Models of Citizenship and Public Sphere[1]

The lecture will explore the link between theories of the public sphere and democratic theory more generally. Democratic theory focuses on accountability and responsiveness in the decision-making process; theories of the public sphere focus on the role of public communication in facilitating or hindering this process. More specifically, the lecture will seek to define the democratic public sphere in the form of reviewing four traditions of democratic theory, exploring the answers they suggest for the public sphere and, more particularly, for the normative criteria of mass media discourse in Western liberal democracies. In a more matter-of-fact language, the questions about normative criteria of the public sphere could be formulated as follows: What qualities should the public sphere have to cultivate a vital democratic public life? What characteristics the participants – citizens (actors of public sphere) – should posses, what should be the form and content of their contributions to public discourse and how should the actors communicate with each other? What are the desirable outcomes of the process of communication in the public sphere?

We label the four traditions as Representative Liberal, Participatory Liberal, Discursive, and Constructionist. In each of the traditions sketched below, we attempt to highlight the ideas we see as being shared - thus defining a tradition - and to highlight the specific normative criteria that each perspective would endorse and emphasize. At the end, we summarize these criteria in terms of who should speak, the content of the process (what), style of speech preferred (how), and the relationship between discourse and decision-making (outcomes) that is sought (or feared).

I Representative liberal theory

[1] Excerpts and the table for this lecture are taken from Myra Marx Ferree , William A. Gamson, Juergen Gerhards, and Dieter Rucht, "Four models of the public sphere in modern democracies," *Theory and Society* 31: 289-324, 2002.

We focus particularly on theories that accept the desirability of a public sphere - strong and well-functioning one, - but one in which general public participation is limited and largely indirect. One can trace roots of representative liberal theory back to John Stuart Mill and such sceptical commentators on popular democracy and the French revolution as Edmund Burke. All authors in this tradition share the assumption that ultimate authority in society rests with the citizenry. Citizens, however, need policy makers who are ultimately accountable to them but they do not need to participate in public discourse on policy issues. Not only do they not need to, but public life is actually better off if they don't. This is the ''realist'' school of democracy - the belief that ordinary citizens are poorly informed and have no serious interest in public affairs, and are generally badly equipped for political participation. Hence, it is both natural and desirable for citizens to be passive, quiescent, and limited in their political participation in a well-functioning, party-led democracy.

For representative liberal theorists, the citizen's main role is to choose periodically which among competing teams of parties -- would-be office holders will exercise public authority. **If the media are doing their job**, citizens will be encouraged to vote, and the media will provide enough information about the parties and candidates so that citizens can choose intelligently among them. Representative liberals thus place particular weight on political parties as bearers of public discourse. From this perspective, an **important criterion of good public discourse** is its **transparency (TABLE).** It **should reveal what citizens need to know about the workings of their government**, and the parties that aggregate and represent their interests.

Theory types	Criteria for a good democratic public discourse			
	Who participates	In what sort of process	How ideas should be presented	Outcome of relation between discourse and decision-making
Representative liberal	Elite dominance Expertise Proportionality	Free marketplace of ideas Transparency	Detachment Civility	Closure
Participatory liberal	Popularinclusion	Empowerment	Range of styles	Avoidance of imposed closure
Discursive	Popular inclusion	Deliberative	Dialogue Mutual respect Civility	Avoidance of premature, nonconsensus-based closure
Constructionist	Popular inclusion	Empowerment Recognition	Narrative creativity	Avoidance ofexclusionary closure Expansion of the political community

Those citizens who feel their views are insufficiently represented have the political obligation to use the representative process being offered. Without their own representative at the table, their preferred frames will, appropriately, be largely disregarded. This is legitimate, since such views are, at best, irrelevant in practice. We will call this **standard elite dominance**. The public sphere here should reflect the public's representatives.

