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Deliberation and Ethnicity¹

Erik Schneiderhan,² Shamus Khan,³ and Jennifer Elrick⁴

Scholars typically suggest that deliberation, defined as communication guided by reason-giving and inclusion, works best behind a veil of ignorance or when personal differences are bracketed. In this article we explore deliberation within ethnically diverse groups. We operationalize ethnicity in three ways: as an aspect of individual identity, as an identity that is made salient through priming, and as an enactment relative to interactions in particular situations. In this way, we can explore the applicability of our previous experimental results to ethnically diverse groups. We find similar results: within ethnically diverse groups, deliberation matters; participants are more likely to reconsider their positions when deliberating than when simply talking about politics. Ethnicity has no adverse effects on the quality of deliberation, indicating that bracketing has no significant impact. On the contrary, when conceptualized as a relational enactment, ethnicity is correlated with increased levels of reason-giving and inclusion, and hence higher quality deliberation. This suggests deliberation works in multiethnic groups in much the same way as—if not better than—it does in homogeneous groups. Deliberation is a robust form of political communication that not only helps manage, but also embraces diverse subjective experiences as a part of the political process.

KEY WORDS: decision-making; deliberation; enactment; ethnicity; politics; relational sociology.

INTRODUCTION

As nations become more ethnically diverse, we need to better understand the communicative mechanisms that either promote or constrain democracy. Deliberation has been posited as good for democracy, but its empirical basis is somewhat tenuous. This is particularly the case for deliberation among ethnically diverse groups. Thus, it is important to know if the positive impacts of deliberation we have observed in earlier studies apply to ethnically diverse contexts. Deliberation theorists have also argued that subjects need to “bracket” their identities (often behind a kind of veil of ignorance). Yet, as feminist and race scholars have pointed out, such bracketing weighs more heavily on women and minorities. In this article, we analyze data from an experiment with university students in Canada to consider whether

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bracketing is required for diverse deliberation to work. We also go beyond the issue of bracketing to explore how ethnicity affects deliberative processes and outcomes.

We operationalize ethnicity in three alternate ways: as a salient component of individual identity, as a salient component of the deliberative context, and as a relational enactment specific to interactions in particular situations. This three-pronged approach lets us experimentally test how ethnicity affects individual decisions and the quality of political communication in deliberative contexts. The experimental work has two key elements: a pretest/posttest design to evaluate the impact of deliberation on individual decision making and a treatment condition wherein some groups are primed to enact ethnicity within their interactions.

Theoretically, we are interested in the intersection of ethnicity and deliberation; empirically, we are concerned with whether deliberation “matters” in ethnically diverse settings. Our main finding is that how ethnicity affects deliberation depends on the form of ethnicity at play. Put another way, how we think about ethnicity conditions what we find. When we consider ethnicity a salient attribute of participants’ individual identities, we do not observe an effect. If we treat ethnicity as an individual-level variable, we do not find strong effects of this variable on deliberative outcomes. This is an encouraging finding. Asking participants to deliberate (operationalized as communication guidelines emphasizing reason-giving and inclusiveness) has a significant effect on changing individual outcomes in a multiethnic context, just as it does in a context in which ethnicity is bracketed. When we seek to make ethnicity a more salient aspect for individuals engaging in deliberation (using identity priming—encouraging participants to hold their ethnicity squarely in mind when deliberating), it has no effect on deliberative outcomes. However, when we conceptualize ethnicity as a relational enactment, ethnicity has a positive effect on the quality of political communication; it is correlated with higher levels of reason-giving and inclusion, moving the deliberative process closer to the “Habermasian” ideal. If we treat ethnicity as an aspect of a situation or collective dynamic, rather than an individual-level variable that marks participants, we find that ethnicity has (positive) effects on deliberative processes. Taken as a whole our findings suggest that deliberation not only “works” in multiethnic settings, but it may actually work *better*. Our findings suggest that prior assertions that actors must bracket their identities for communication are not only unnecessary, but they may even be counterproductive.

