almost all people are part of organized interests of some kind or other, whether they are

cognizant card-carrying members or not. Members of labor unions, the AARP, the American Legion, and the NAACP are all part of advocacy groups that try to tell their membership what to do and how to vote. The idea of citizens forming political opinions in a social vacuum strikes me as not only unrealistic, but normatively unappealing. So here again, I find it difficult to understand how theorists differentiate "good" from "bad" participation.

But surely partisans have a negative and polarizing influence on public opinion, as Landemore suggests? Another reason theorists might want to be more circumspect about discouraging partisan activism is that by suggesting that "good citizens" are not partisans, theorists risk further marginalizing all but the most extreme citizens from the political process. If people who care about social harmony are not involved in politics because they see it as inherently alienating and controversial, then we will naturally see fewer moderates in positions of political power. Despite the reputation of politics as a "get-rich-quick" scheme, it is quite difficult to persuade Americans to run for political office. Any narrowing of the pool of those willing to be counted as partisan naturally leads to a more extreme pool of potential candidates.

Interestingly, Mill is cited approvingly as an example of someone who rejects partisan activism but advocates critical-deliberative involvement. In the positively regarded example provided, Mill is distributing pamphlets on contraception to churches, an activity that strikes me as an easy example of political advocacy. But this activity is instead classified by Landemore as the good kind of participation because it "stemmed from carefully thought-out personal beliefs, not the instructions of a party." It is unclear to me if it is the sheer association with political parties that sullies one's participatory activities, or if it is because "carefully thought-out personal beliefs" are viewed as being automatically different in kind from partisan activists' participation.

Those familiar with the history of empirical evidence about the American electorate may be surprised to learn that many normative theorists who advocate critical-deliberative participation believe that partisans' beliefs and preferences are not as well thought out as those of non-partisans. I know that I was surprised, because I am not aware of any evidence to support this belief. One might not agree with the logic of partisans' preferences, but partisans who would take the time to walk door to door with pamphlets advocating an issue position have among the most well-developed belief systems, partisan or otherwise. It has

always been the case that the most politically informed Americans are more partisan; they have opinions and they act on them. As Rosenblum (2008) notes, parties are "the darlings" of empirical political science but the orphans of political philosophy.

The commentary provided by Robert Y. Shapiro (2013), another empirical scholar, echoes my own surprise about this particular collision of political theory and empirical political science. As he points out, it was not long ago that political scientists were pushing for more clearly defined, ideologically consistent political parties. Nonetheless, my impression is that most of the theorists writing in this volume would see ideological consistency as a sign of mindless voting. Ironically, then, only judgments that do not follow a predictable pattern would be seen as independently formed and well thought out. As demonstrated in the many studies Shapiro reviews, the American public is now more issue savvy and ideological, and turnout has increased somewhat. Yet theorists are not rushing to embrace this as a positive development; in fact, it may have occurred precisely because cross-cutting exposure has declined, and people are increasingly exposed to like-minded views (see Dilliplane 2011).

Ultimately I do not think it is as easy or as desirable as Landemore suggests to separate party-related political activism from other forms of political advocacy. Moreover, as an empirical matter it is difficult to argue that partisanship has no appeal; empirical evidence suggests that parties are essential to meaningful and effective political action. Parties familiarize citizens with arguments; they help with the division of labor that makes contemporary politics possible on a large scale. Moreover, true "independence of judgment" is a myth. No one exists in a social vacuum and we are all influenced by the views of those around us, whether they are party members, union members, or bowling league members. In the end, then, how do we judge whether someone's political participation is the right kind?

Take the particularly egregious example of a hypothetical person who votes for a congressional candidate he sees as superior to the opposition's candidate purely because the candidate is of the same political party. Isn't this clearly an example of what Landemore sees as negative about party-related political participation: mindless adherence to a party line? Even in this extreme example, it is possible to envision such a vote as a highly mindful, strategic action. After all, legislation must be enacted by a congressional majority. If the voter's preferred legislation is typically

supported by candidates of a given party, then it is not at all irrational for him to support the inferior candidate if she is a member of that party.

This leads me to what I see as the crux of the problem, for purposes of furthering a conversation on this matter between theorists and empiricists. Empiricists naturally seek evidence documenting whether one form of participation or another is more desirable. Theorists are focused on the processes by which individuals arrive at political decisions (independently versus with advice from other people or institutions; with low versus high levels of information; and so forth). The processes themselves are seldom observable, even to the individuals making the decisions. Whether Mill engaged in political activism because of "personal beliefs" or because he was influenced by other groups or individuals to hold those beliefs seems a distinction without a difference. As an advocate of empiricism, Mill would certainly appreciate the problem; people are not capable of accurately reporting the origins of their own views, let alone the origins of others' views.