The larger and more representative the party or organization, **the more voice** it has earned in the **media**, and the more powerful it should be in shaping decisions. This suggests a **criterion of proportionality** (TABLE) - that is, media standing and the amount of coverage of the frames of different actors should be more or less proportional to their share of the electoral vote for parties or to membership size for relevant civil society actors. Thus, government officials, major party spokespersons, and large formal organizations that can credibly claim to represent the interests of a substantial portion of the population should dominate the public sphere. The nature and quality of their

relations with the mass media are central to evaluations of the quality of public discourse in general.

To expect citizens to be actively engaged in public life is seen by advocates of this view as, at best, wishful thinking or as ‘‘romantic but idle fantasy.’’ The media should encourage a dialogue among the informed, and most citizens are not well-informed enough to contribute. There are **exceptions** - citizens defined as ‘‘**experts**,’’ either on the political process in general, or on the substantive matter under discussion. This criterion of representative liberalism, expertise, emphasizes its value in informing the people’s representatives in making wise decisions, rather than in informing the public.

Ideally, experts should not be stakeholders in the conflict, but disinterested and without any political agenda. From this position, they can dispassionately advise. Experts should play a particularly strong role in defining the issues before they reach the stage at which decisions need to be reached. In some versions, journalists themselves should play the role of advisors to decision-makers in their commentary: journalists are expected to take a position on the issues at stake and so guide officials toward more knowledgeable choices. But the ‘‘chattering classes’’ should not usurp the appropriate role of parties and elected representatives.
When it comes to evaluating the **content** of public discourse, the operant metaphor for representative liberalism is the **free marketplace of ideas**.
TABLE look again

Restrictions on content are inherently suspect. The criterion of proportionality legitimately excludes those ideas held by small minorities but this does not exclude them on substantive grounds. Whether any content is too extreme to be permitted is a matter for debate. In Germany, groups or ideas that are judged to be ‘‘hostile to the constitution’’ are formally excluded, and denial of the Holocaust, use of Nazi symbols, and advocacy of Nazi views are legally prohibited. In the United States, no ideas are formally excluded but the ‘‘spectre of Communism’’ was used to allow both government and private actors to suppress and punish advocates of socialist ideas throughout most of

the twentieth century. But even the exclusion of ‘‘anti-democratic’’ ideas is problematic for representative liberal theorists, and is not clearly normative.

On the how question, the prescribed form of communication is **detachment** - a rejection of the expression of emotion. TABLE To betray emotions through one's facial expression or body language suggests that one's arguments are driven by them rather than by cool reason.

Representative liberalism endorses a normative standard of **civility**, that is, a way of speaking politically that does not inflame passion or permit ad hominem attacks upon other speakers. TABLE It is not the same as detachment since civility is perfectly consistent with the expression of positive emotions such as empathy, but it dovetails nicely with detachment.

Representatives are elected in order to decide for the people, and once a decision is reached, there is no further need for debate. Representative liberal theory endorses a norm of **closure** - a time at which all concerned can agree that the matter has been decided and the system moves on. TABLE Once a decision is reached, the media should move on to other issues on which decisions are still pending.

The model is that of an election: the winner and loser alike acknowledge their respective positions, the winner takes a place in the system, the loser concedes graciously, and the contest is set aside until the next appropriate time for a decision comes around. Debate that is not leading to a decision is potentially harmful, because it appears to call into question the ability of decision-makers to meet citizen needs effectively.

In summary, representative liberal theory particularly focuses on the question of **who** participates in a public sphere which is designed to produce wise decisions by accountable representatives organized in political parties best serves the needs of democracy.

II Participatory liberal theory

The common thread in participatory liberal theories is the desirability of maximizing the participation of citizens in the public decisions that affect their lives. To do this, they should be active participants in the public sphere as part of an ongoing process. With roots in Rousseau's preference for direct democracy over representative democracy, writers in this tradition often share a distrust of institutional barriers and mediating structures that make participation indirect and difficult. Different authors refer to this as an ''associative democracy,'' or ''strong democracy.