THEORETICAL CONTEXT: DELIBERATION AND ETHNICITY

Our particular focus in this article is on group interactions that involve “political communication,” which we take to mean any communication between individuals about public resource allocation and/or official power and authority (Denton and Woodward 1990; McNair 2003[1995]). The particular form of political communication that concerns us is deliberation, characterized by reason-giving and an ethic of inclusiveness (Bohman 1996; Bohman and Richardson 2009; Gutmann and Thompson 1996, 2004; McGann 2006; Steiner et al. 2004). In the literature, deliberation is proposed as a democratic ideal; it is said to create engaged public citizens,

good decisions, and just outcomes (Habermas 1984; Rawls 1971). Our research (Elrick, Schneiderhan, and Khan 2014; Flynn et al. 2011; Schneiderhan and Khan 2008) and the empirical work of other scholars (Baiocchi 2001, 2003; Fishkin 1991, 1995b, 2009; Fishkin and Laslett 2003; Fung 2001; Heller and Isaac 2003; Polletta and Lee 2006) show that deliberation does, indeed, change outcomes in political communication. And citizens themselves have also been found to favor a deliberative public sphere as a central part of their democracy (Evans 2012).

Deliberation, though, has generally been conceptualized as contingent on homogeneous settings or contexts in which subjects are required to disregard their differences and their interests (Young 1996, 1999, 2000, 2001). This is because much of the literature on deliberation takes personal difference as either a problem or as something that should be “bracketed,” that is, put aside and kept entirely out of the deliberative process. The tradition was inspired by the work of John Rawls and Jürgen Habermas. In his work on the *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Habermas (1989[1962]) argues that the bourgeois public sphere broke down as groups became more heterogeneous. In his theoretical work on justice, Rawls suggests that the best deliberative actors are those who are ignorant of their positions—behind a veil that makes their own ethnic identity invisible to them and others. Theoretically, then, deliberation often asks subjects to disembodied themselves from all aspects of their social self—including their ethnicity, class, gender, and age (e.g., Habermas, 1989[1962]; Rawls 1971, 1999). Why so? Because without bracketing, the public sphere would fragment into a mass of varied and competing interests.

This bracketing of the social self is problematic for two reasons. First, following gender and race theorists, bracketing gives primacy to those in power, allowing those in “unmarked” categories (e.g., whites, men, native-born citizens) to speak as if from the position of the “general interest.” Young (2001) goes so far as to identify this as the hegemonic quality of discourse. The presumed naturalness of such positions and their corresponding enactments result in a situation in which some actors may act as they usually would, while those who are comparatively powerless or whose identities are socially marked (by ethnicity, gender, or sexuality) have their interests coded as particular. In terms of the subject of this article, bracketing means denying subjects’ ethnic experiences, artificially creating homogeneity, further empowering those who already enjoy considerable privileges, and demanding denials from those already likely to be disadvantaged within political discourse. Within this identity dance, some scholars have gone on to highlight the ways in which dominant groups either purposefully or inadvertently silence marginalized groups, thereby making individuals even *less* comfortable to raise their positions within political discussions (Mansbridge 1983; Sanders 1997; Young 1996).

Further, a wide range of literature from social psychology suggests that diversity can have manifold effects on group processes—including upon the outcomes of group processes and the cognitive states of individuals engaged in them—making it theoretically impossible to “bracket” every aspect of diversity. Some scholars (e.g., Sunstein 2002), in fact, attest to the positive effects of group diversity. Teams are usually more successful and creative when they are heterogeneous (McLeod and Lobel 1992; Uzzi and Spiro 2005). Diverse groups, it seems, make for better

decisions than homogeneous ones (Page 2007). Ethnically homogeneous groups tend to be more successful at first, but are eventually surpassed by their heterogeneous counterparts after multiple interactions (Watson, Kumar, and Michaelson 1993).

Still, the “benefits of diversity” school tends to draw upon results where diversity is thought of rather broadly—often in terms of level of education or position within a firm (for an overview, see Milliken and Martins 1996)—whereas that work which shows the challenges of diversity within groups often focuses on ethnicity (particularly black/white groups). Scholars who are critical of the notion of diversity as a boon suggest that interacting within a heterogeneous group can be “cognitively costly,” particularly for minority group members (Richeson and Shelton 2007; Richeson and Trawalter 2005; Shelton, Richeson, and Salvatore 2005). They argue that not all diversity is the same, diversity is not always salient within interactions, and some group differences, particularly those that are of greater symbolic importance like race (Lamont 2000), are likely to create greater challenges for interactions.

Taken together, traditions within political science and gender theory have pointed to a “diversity paradox”: when ethnic tokenism (or gender tokenism; see Kanter 1977) is overcome and minority groups are represented in larger numbers, backlashes are observed, especially within political settings (Kanthak and Krause 2012). There is, then, a political costliness to heterogeneity; Triandis (1988:37) has argued:

One of the realities of different subjective cultures is that they result in different expectations and difference perceptions of the antecedents or consequences of interactions. Thus, the greater the heterogeneity within a given society, the greater the probability that interactions will be costly.