How, then, can one differentiate desirable from undesirable forms of participation? Should holding consistent party-line opinions on issues be sufficient evidence of mindless opinion formation? Because we seldom know the confluence of factors that have affected how any given person ends up thinking as she does, it seems unwise to single out partisans as having followed undesirable opinion-formation processes. And it is worth reiterating that based on this criterion, a person whose political views were chosen totally at random would top the desirability scale.

What Is Deliberative "Success"?

The same kind of problem can be observed when examining differences of opinion between empiricists and theorists in judging Deliberative Polls. I was surprised to learn that theorists consider deliberative polls a "gold standard" for deliberation (Mansbridge 2010). Among empiricists, there is far less consensus about the existence of evidence of "success."

What counts as successful deliberation? As I pointed out in my examination of whether deliberative theory was a falsifiable theory (Mutz 2008), even when changes are observed in participants it is difficult to know if they are due to deliberation or some other factor, given the many components of such events (incentives, information, the presence of experts, and so forth). More importantly, there seems to be little agreement on what the outcome of a successful deliberative poll

would look like. If opinions change, is that a sign of success or failure? If people learn from the expert information provided, how is this different from the usual top-down, elite-driven process of becoming informed? And how will those not involved in this endeavor know that they can trust the "expert information" that was provided or the variable quality of the deliberations' moderators?

Given that the relatively small sample of people that participates must represent what opinions in the larger collective would look like if all citizens had deliberated, it also matters how the general public regards this process and its outcomes. Will those who were not part of the deliberative poll feel represented by the "considered opinions" of those who did participate? I am constantly asked how anyone in their right mind can believe that a sample of 1,000 people can represent the views of such a large nation. Probability theory can explain this, but many remain dubious. Even when they are highly representative, deliberative poll results have the same legitimacy problems that regular polls do.

But deliberative polls face a potentially much greater legitimacy problem. It seems unlikely that citizens en masse will rush to embrace the notion that they *would have* reached the same conclusions as the deliberators had they been chosen to participate instead of those who were. In fact, they are right to be skeptical. Interactive processes tend to have results that are far less predictable than is random sampling. If, for example, we take 1,000 voters from a population, sampling theory tells us that the percentage who favor an issue will seldom vary from the true percentage by more than a few points. However, if we sample 1,000 voters, let them deliberate, then poll them, the results might be wildly different from one random sample to the next. This is because interactive processes such as deliberation are subject to "historical dependence," meaning that the result can be greatly affected by chance occurrences early in the process that set the process moving in a certain direction. Historical dependence has been well documented in many fields (e.g., Cohen 1976; Arthur 1989), including models involving mutual persuasion (Clifford and Sudbury 1973). In other words, the outcome of a particular deliberative poll is highly contingent on events in the early stages of the process, the occurrence of which would be uncertain in a different iteration of the poll. Thus, deliberative polling does not have anywhere near the reliability of ordinary polling.

The Tension Between Participation and Cross-Cutting Exposure

Central to my book's argument is the tension between, on the one hand, people's need for social harmony in their interpersonal environments and, on the other, the need for cross-cutting exposure in order to make balanced political decisions on controversial issues.

One way to alleviate the tension between political advocacy and cross-cutting exposure is aptly illustrated by some of the arguments in these essays. If we simply extend the definition of political participation beyond political advocacy to include civic engagement in the broad sense of public involvement of all kinds, then "political participation" poses little threat to people's interpersonal relationships. So long as they choose certain non-controversial forms of civic involvement over partisan advocacy, there should be no problem making these two ends compatible.

As suggested earlier in this essay, civic engagement serves as an effective means of distancing one's self from partisan turmoil while still being publicly involved. Civic engagement need not threaten social cohesion in the same way political advocacy does. I see the widespread popularity of civic-engagement initiatives as symptomatic of a desire for a "way out" for those who do not want to risk alienating those different from themselves, but who still want to remain civically active. It is not the only way out, however. Wealthy patrons of political causes may also decide to pursue the initiatives they care about directly through philanthropy rather than through electing like-minded government officials. Contributing either time or money to a cause produces less controversy than being actively involved in partisan politics. Philanthropy allows some to pursue politics by other means (Frumkin 2006).