In a complex modern democracy, no one expects or desires that all citizens spend all their time discussing public affairs and directly deciding on public policies. Inevitably, there must be delegation to mediators who aggregate and articulate one's discursive interests in the public sphere. But this implies a particular relationship between these mediators and the citizens on behalf of whom they speak. Robert Michels in 1911 described how even social democratic parties with ideological beliefs in participatory democracy became staff driven rather than member driven. Others characterized his argument as an ''iron law of oligarchy.'' (The tendency toward oligarchy is common enough.)

In the participatory liberal tradition, organizations with active forms of member participation and a leadership that is accountable to members are more desirable mediators than those who are only nominally accountable to members, as many modern political parties may be. Some degree of centralization and bureaucratization may serve the wider goal of effectively mobilizing large numbers of citizens to act politically on their own behalf, rather than merely delegating their political interests to others.

Writers in this tradition typically believe that preferences and abilities for judging public issues emerge in the process of public deliberation. Participation transforms individuals into public citizens.

Popular inclusion, as we label this criterion, has implications for media content. The public sphere should provide ''the institutional sites where popular political will should take form. The goal is to establish structures of broadcasting in the public interest ...

which optimize diversity in terms of information, viewpoints and forms of expression, and which foster full and active citizenship. In the hopeful words of one author, citizens will ‘‘reawaken when they are addressed as a conversational partner and are encouraged [by the media] to join the talk rather than sit passively as spectators before a discussion conducted by journalists and [political] experts.’’

Popular inclusion does not simply demand a passive non-exclusion nor encourage only a top-down transparency for governmental action. It places normative demands on media to seek out and actively facilitate the inclusion of diverse speakers and interests. The participatory liberal tradition rejects the norm of expertise that representative liberals endorse.

The argument that public participation transforms individuals into engaged citizens implies that media content should first and foremost encourage empowerment. This requires that media discourse should address a major obstacle to political engagement. Mainstream political parties, with their stake in the status quo, often collaborate in discouraging more extended citizen engagement that might curtail the power of party leaders.

Participatory liberalism suggests that social inequality is typically reproduced by a variety of social, political, and cultural practices. From this perspective, therefore, social movements have a positive role to play in mobilizing individuals - especially those who are socially and politically disadvantaged - to develop and act on political commitments. Media discourse that facilitates such mobilization is desirable.

From their basic commitment to empowerment, writers diverge in evaluating the styles of communication that will best contribute to this goal. Some advocates of the participatory liberal tradition extend the criterion of empowerment to reject the norm of civility, at least as representative liberal theory interprets it. Polemical speech acts or symbols that capture the emotional loading of public issues as well as their cognitive content can play a very important mobilizing role.

Style, in this view, is intertwined with empowerment. Speech that mobilizes people to participate places them in a position in which their awareness of the complexity of politics can grow through their participation in the political process itself. Thus even

‘‘emotional’’ slogans such as ‘‘abortion takes an innocent life’’ or ‘‘my belly belongs to me’’ should directly foster a more inclusive public sphere and indirectly lead, through greater participation, to a more politically competent and knowledgeable public.

While participatory liberal theorists cannot be said to endorse slogans and polemics as a means of discourse, they do not reject such style of expression out of hand. The normative criterion here is **a range of communicative styles**. TABLE Appropriate forms of discourse do not preclude civility and deliberativeness, but do not necessarily require it. Writers in this tradition also tend to be suspicious of calls for closure, seeing in such demands a means of pushing enduring structural conflicts of interest off the political table. Social movements can and should play an important role in agenda-setting, calling public attention to issues that the established parties and elites would prefer to see ignored. The ability of social movements to continue to press their agenda in the public sphere is an alternative source of political power for them, and allows the alternative agendas that they advance to enter into debates with official power-holders. The fear here is of **premature closure** and pseudo-consensus, not of endless debate.