The cost of such heterogeneity seems to increase as ethnic minorities become a greater proportion of an organization or process.

Regardless of whether diversity is seen as beneficial or harmful at the group or individual level, long-standing disagreements on the matter highlight the need to account for the role ethnicity plays in actual, not just theoretical, political communication. For polities like Canada, the question of how ethnicity affects political communication and whether it needs to be bracketed in contexts marked by multiple identities is of practical concern. At all levels of Canadian governance, there is widespread support for the notion that in political communication, deliberation (as opposed to just plain “talk”) leads to more just and democratic outcomes. In a nation with a significant proportion of visible minorities, and as one of the most diverse countries in the world, Canada has a vested interest in the question of how its citizens might be heard in a space that promotes citizen engagement, transparency, more tolerance, and a broader commitment to community values. Especially at the provincial and municipal levels, there have been considerable efforts to increase the public’s role in governance through various forums for public consultation and participation in a range of policy areas, from health and electoral systems to sustainable development and forestry (Abelson et al. 2002; Côté and Bouthillier 2002; Herath 2007; Lang 2007; Ontario Citizens’ Assembly on

Electoral Reform 2007; Quantz and Thurston 2006; Sinclair 2002; Warren and Pearse 2008).

This Canadian deliberation “boom” is in keeping with the recent academic emphasis on the importance of deliberation for a vibrant public sphere (Fung and Wright 2003; Gutmann and Thompson 2004; Habermas 1979[1976]; Rawls 1971). As scholars emphasize deliberation’s politically emancipatory potential, deliberative democracy gains importance for ethnic minority populations (Valadez 2001; Wheatley 2003) in Canada and elsewhere (Ballamingie 2009; Schmidtke 2007; Walmsley 2009). Herath (2007) points out that ongoing discussion of fair representation in modern democracies focuses on the issue of “nonrepresentation or underrepresentation of minorities,” among others, and Canada’s minority population is large and growing.

What we do not know is how well the deliberative principles of reason-giving and inclusiveness “travel” across different situations; the literature is silent as to whether deliberation matters equally across contexts. In politics, how Canadians think, communicate, and act depends in part on social structure, and this structure varies across context. As Grabb and Curtis (2010) show, the “deep structures” in Canada—with its large territory, diverse population, and varied colonial history—derive in part from the influence of relations with England and France in the eighteenth and nineteenth century and still shape the attitudes and actions of Canadians. For example, Quebecois are more likely on average to support state-sponsored social provision and are more active politically than residents of English Canada. However, we don’t know enough about how contextual differences might influence and organize political communication. As deliberation becomes more prominent, it is not only important to understand how and why it works, but also to make sense of *where* it works.

Empirical evaluations of the effect of deliberative processes on outcomes (including our own previous work) either adopt the bracketing of the social self or take it a step further—relying upon homogeneous research subjects (less often by design than by necessity). Previous work (e.g., Steenbergen et al. 2003; Sulkin and Simon 2001) that has shown how deliberation and discourse quality matters for decision making has relied upon an overwhelmingly white, young, and geographically bound subject pool. Even those scholars who use representative sampling to ensure some group diversity, like those who come out of the rich deliberative polling tradition (Fishkin 1995a, 2009; Fishkin and Laslett 2003; Fishkin and Luskin 2005; Luskin, Fishkin, and Jowell 2002), rely upon the Habermasian impulse, asking subjects to do an elaborate identity dance that some scholars refer to as the “hokey pokey”—in deliberation, one should put one’s “reasoning leg” in and one’s “identity leg” out (Mische and Gibson 2012). Hence, the external validity of such exercises in regard to real-life political communication in ethnically diverse polities is questionable: in most situations it is practically impossible to choose stakeholders by means of representative sampling and/or require them to cast individual identity aside.

Work that *does* consider ethnicity and deliberation (e.g., Herriman, Atherton, and Vecellio 2011; Mendelberg and Oleske 2000; Walsh 2007; Wheatley 2003) tends to take a static view of ethnicity as a fixed attribute of actors’ identities. That

approach stands in contrast to more recent cognitive and relational theories of ethnicity. Since Barth's (1969) revival of the Weberian (1978[1922]) assertion that ethnicity is not an immutable attribute but a form of social organization based on self-ascription and ascription by others, a substantial body of literature has formed around the notion of ethnicity as a relational and situational concept (e.g., Lamont 2000; Nagel 1994; Waters 1990; Wimmer 2008a, 2008b).