A second criticism offered in these essays is that I impugn deliberation in the absence of cross-cutting exposure, even though most definitions of deliberation require more than such exposure. This is certainly true; cross-cutting exposure is only one of many components generally required for deliberation. But as a logical matter, if we agree that cross-cutting exposure is *necessary* for deliberation, and if we acknowledge that it is the cross-cutting part of the activity that makes deliberation difficult, then cross-cutting exposure is more than just one of several parts. It is a linchpin if deliberative democracy is to work in practice, not just in theory. If deliberation as it occurs in everyday life is to facilitate the ends

advocated by normative theorists, then it must incorporate exposure to differing viewpoints. To the extent that political advocates tend not to have much exposure to alternative points of view, their participation should be of a lesser quality.

A third, more complex criticism is that in *Hearing the Other Side*, I unnecessarily demand that both cross-cutting exposure and political advocacy be incorporated within the same individual. By suggesting that these are simultaneous responsibilities of the individual, I create a no-win situation, given that my findings suggest that cross-cutting exposure diminishes the propensity to participate. Chambers (2013, 199), however, asks (in effect): So what if political activists are not open to hearing the other side? Both open-minded citizens and partisan activists "make equally important and positive contributions to deliberative politics when it is viewed as a system that deploys a division of labor." According to this line of argument, no single site of deliberation must embody all components so long as the system as a whole incorporates all necessary elements. So some people can experience cross-cutting exposure while others actively participate in partisan politics.

This idea is an appealing one (see Mansbridge et al. 2012) because it suggests that the tension between participation and exposure to cross-cutting views can be alleviated through a simple division of labor; some people will be exposed to differing political views, and others will participate as active political advocates. One obvious difficulty with this approach is envisioning how the benefits of exposure to multiple perspectives (tolerance, awareness of others' perspectives, moderation, and so forth) will be communicated to the citizens responsible for political advocacy. If they participate in a way that does not acknowledge alternative viewpoints and dissimilar others' needs, then their activism may be counterproductive, exacerbating whatever problems the non-participative elements of society had hoped to solve. Participation that does not advocate on behalf of both parts of this division of labor will not serve both groups' interests.

The only scenario in which I can see a division of labor potentially working is if these roles were randomly assigned to people. If activists reflected the same interests and values, on average, as those who were inactive, then perhaps it could work, even without the need to transmit to the activists what was gleaned from exposure to oppositional views. Unfortunately, what we know about those who are most exposed to oppositional views and those who participate most energetically is that

they represent very different demographic and political profiles. Perhaps there are ways this might work at a system level that I have yet to envision, but for the moment, I remain skeptical that these different parts of a larger system would work together to provide the same outcome.

The Future of Hearing the Other Side

I agree with Landemore that the tendency to seek out like-minded others is hardly a recent problem. But it nonetheless has no easy solution by means of formal deliberative encounters or everyday interactions. The tendency for people to gravitate toward like-minded others is so basic and pervasive that apparently one can observe it even in preverbal infants. Babies demonstrate a preference for those who like the same things they do and hold negative attitudes toward those who do not share their tastes. For example, if one puppet is shown eating graham crackers and the other Cheerios, then a baby who prefers Cheerios will select the latter puppet to play with. Even very young babies repeatedly prefer those who share their tastes in food and clothing. And this tendency extends beyond one-on-one relationships; infants as young as nine months old prefer individuals who are nice to people like them and who are mean to people who are not like them (Hamlin, Wynn, and Bloom 2007; Hamlin, Mahajan, Liberman, and Wynn 2013).

As depressing as such findings may be, they tell us something about the nature of similarity seeking. People may be hardwired to desire communicating with those with similar ideas and tastes, and it is not likely to be easy to convince them they really want to expose themselves to difference. Exposure to cross-cutting views happens primarily because people do not have full control of their environments rather than because they actively choose diversity.

Although I may be overly optimistic, I do not think this means that encouraging cross-cutting exposure is a lost cause. With respect to the contemporary media environment, I agree with the excellent reviews provided by Shapiro and Chris Wisniewski (2013). There is no doubt that media choice has increased for most Americans, and greater choice is unlikely to be used in service of increased cross-cutting exposure. The explosion of channels on cable television has meant that people can avoid politics altogether; further, they can self-select particular flavors of exposure to politics and avoid much cross-cutting exposure if they so choose. I am not naïve enough to think that Americans are ready to voluntarily give up

their hundreds of cable channels in service to the cause of deliberative politics. Moreover, research published since *Hearing the Other Side* suggests that exposure to like-minded television content works in much the same way that interpersonal communication does, as I showed in my book: It increases some kinds of political participation over time (though not turnout), while exposure to cross-cutting news depresses participation. As Susanna Dilliplane (2011) summarizes, "the hypothesized energizing and enervating effects of exposure" also apply to mediated exposure.