In summary, participatory liberal theory is a critical perspective on democracy that stresses the benefits of active engagement in politics. Its central normative criterion is therefore the widest possible empowerment, and popular inclusion is necessary to achieve this. From this commitment, it derives its endorsement of a range of communicative styles, and avoidance of premature closure. It rejects or is ambivalent about such criteria as expertise, detachment, and civility.

III Discursive theory

The line between participatory liberal and discursive theories is not easy to draw. Popular inclusion is equally embraced by both traditions. The central value here is in the process of **deliberation with popular inclusion** being desirable because it supports the valued process. TABLE Juergen Habermas, the most authoritative figure in this tradition, accepts the fact that decisions on public affairs are normally made at the political center -

by government agencies, parliaments, courts, and political parties. For routine decisions, it is reasonable and acceptable if these are made without extensive public discussion. But when important normative questions are at stake, it is crucial that the discussion not be limited to actors at the center of the political system. A well functioning public sphere should simultaneously include actors from the periphery as well - that is, civil society actors including especially grassroots organizations.

The autonomous actors, by which Habermas basically means small, non-bureaucratically organized grassroots associations with little or no division of labor, are minimally mediated and closer to personal, everyday experience. Such associations will take a particular organizational form, noting that ‘‘with their informal, multiply diffrentiated and networked communication processes, they form the true periphery.’’ In this regard, his standard for what ‘‘counts’’ as a grassroots organization is much narrower than the participatory liberal perspective, which values all groups that actively bring their members into politics. For Habermas, the organizational form is important because of its contribution to the deliberative process - the less bureaucratic, centralized form serves to carry political discussion into what he calls the lifeworld of the members.

These autonomous actors are free from the burden of making decisions and from the constraints of organizational maintenance. This allows them, in contrast to other actors, to deliberate more freely.

The ultimate goal is a public sphere in which better ideas prevail over weaker ones because of the strength of these ideas rather than the strength of their proponents. The normative ideal in the Habermas version is an ‘‘ideal speech situation.’’ He insists that it is more than simply an abstract ideal that should guide practice without ever being fully achieved. It is being realized, at least in part, whenever one starts to argue in order to convince others rather than simply negotiating, suggesting a compromise, or in other ways abandoning the effort to persuade.

For the better argument to be decisive, it should not matter who is making the argument. There must be mutual and reciprocal recognition of each by all as autonomous, rational subjects whose claims will be accepted if supported by valid arguments. Popular

inclusion in the discursive tradition is justified in part by its ability to foster **deliberativeness**, TABLE, the more theoretically central criterion. Other criteria on the how and what of good public communication also flow from deliberativeness. Civility and mutual respect are required. In an ideal deliberative process, one seeks agreement when it is possible and maintains mutual respect when it is not. Mutual respect is a form of agreeing to disagree, but demands more than simply tolerance.

All of these strands of discursive democratic theory share an underlying assumption - that the participants are part of the same moral community, sharing basic values. They assume that all the participants deserve respect but what of those participants who repudiate the shared values or whose ideas are not worthy of respect? It often turns out that most issues with a strong moral component involve ambiguity about who is or is not in the same moral community. Different frames[2] give different answers, and draw the boundaries of who should be extended mutual respect in different ways.
In addition to mutual respect, the participants in public discourse should demonstrate their readiness for **dialogue**. TABLE Dialogue, in the Habermas version, implies a discourse in which claims and assertions are backed by reasoned, understandable arguments. This implies a willingness to entertain the arguments of those who disagree.

The normative standards of dialogue, civility, and mutual respect combine to promote a positive value on consensus-seeking speech.

The primary responsibility of journalists should be to facilitate [emphasis in original] public deliberations aimed at reaching rational-critical public opinions that are autonomous vis-a ' -vis the private sphere and the state. One of the major articulators of the civic journalism project, journalists should ‘‘focus on citizens as actors within rather than spectators to [the democratic process].’’

2 “[t]o frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation.” (Entman 1993: 52). Entman, Robert M. 1993. "Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm." *Journal of Communication* 43 (4): 51-8.