Following these contemporary theoretical approaches to ethnicity, we understand it primarily as how one enacts a sense of belonging related to a shared culture and ancestry (Wimmer 2008a) and also as a set of perspectives on the world that can be negotiated—consciously *and/or* unwittingly—depending on the social situation (Brubaker 2002, 2006). Any examination of the relationship between ethnic diversity and deliberative outcomes needs to take into account different possible conceptualizations of ethnicity and their potential effects on political communication. Ethnicity, as a social construction, has real-life consequences, as long-standing antagonisms between blacks and whites in the United States or the Arab–Israeli conflict show (Nagel 1994). If ethnicity is a salient component of individuals' personal identity, tensions may arise along an ethnic boundary that affect deliberative outcomes by preventing individuals from engaging in reasoned debate, including each other in discussions, or being open to new proposals. If ethnicity is a salient component of the situation in which deliberation takes place (e.g., when some stakeholders are recruited explicitly as representatives of government-recognized minority groups), deliberative outcomes may be affected by mobilization around group-level ethnic self-awareness. That, in turn, leads to resource competition and, hence, less just outcomes for other participants. Both ethnicity as a salient component of individual identity and as a result of priming effects presuppose the existence of clearly delineated ethnicities that can be drawn upon—relationally—from a range of identities in one's "toolkit" (Nagel 1994; Swidler 1986). Even when ethnicity is conceptualized as an enactment that draws, in perhaps unpredictable ways, on norms, beliefs, and other "cultural stuff" (Barth 1969) to create a range of shared meanings, it is still conceivable that ethnic boundaries produced by individuals in the course of this meaning making can have the same negative impacts on the quality of deliberation and the justness of outcomes.

Taken together, the literatures on ethnicity and deliberation (including relevant contributions from social psychology) point to two imperatives in studying deliberative processes. First, the ethnicity of participants in deliberative settings—and the salience of ethnicity in those settings—needs to be accounted for rather than bracketed. Second, the ethnicity of participants needs to be conceptualized in a way that incorporates newer perspectives on its relational and situational quality. Marichal (2010) specifically links this kind of practical and contextual perspective on ethnicity to the study of deliberation, calling for an approach that privileges a "new civic rationale for diversity" with space for the expression and evolution of cultural identity. In our view, that ideally starts with designing studies (and deliberative spaces) that are contextually multiethnic.

These rich, complex strands of research highlight the challenges of accounting for the effect of ethnic diversity on political communication. Confoundingly,

diversity has been shown to be good for groups, but not always, and perhaps not for individual group members (particularly minority members). Deliberations are seen as good for political processes, but bracketing demands are more heavily felt by those already disadvantaged. The difficulties compound as diversity increases. To begin addressing these challenges, we seek to provide empirical evidence on a basic question: How does ethnicity affect individual decisions and the quality of political communication in deliberative contexts? In other words, what happens when diverse groups deliberate without bracketing ethnicity? We address contemporary theoretical work on ethnicity and previous studies on ethnicity and deliberation by operationalizing ethnicity alternately as a salient attribute of individuals' identities, as a salient property of the context in which political communication takes place, and as a relational property of interactions in particular situations.

DATA AND METHODS

Building on our earlier experimental work (Schneiderhan and Khan 2008), which explored whether deliberation mattered in terms of political decision outcomes, this article explores the role of ethnicity using an experiment with two components: (1) a within-subjects approach, in which we gather pretest and posttest measures with one treatment (deliberation); and (2) a between-subjects component—grounded in the literature on identity “priming” (Forehand, Deshpandé, and Reed 2002)—in which we randomly assigned groups to receive a treatment wherein some groups were prompted to enact ethnicity and others were not.