Given that the Internet grants its users a tremendous amount of control over what they see and hear, it should not be terribly surprising that people use it to locate like-minded content. But the Internet is neither as good for cross-cutting discourse as some predicted, nor as bad as is often claimed by its detractors. I concur with Wisniewski that there probably has been too much emphasis on issues of access to the Internet (the so-called digital divide) and not enough on what people do with the Internet once they have access. The digital divide can conceivably be fixed with time; humanity's apparent desire for like-minded exposure is going to be a far harder problem to solve.

So what reasons might there be for optimism amidst such evidence? I can point to two possibilities. First, contrary to many apocalyptic predictions, things are not quite as bad as one might think on the media front. For example, the current American political television diet is not so heavily skewed toward like-minded political content as one might think. News programs without any recognizable partisan slant remain the most popular with American audiences. This is quite different from the pattern observed with face-to-face political discussion, where like-minded sources dominate. Fortunately these "neutral" sources tend to incorporate arguments on multiple sides, as Shapiro notes, even if it is only for purposes of creating the impression of intense conflict. The fact that Americans still overwhelming use more neutral than partisan sources contradicts predictions that people would soon abandon such traditional news for likeminded partisan sources (e.g., Bennett and Iyengar 2008; Sunstein 2007). "Neutral news remains a strong—indeed, the strongest—player in the increasingly competitive battle for the American news audience" (Dilliplane 2012).

A second source of optimism harks back to Carole Pateman's (1970) original emphasis on the importance of the workplace as a democratic training ground, though I deem the workplace important for somewhat different reasons. The types of interactions my book studied were

primarily dyadic interpersonal interactions that happened in the course of everyday life. I remain convinced that deliberation must be embedded in the course of people's daily lives in order to serve the legitimizing function envisioned by theorists. But based on burgeoning research, I think the American workplace is in many (though not all) ways the best available public forum.

People work because they need to make a living. We can pick and choose our close friends, but with many coworkers we must simply get along well enough to get the job done. We have little choice but to spend long hours together. People's discussions at work reflect the baseline availability of partisan opinions, and the majority of workplaces are roughly equally divided among Republicans and Democrats (Mondak and Mutz 2002a).

As a result, people are more likely to experience cross-cutting political opinions at work than anywhere else. Although I noted this in passing in *Hearing the Other Side*, additional data gathered since that time have further convinced me of the importance of this unique venue. Based on studies of a number of different kinds of workplaces, it appears that employees are quite accurate in assessing the political views of their work associates and supervisors. Surprisingly, they do not feel very threatened by differences of opinion in this context and do not feel that it affects their promotion or employment prospects. Moreover, they learn quite a bit about the other side simply from *listening* to others who are differently minded and are sometimes more interested in politics than they are. Even when one merely watches and listens, there is a great deal to be gained from spectating (see Green 2010). There are no paid moderators at work, but people typically hold their tongues and remain respectful so that they can continue to work in harmony alongside their colleagues (Mondak and Mutz 2002b).

The intensely social atmosphere in most workplaces creates spillover effects that increase the size of people's networks. Even more important, the workplace has been one of the most successful sites for racial and ethnic integration. As Cynthia Estlund (2003, 61) puts it, "people from different racial and ethnic groups—while often continuing to live, go to school, and worship in separate social spaces—increasingly work together." The workplace is a unique domain in which people experience lengthy and ongoing interactions with people with whom they would not otherwise choose to associate. It is, in this sense, an "involuntary association," one that eludes the problems of self-selection.

Of course, it remains to be seen if this uniquely integrative social context will be harnessed toward deliberative ends. At the moment, the workplace remains one of the few venues where close social interaction is combined with political heterogeneity, thus giving it tremendous unrealized potential (Mondak and Mutz 2002a). Although the workplace is not currently recognized as a public forum, and political speech is not protected in private workplaces, the majority of Americans think that it is (Mondak and Mutz 2002b). For now, this may make them more willing to engage in political talk around the water cooler than they would otherwise. In the long run, the civic potential of the American workplace is something that will need to be fostered and protected if it is to serve the purpose of encouraging cross-cutting political exposure.

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