While this tradition shares with representative liberalism a belief in the positive normative value of closure, it assumes that achieving a consensus is both desirable and attainable, at least in the ideal case. Only under these conditions, does **closure** after a decision make sense: TABLE

In summary, the discursive tradition shares the value of popular inclusion with participatory liberalism, but unlike that tradition, views this as a means to a more deliberative public sphere rather than as an end in itself. Deliberativeness is the core value of this perspective, and it involves recognizing, incorporating, and rebutting the arguments of others - dialogue and mutual respect - as well as justifying one's own. Civility and closure are also values that this tradition shares with representative liberalism, but these norms are interpreted more loosely: civility is not tantamount to emotional detachment nor is closure desirable if consensus has not been achieved.

IV Constructionist theory

Writers in this tradition are more pessimistic than discursive theorists about the possibil-306 ity of separating oppressive power from speech. They identify discourse as the practices of power di!used outside formal political institutions, making use of seemingly neutral categories of knowledge and expertise to control others as well as to construct the self as a political actor. We call this tradition constructionist because it emphasizes the contingently produced nature of every aspect of the political process.

Many of the most active theorists in this tradition such as Nancy Fraser, Seyla Benhabib, and Iris Marion Young, begin from feminist premises and develop their theories in part to explain and critique the marginality of women in politics. They point out that the very definition of ''politics'' situates it as a separate ''sphere'' apart from and in some ways ''naturally'' opposed to private life.

Because power relations operate throughout an individual's ''private'' life, a good public discourse should include individual speakers who will name and exemplify such connections for others. This tradition thus actively rejects the representative liberal criterion of expertise.

So, on the question of who should participate and when, the constructionist approach shares the strong normative value placed on **popular inclusion**. TABLE Many would privilege the voices of those who are marginalized in society, since they can offer the ‘‘double vision’’ of those who are ‘‘outsiders within’’ the system. The value of inclusion is tied conceptually to recognition of the distinctive standpoints of the actors.

Recognition means putting particular value on social differences in experience and identities. Rather than producing a common system of meaning, political discourse has need of making the other ‘‘strange’’ in order to encounter and comprehend the compelling reality of their difference. This exposure of presence may bring forth new understandings and recognition, but it might also involve threat and anxiety.’’ Thus through making strange and experiencing otherness, the two sides of a dialogue can be realized.’’ Recognition politics, sometimes called identity politics, creates a good public sphere by de-centering dominant speakers and their assumptions of what is ‘‘natural.’’ Constructionists argue that the more socially diverse the participants in public discourse are, the wider the range of options and implications that can be imagined.

"What is to be represented then takes priority over who does the representation...."

Thus the ‘‘who’’ of inclusion is tied also to the process of speech itself, and **creativity** in bringing new ideas forward is highly valued. TABLE Contemporary women’s movements have particularly stressed the emancipatory significance of public discourse that breaks unrecognized silences. One of the tasks of theory should be to expose ways in which the labelling of some issues and interests as ‘‘private’’ limits the range of problems. Changing who speaks about rape, sexual harassment, battering, prostitution, or reproductive rights also changes what is spoken about.

To foster such new ideas, some constructionists challenge the desirability of a single public sphere, preferring the idea of multiple independent public spheres. Dialogue in a single public sphere is not necessarily as desirable as autonomous and separate cultural

domains, or ‘‘free spaces’’ in which individuals may speak together supportively and develop their identities free of the conformity pressures.

Critics argue that emphasizing the connection between positions taken in public discourse and specific life experiences structured by relationships of inequality will lead to misleading forms of ‘‘categoricalism’’ or ‘‘essentialism.’’ When diversity is treated as the property of ‘‘underrepresented groups,’’ even those in sympathy with the aims of this approach worry about the extent to which the public becomes fragmented into mutually uncomprehending factions, groups are attributed unitary identities that reflect the standpoints of the most powerful among them, and identity claims are used to silence dissent.