In early 2011, we recruited a convenience sample of 149 undergraduate students at a Canadian university. The sample is reflective of a diverse student body in which only 16% self-identify as white and no ethnicity makes up more than 40% of the total population (see Table I for the ethnic and gender compositions of our sample). We administered a demographic survey⁵ to all participants two weeks before the experiment. Each participant was scheduled into one of 28 small-group deliberation sessions, based on availability.⁶ As with our previous work (Schneiderhan and Khan 2008) we constructed groups of four or five members, approximating the typical size of school and village councils, community boards, and other political bodies requiring individual member voting. These groups made no attempt to reach consensus. Rather, each member's task was to cast a private vote on the matter under consideration. The participants were randomly assigned seats at a round table, and the administrator⁷ for each group gave all participants an information sheet with relevant data on university funding and tuition. Participants then had 10 minutes to read over the information and answer a pretest

⁵ Prior to administering the survey, we conducted three focus groups using “cognitive interviewing” techniques as outlined by Willis (1999) in order to identify any potential sources of response error in the questionnaire.

⁶ The treatment and control groups were relatively indistinguishable in terms of participant background characteristics. In addition, the mean ethnic identity salience measures for each group were nearly identical.

⁷ We used three different female administrators for the project.

Table I. Ethnic and gender composition of experiment participants

| Ethnicity | Female | Male | Total | Percent |
|--------------------------------|--------|------|-------|---------|
| White Western European | 10 | 3 | 13 | 9 |
| White Eastern European | 4 | 7 | 11 | 7 |
| Asian | 16 | 13 | 29 | 19 |
| Arab | 2 | 3 | 5 | 3 |
| Persian | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Hispanic or Latino | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Indian or Pakistani | 45 | 13 | 58 | 39 |
| Black, African | 10 | 4 | 14 | 9 |
| Black, Caribbean | 4 | 0 | 4 | 3 |
| First Nations, Inuit, or Metis | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Other | 9 | 3 | 12 | 8 |
| Totals | 103 | 46 | 149 | 100 |

question: "Please decide what percentage of university fees should be paid by the following parties: individual student (including loans); student's family; and state funding." We chose this question (and topic for discussion) because it is relevant for all participants, contentious without being polarizing, involves basic position-taking on social justice and the role of the state (per our interest in *political* communication), and allows for quantification.

We drew on Fung and Wright (2003) in operationalizing the deliberation treatment as a set of communication rules⁸ presented to participants; the process is our operationalization of a kind of "optimal deliberation" (Shapiro 2002). Thus, after the pretest, the administrator provided all groups with written and oral guidelines for the desired communicative process. The group then considered the following question: "How much do you feel you, your parents, and the state are responsible for paying tuition fees?" The groups talked for 30 minutes. During this time, the administrator made only four scripted comments, reminding the participants of the rules of deliberation, alternating between an emphasis on inclusiveness or reason-giving. At the conclusion of the allotted discussion period, the participants were given a posttest questionnaire, identical to the pretest survey.

In the between-subjects element of the experiment, groups were randomly assigned to receive the treatment condition designed to make ethnicity salient for those participating in the deliberation. Individuals within these groups were exposed to several "primes" on participant ethnic identity: (1) a survey question on ethnicity administered just prior to the start of the communication, (2) an additional deliberation guideline asking participants to draw on their ethnocultural backgrounds,⁹ (3) a request for participants to introduce themselves to

⁸ Those rules were "(1) Participants listen to one another; (2) Participants do not just offer opinions, but rather provide reasons; (3) Conflict is okay; (4) Participants should find reasons they can accept; (5) Participants should be open to new proposals; and (6) All participants should be included in the process."

⁹ This guideline added a seventh deliberation rule: "(7) You should feel comfortable drawing upon your personal ethnocultural background when talking about issues important to you and your community."

each other on the basis of ethnicity, with modeling by the administrator,¹⁰ and (4) a single scripted intervention asking participants to draw on their ethnic identities in communication. In essence, participants in the treatment groups were asked *not* to bracket their ethnic identity. All other elements of the design were identical. Of the 28 groups, 15 received the treatment and 13 were controls.

All sessions were video recorded, transcribed, and coded.¹¹ The recordings served as the basis of observations of political interactions and allowed for a validity check of our group administrators and the experimental treatment.

Coding and Variables

As one of aims was to replicate our earlier work on the value of deliberation over “just talking” using heterogeneous groups, we coded for deliberation as we had previously, relative to two elements: reason-giving and inclusion. We operationalized the concept of reason as any justification for a position or statement, whether grounded in abstract principles or a story, and coded each relevant speech act for the presence of a reason. The result was a total count of the number of reasons given in each group’s political communication. Clearly, one must speak to be included in a political communication, so we kept a running count of who spoke and for how long. However, conscious of scholarly criticisms about the potentially marginalizing quality of deliberative discourse (Mansbridge 1983; Sanders 1997; Young 1996), we sought to consider inclusion as more than simple participation. We conceptualized it as reciprocal; the efforts of group members to draw others into the communication were, for our purposes, just as important as the response they engendered. Thus, we also coded and counted each speech act in which the speaker called on another person or referenced their previous speech to make a contribution to the conversation. There are, then, two components to the overall inclusion score: the net count (positive interjections minus interruptions) of speech acts that show engagement in the conversation without disrupting the flow of the communication and the total count of speech acts in which a speaker calls on another to make a contribution. Inclusion and reason-giving taken together comprise how we operationalized deliberation and attempted to capture variation in the quality of discourse within communication contexts.

To explore the role played by ethnicity as a property of individuals and/or groups in deliberative outcomes, we operationalized the term in two additional, theoretically grounded ways (our third operationalization—ethnicity as a salient component of deliberative context—is built into the experimental design described in the previous section). First, we operationalized ethnicity as a fixed

¹⁰ The prompt was, “Since our ethnocultural background influences how we think about things, before we begin, I would like each of you to introduce yourself by telling us your name and some brief information about where you are from and your ethnic background. Let me start. My name is _____, and I am from _____. My background is _____ which has influenced me to value family and education.”

¹¹ The intercoder agreement in codes across the three coders was over 95%, giving us high confidence in the coding procedures.

attribute of individual identity by constructing an index of ethnic identity salience based on a survey conducted two weeks before the experiment. Participants were asked a number of questions about different ways in which ethnicity can be expressed and were asked to rate the degree to which different expressions of ethnicity manifested in their day-to-day lives. We used seven of these Likert-scale response items to construct the index (Alpha score .887) for each individual, ranging from 1 to 5 (low to high). This allowed us to see how strong ethnicity is as general part of a participant's identity.¹²

Second, we operationalized ethnicity as a relational property of particular situations by coding each individual speech act that involved a differentiation (boundary-drawing) between individuals or groups. We refer to such boundary-drawing as an ethnic enactment. The codes reflected boundary markers commonly discussed in the theoretical literature on ethnicity as a relational concept, including "visible minority" (speaker differentiates between individuals or groups through explicit reference to difference in physical features); "ethnicity" (speaker differentiates between individuals or groups based on reference to heritage, culture, or tradition); "religion" (speaker differentiates between individuals or groups based on reference to belonging to a religious group); and "immigration" (speaker differentiates between individuals or groups based on immigration status). For example, when a research subject said, "Students in a Pakistani culture tend to be very independent," this was coded as an ethnic enactment. Enactments were counted both for the frequency with which individual group members deployed ethnicity as well as the number of ethnic enactments within each group.

We constructed three primary outcome variables based on the pretest/posttest question regarding the competing responsibilities of state, individual, and family (the "welfare triad") in education funding. The first is a simple change variable that considers the absolute value of the total change in allocation (range 0 to a high of 200). This is consistent with our earlier work that considered the absolute value of change, but is limiting in that it is a shift in percentages and does not consider the *direction* of change, particularly whether people shifted positions toward or away from state responsibility. So, we constructed a second shift variable to capture change in the participant's allocation of resources between the public (state) and private (family plus individual) from pretest to posttest. The result is an outcome variable that allows us to address a question at the heart of political communication—What role should the state play in allocating resources?

Anticipating a criticism, we attempted to increase the external validity of the variable by considering *any* directional shift significant, regardless of the magnitude. Thus, an increase of 1% in state responsibility is equivalent to a 50% increase, in that they are both assigned to the same category of our variable. Our rationale is that small percentage amounts, while numerically trivial, are typically significant when applied to budgets and taxation. Thus, a 1% increase in state responsibility and a corresponding decrease in private responsibility for supporting education would be significant in terms of decreasing tax burdens and increasing state outlays.

¹² The construction of an ethnic identity strength measure is consistent with Elias, Appiah, and Gong's (2011) work on advertising and strength of ethnic identity, as well as Phinney's (1990, 1992) ethnic identity strength index.

Finally, we constructed another, dichotomous, “shift” variable with the following categories: 0–Private and 1–State, discarding “no change” respondents. As a result, in analysis with this dependent variable the N is reduced to 87, but we can focus specifically on those respondents who *did* change—that is, those for whom deliberative discussion changed viewpoints. Because this is a dichotomous variable (people change *either* to private *or* to state) it is interpreted using logistic regression.