Nonetheless, several authors argue that pre-political identities are vital to true inclusion of marginalized groups in public discourse, even though they neither can nor should try to capture the ‘‘essential’’ quality of what members of such groups will say. In order for publics to prevent such essentializing there should be no privileging of some voices as more authentic than others and no coercive imposition of a supposedly unified point of view.

If one finds that ‘‘robust democracy’’ already exists within actual ‘‘identity based’’ social movements, it will foster contestation and challenge to a recurrent tendency towards essentialism: people are considered tough enough to resist prior classification and far too argumentative to accept someone else’s definition of their selves.’’

BUT WHAT IF THERE IS NO PRIOR ROBUST DEMOCRACY (like, for example in Serbia-Montenegro or other post-communist countries especially those that also went through ethno-nationalist violence), WHERE WE ALSO FIND PLENTY OF CLAIMS TO BE BASED ON IDENTITY?

Unlike the participatory liberal tradition, this constructionist tradition sees the political as spilling across the artificial boundary between public and private. Families, cultural activities, even lifestyles, are political in the sense of having power relations woven through them. The constructionist approach to popular inclusion, by challenging the

separation of public and private, stresses how ordinary people are actually engaging in politics in diverse arenas of their lives - by what they buy, wear, eat, or use to travel. The constructionist tradition wants the media to step out of its routines for dealing with the powerful and actively seek out other perspectives at the grassroots.
Only in such ways the discursive claims of marginalized groups will be courageously expanding the realm of the political by creative collective action.

Taken together, these claims and counter-claims from the constructionist tradition stress popular inclusion, for the sake of both empowerment and recognition, and object to the inclusion of so-called experts or elites, in favor of seeing *all speakers* as the experts on their own life experience.
Critics, from Hannah Arendt on, have viewed identity politics with fear and loathing, suspecting these new public speakers of suppressing true individuality, fragmenting the public sphere, and swamping the polity with inappropriate social concerns. Theorists in the constructionist tradition responded in a variety of ways to these challenges, but the problem of achieving recognition without essentialism remains thorny. With regard to content and style, constructionists do not devalue deliberation and formal argument in discourse, but they are concerned that unexamined rules about how discourse should be conducted may, intentionally or inadvertently, limit who participates.

Narrative is one preferred mode of the ‘‘non-expert’’ who can at least speak from her own experience in this form. TABLE More generally, if cultural norms of how discourse should be conducted differ by social location, then these norms have the potential to silence those who habitually use alternative modes. Narrative and other preferred modes may be successfully revealing the supposed ‘‘impartiality’’ of technical expert discourse may conceal an unacknowledged political agenda.
This is a central theme in constructionist and feminist readings of Habermas. The norms of deliberativeness that Habermas advances as well as the standards of civility that representative liberals offer are seen as too limited in that they reflect conventional rather than inclusively forged standards. For example, public and private have a gendered subtext in which the public realm is a male sphere and its norms and practices reflect this

in subtle (and often not so subtle) ways to exclude ‘‘feminine’’ modes of participation. The norms and practices governing policy discourse privilege certain forms of presentation over others, and thus selectively disempower certain categories of speakers.

In particular, the normative standards regarding policy discourse derive from specific institutional contexts inWestern society - in particular, parliaments and courts. As Iris Marion Young observes, ‘‘Their institutional forms, rules, and rhetorical styles have defined the meaning of reason itself in the modern world.’’ Claims of universality are made, but the norms of deliberation are culturally specific and often operate as forms of power that silence or devalue the speech of some people.
‘‘Narrative,’’ Iris Marion Young writes, ‘‘fosters understanding across ... difference without making those who are different symmetrical.’’ It reveals experiences based on social locations that cannot be shared fully by those who are differently situated. She offers the example of wheelchair users making claims on public resources. ‘‘A primary way they make their case will be through telling stories of their physical, temporal, social, and emotional obstacles.’’
Storytelling promotes empathy across different social locations. Narrative complements arguments, while tending to be more egalitarian since all people are experts on their own experiential knowledge.

Style of public expression is also a matter of class, as the distinction between the bourgeois public sphere and the plebeian one suggests. Constructionists worry that the original insight about the exclusionary character of the bourgeois public sphere becomes lost in allowing elements of rhetorical style to determine the definition of rational deliberative discourse.

Civility in discourse is a matter of socially secured agreements to conform to the local culture, and such local and specific cultures are deeply imbued with power. What is normal in public discussion in some places is rude in others; and what is considered a normal way of showing respect in some venues seems mannered and arid in others.

Like critical theorists in the participatory liberal tradition, constructionist writers **fear premature closure and false consensus**. TABLE But more than this, they also positively value a discourse that continually widens the realm of the political by bringing unimagined ideas and invisible groups into it.

Ending debate also stops the expansion of the political and accepts the exclusions that remain.

In their search for a model that revels in the diversity and pluralism of actually existing democracies, constructionists broaden the type of desirable outcomes beyond the ability to produce policy outcomes.

Consensus, in this tradition, is not always desirable, and always requires critical analysis in evaluating it.

In summary, the constructionist view of a well-functioning public sphere begins by questioning the separateness of the public sphere at all. Public discourse should question the boundaries of ‘‘the political’’ by a strong norm of popular inclusion,which in turn serves the goals of empowerment of the marginalized and recognition of di!erences. Incorporating the standpoints of socially marginalized individuals and social movements can both name and exemplify the linkages between public action and private life. The norm of expertise is rejected explicitly, and the standards of deliberativeness and civility are qualified by subjecting them to critique based on a higher value of popular inclusion. Rather than dialogue and formal argumentation, constructionists particularly value narrative as a characteristic of content and style that challenges both the diffuse power relations of daily life and the concentrated power of disembodied formal political institutions by revealing the connections between them. Legitimating the language of the life world in discourse privileges the experiential knowledge of ordinary citizens and contributes to their empowerment. Finally, closure after a decision is deeply suspect since it can so easily suppress the diversity of expression that vitalizes democracy.

Constructionists point to important weaknesses and hidden assumptions in other models but some critics of this tradition find it frustratingly abstract with its alternative solutions

undeveloped. It never becomes clear, in critics' view, exactly what a good discourse would be like and the reader is left to make sometimes large inferential leaps.

Summary

TABLE look again

In this table, the priority concern is presented in italics. Each tradition places its emphasis on a different question. For the representative liberal tradition the problem of who should be included (the ‘‘who’’ question) is central; for the participatory liberal, what the process of engagement in public debate is and does (the ‘‘what’’ question) is core. For the discursive tradition, the issue of the style in which debate occurs (the ‘‘how’’ question) is central, while for the constructionists it is the relationship between public debate and decision- making (the ‘‘outcome’’ question). On the who question, the representative liberal tradition stands alone in valuing elite inclusion over stronger and more active versions of popular inclusion. The representative liberal tradition positively values expertise, while constructionists suspect it as a way of managing discourse to maintain existing relations of dominance and subordination. The other two traditions are essentially indifferent to the extent to which experts are included, as long as their participation does not displace that of ordinary individuals. Representative liberal theory suggests a criterion on how public discourse space should be allocated: proportionality. It should be distributed in proportion to voting strength or size of representation. Discursive theory suggests that it should be divided among actors in the center and periphery, at least for non-routine decisions. The other traditions are vague or silent on this question.

On the content of the discourse, none of these traditions would defend a priori restrictions. In the ‘‘what’’ category, representative liberals favour a process that functions as a free marketplace of ideas, placing particular value on the inclusion of a variety of beliefs that can contend for support based on the strength of their representation. This connects the ‘‘what’’ and ‘‘who’’ questions. Additionally, for the representative liberal tradition, the discourse should make visible to the public what its

representatives are doing so that they can be held accountable - the criterion we have labeled transparency. Other traditions do not reject this but emphasize its insufficiency.