RESULTS

Deliberation matters in heterogeneous groups. The within-subjects portion of the experiment, which compared all subjects’ pretest and posttest responses to the question of educational funding, confirmed this. We used a nonparametric related-samples Wilcoxon test to determine whether the deliberation treatment, administered to all subjects, had a statistically significant effect on their decision outcomes, taking up each component of the allocation question (individual, family, and state) as a separate variable. Across all three change variables, our earlier research was confirmed in the multiethnic context. We rejected the null hypothesis ($p \leq .05$); for both the private (family and individual) and the public (state) allocation percentages, we found a statistically significant difference between pretest and posttest allocations. The mean absolute value of change for the three variables taken together was 26.57; participants changed their positions through a reallocation of approximately 27% in terms of total resources. We can see in Table II that as a result of deliberation, subjects were more likely to move toward state funding and away from individual or family education funding. Considered in dialogue with our previous work, our within-subjects experiment yields an important finding: *Deliberation matters not just in homogeneous groups, but also leads to changes in position for heterogeneous groups.* People are more likely to change their positions in political communications that possess a deliberative structure, regardless of the group’s ethnic homogeneity or diversity.

In the between-subjects portion of the experiment, we asked if our ethnically primed treatment groups differed in their outcomes from our control groups. Regression analysis showed that the ethnic priming treatment had no statistically significant influence on either the shift or absolute value of change variables. We conducted a nonparametric Mann-Whitney U test to see if the distribution of change in allocation (pretest to posttest) was different across the categories of the treatment (priming/no priming). *We retained the null hypothesis, finding no statistically significant effect of the priming treatment on decision outcomes.* In lay terms,

Table II. Mean pretest and posttest percentage allocations

| | Student | Family | State |
|------------|---------|--------|-------|
| Pretest | 26.8 | 20.2 | 53.1 |
| Posttest | 21.3 | 16.0 | 62.5 |
| Difference | -5.5 | -3.8 | 9.4 |

attempting to “prime” the ethnic identities of participants in a political communication does not significantly affect discourse outcomes.

Regarding the effect of ethnicity as a fixed attribute of individual identity on deliberative outcomes, we examined the effects of pretest ethnic identity strength on the absolute value individual change in position. Ethnic identity strength on its own did not predict change in positions, operationalized as the absolute value of total change. This confirms the experimental result and indicates that the strength of subjective ethnic identity (as measured with a survey) *does not* provide much traction in making sense of deliberation outcomes when considering the likelihood that an individual will change his/her position in general. Neither encouraging people to embrace rather than bracket their ethnicity nor the *a priori* strength of one’s ethnic identity appears to matter much in making sense of deliberative outcomes. This is a curious, yet important, result providing some support for literature that has shown that “diverse groups”—or groups that enact their differences—actually communicate better (McLeod and Lobel 1992; Page 2007; Uzzi and Spiro 2005). But does it mean that ethnicity does not matter in deliberation?

Here we turn to our operationalization of ethnicity as a relational property of a particular situation—what we call ethnic enactments. From this perspective, we found some evidence to support the idea that ethnicity has a positive effect on deliberation. There was a positive and statistically significant correlation between the degree of deliberation and the level of ethnic enactments.¹³ The more participants engaged in meaning making around the “cultural stuff” (Barth 1969) of ethnicity and drew ethnic boundaries in the process, the higher the level of reason-giving and inclusion within the group—ethnic enactments lead to a more “Habermasian” deliberative process. In part, this is because reason-giving and enactments *can* be one and the same in deliberation. One’s reasons can be grounded in family history and culture, with positions tied to stories illustrating values. In this way, reason-giving emerges from ethnicity. In our groups, when people were doing their ethnicity, it was not at all at odds with the deliberative process. This result provides some support for literature that has shown that “diverse groups”—or groups that enact their differences—actually communicate better (McLeod and Lobel 1992; Page 2007; Uzzi and Spiro 2005).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this article, we asked how ethnicity affects individual decisions and the quality of political communication in deliberative contexts. Our results show that the answer depends in part on how ethnicity is conceptualized. When ethnicity is considered as an individual-level variable it has no effect on deliberative outcomes, even if such ethnicity is made salient through priming. However, when conceptualized as ethnic enactments, ethnicity has a positive effect on the quality of political communication; it is correlated with higher levels of reason-giving and inclusion, moving the deliberative process closer to the “Habermasian” ideal.