There are major disagreements, however, on the **empowerment** criterion. For participatory liberal theory, it is the central responsibility of public discourse to engage as many citizens as possible in public life. For the constructionist tradition, empowerment is also very important, but empowerment is a means to the end of including all standpoints, widening and improving the range of ideas being considered by decision- makers, not an end in itself as it is for participatory liberals. Thus for constructionists, the continuing recognition of difference is equally important. Dialogue across difference rather than transformation into a general will is an indication of successful empowerment. Empowerment is less emphasized but implicit in the discursive tradition, which demands the ability to set aside differences in power in order to communicate. However, empowerment is explicitly rejected by representative liberal theory as a normative criterion for public discourse.

There are also major differences on the **how** question. The constructionist tradition seeks creative means to name the politically invisible and values the use of novel and imaginative tactics to expand the boundaries of the political. Of the four traditions, it is most critical of the demand for civility, seeing it as a way to discipline persons and ideas into existing normative categories.

Deliberativeness, the highest value in discursive theory, includes the criterion of dialogue, a process in which one provides fully developed arguments for one's own position and takes seriously and responds to the arguments of others. Participatory liberal theory does not reject dialogue but calls for a range of communicative styles to promote empowerment, its higher value. Similarly, constructionist theory does not reject dialogue but is wary that emphasizing it can delegitimize other forms. In particular, it can delegitimize narratives of personal experience and other preferred forms of communication in the real world, thereby silencing women and other culturally excluded groups.

Finally, on the outcome question, the representative liberal tradition places the strongest value on closure. Public discourse is only useful in relationship to decision-making, and once decisions are made, continuing debate is at best a waste of resources and at worst a threat to legitimacy. The constructionists fear closure that suppresses diversity, a continuing source of vitality for a democracy. Because differences will always exist, de-centering dialogues are always necessary. Political debates widen the agenda of decision-makers on an on-going basis, as different aspects of identity surface in resistance to all reifying categorizations.

Research implications

We take on the difficult challenge of using public discourse on abortion in elite newspapers in Germany and the United States over a 30-year period.

German discourse, in most respects, meets the criteria highlighted by representative liberal theory. The discourse is dominated by accountable state and party actors, supplemented by experts and representatives of the Catholic and Lutheran churches. It is carried on with little incivility. Not all possible ideas about abortion appear, of course, but within a broad range, the sponsors of different policies are given free reign to offer the most persuasive arguments that they can muster

German discourse provides just the kind of closure that is advocated by this tradition.

U.S. discourse comes much closer than German discourse in meeting the criteria emphasized by participatory liberal theory. Civil society actors, including grassroots organizations and ordinary people, are given a lot of voice along with the people's representatives. There is a lot more discourse promoting citizens as active agents rather than as clients to be protected. There is allowance for or even encouragement of styles of expression that would probably be considered bad taste in Germany.

The answer to which country best fits the criteria of discursive theory is more complicated. On dialogue, in particular, different measures show slight advantages for one country or the other, or no difference.

The closure that German discourse provides does not flow from a deliberatively achieved consensus and, hence, is not the closure that the model envisions. But the ongoing U.S. discourse does not fit any better since it shows little tendency to produce a consensus that should lead to voluntary closure. The absence of a tendency toward consensus is a failure of the deliberative process in both countries.

U.S. discourse comes much closer than German discourse in meeting the criteria emphasized by constructionist theories. The criteria which it shares with the participatory liberal tradition - popular inclusion, empowerment, and the avoidance of premature closure - are better met in the United States. U.S. discourse is also notably stronger in overcoming the distinction between the public and private realm, and in legitimizing the language of the everyday life and experiential knowledge through personal narratives. However, from the perspective of the other models, it veers dangerously close to the fragmentation of identity politics, and the weight given to the social and the personal can appear to swamp the political in sensationalism.

Final suggestion: The criteria we have derived from democratic theory are fruitful for comparing discourse in different societies on many other issues. One example: STEM CELL RESEARCH