¹³ Pearson correlation 0.416 (significant at the .05 level, two-tailed).

In our earlier work we established experimentally that deliberation matters as a form of political communication. Specifically, if people were asked to think on their own or “just talk”—that is, communicate in ways not marked by ethics of reason-giving and inclusion—they were unlikely to reconsider their starting positions. By contrast, if they were asked to deliberate, they were more open to changing their political positions. Yet our earlier work established this finding in the context of ethnically homogeneous groups. For key deliberative theorists such as Habermas and Rawls, the deliberative public sphere can only be realized if participants speak abstractly, using pure reason rather than arguing from social locations associated with their personal identities. Following these traditions, scholars have introduced the idea of “bracketing,” a kind of identity dance in which people make their reason part of the deliberative process but try to keep their situated identity outside of it.

But as we argued at the outset, bracketing identity is problematic for several theoretical and empirical reasons. First, even if such an identity dance is possible for social actors, there are disparities in the ability of individuals in “unmarked” and “marked” identity categories to “bracket.” The former generally have the privilege of speaking in the name of “general” interest; this power differential can lead to the denial and subordination of points of view brought forward by representatives of “marked” social categories. Second, manifold, contradictory findings on the effect of diversity on group processes and individuals within those groups highlight the need to account for the role ethnicity plays in political communication. Finally, on a practical level, multiethnic polities, such as Canada, increasingly turn to deliberative activities to resolve political matters, and it is unrealistic to expect that the ethnic composition of these activities can be systematically controlled or that stakeholders might be able or willing to cast their individual identities aside.

Our finding is that ethnicity could be beneficial to deliberative processes by bringing with it an increased tendency to give reasons and include others. It provides further evidence that the impulse to bracket ethnicity is misplaced, if not counterproductive. Deliberation theorists must not attempt to manage diversity by trying to make it invisible in the interest of maintaining a thriving democracy. As we watched the videos of our research participants, we saw actors consistently combine reason-giving with ethnocultural referents. People’s ethnocultural identities were deployed *as* reasons; students emphasized how their cultural values of family, individual responsibility, and requirements to help others shaped their political views. If ethnocultural experiences are the basis of subjects’ reasons, asking them to bracket ethnicity may hide the foundation of reason-giving and hinder deliberative exploration.

Our results suggest that when we think of ethnicity as an individual-level variable that people either “are” or can be primed to “be,” we don’t find that ethnicity as such strongly influences deliberative processes. This is a positive finding insofar as people need not bracket their ethnicity when entering a deliberation. But our findings go further. For when we think of ethnicity as something that individuals *do* and thereby marks a situation that others are *in*, we find that deliberative quality increases. Democratic processes need not hide the differences of their participants; indeed, embracing difference within political communication not only creates a more inclusive public sphere for those marked as “different,” but such

enactments actually create situation dynamics that benefit all who are participating in political processes.

We are encouraged by our finding, but also cognizant of its limits. Readers will be quick to remember that these results come from a laboratory setting. Though we struggled to ensure the external validity of our deliberative process, we can be less than certain as to how such results can extend beyond undergraduates in the lab to real-world scenarios in Canada or elsewhere. We also purposefully picked a subject matter that our participants had a real stake in, but was not *overly* politically contentious, and one that did not *necessarily* interact with ethnic differences. We do not know, therefore, what the outcome might look like for more politically charged topics such as abortion. Nor do we know what the political communication would look like if topics directly related to ethnicity, such as affirmative action or immigration, were deliberated. Answers to these questions will require more empirical work that explores the extension of deliberation into heterogeneous settings where identities are *not* bracketed and where subjects deliberate on more heated topics. We also see room for empirical work looking at how context matters—exploring differences in deliberative processes in different state and provincial, rural or urban, multiethnic or homogeneous spaces.

For now, though, we are in a position to argue that deliberation works in multiethnic groups in much the same way we saw it work in homogeneous groups; indeed, it may work better. This provides what we consider a hopeful and welcome moment for reconsidering certain theoretical elements of the deliberation literature—specifically that subjects must dissociate themselves from their (ethnic) identity and that reason is best deployed when blind to ethnocultural experience. Deliberation is a robust-enough form of political communication not just to manage, but also to embrace diverse subjective experiences. This is good news for diverse nations such as Canada that are trying to consider how to ensure that the voices of all its citizens are heard, and it provides some evidence to suggest that other nations might further their own democratic projects.

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