Deliberative Moments: Understanding Deliberation as an Interactional Accomplishment

Leah Sprain & Laura Black

To cite this article: Leah Sprain & Laura Black (2017): Deliberative Moments: Understanding Deliberation as an Interactional Accomplishment, Western Journal of Communication, DOI: 10.1080/10570314.2017.1347275

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/10570314.2017.1347275

Published online: 19 Jul 2017.

Article views: 131

View related articles

View Crossmark data
Deliberative Moments: Understanding Deliberation as an Interactional Accomplishment

Leah Sprain & Laura Black

Deliberation is typically theorized as a normative ideal that can only be accomplished momentarily. Drawing from practical theory, this essay develops the concept of deliberative moments that identifies key elements of how deliberation is coconstructed and accomplished in interaction. Similar to their analog dialogic moments, deliberative moments are intense moments of awareness of the self, the other, and the issue. Deliberative moments involve occurrence of three elements: a reason-giving exchange marked by disagreement, stance indicators of listening and respect, and inclusive discourse. We define each of these categories and provide empirical examples.

Keywords: Deliberation; Dialogic Moments; Disagreement; Language and Social Interaction; Practical Theory

The deliberative turn in political theory sparked a proliferation of theoretical and empirical work. Deliberation is predominantly theorized as a normative ideal. From the early conceptualizations of the ideal speech situation (Habermas, 1984) to more contemporary models (Burkhalter, Gastil, & Kelshaw, 2002; Gastil & Black, 2008), deliberation is treated as an “unattainable ideal” (Burkhalter et al., 2002, p. 400) that can only be reached by degrees. Nevertheless, deliberative scholars have recognized that there are meaningful moments where groups come close to demonstrating...
deliberative ideals in their talk. Gastil (1993) referred to these moments as “brief, brilliant flashes” (p. 123) during which groups temporarily overcome some obstacles to democracy. Mansbridge and her colleagues found that experienced facilitators were able to readily identify examples of “good” and “bad” deliberation in video recordings of forums (Mansbridge, Hartz-Karp, Amengual, & Gastil, 2006). Yet neither scholars nor practitioners have developed a succinct account of the key elements of these flashes so that they can be easily located or cultivated in interaction. This gap is particularly consequential given practitioners and scholars desire to explore the political potential of deliberation in ordinary speech (Lawrence & Bates, 2014), especially the role of everyday deliberation within a deliberative system outside of the context of a deliberative forum or formal political institutions (Kim & Kim, 2008; Mansbridge, 2012).

We recognize that there is a productive tension between theory and practice in the field of deliberative democracy (see Mutz, 2008; Thompson, 2008). There is a global community of practice outside of academia that promotes deliberative discussion as a way to address complex social problems (see Nabatchi, Gastil, Weiksner, & Leighninger, 2012), and it is important for deliberative theory to have relevance to the local practices of these real-world experiences. Rather than disregard normative theory or rely solely on theoretical ideals that promote deliberation as unobtainable, we turn to practical theory (Barge & Craig, 2009; Craig, 2013). Practical theory offers a way to address a current theory–practice gap within deliberative scholarship and also allows us to better understand the moments when groups—including groups not engaged in a formal deliberative process—accomplish deliberative ideals in practice.

We draw on the practical theory tradition to offer a concept that addresses this gap and answers the question: When do interlocutors accomplish deliberation in interaction? Our concept provides a normative reconstruction (Craig, 1989) of deliberative moments as a communication practice. As we discuss later, the term deliberative moment has been used elsewhere by Goodin (2005) to think about sequences of deliberation over time; we use it here to develop the interactional components that identify these brief, shining bursts of deliberation, playing off the notion of a dialogic moment. By articulating links between political ideals and communication practices, we are not providing an explanation for how deliberation works or even primarily a way to operationalize deliberation. Instead, we embrace a reflexive relationship between theory and practice, wherein theory emerges from systemic reflection on communicative practice, and theory can contribute to the reality of deliberation itself (Barge & Craig, 2009). In our case, this means our practical theory comes from both analysis of transcripts from groups modeled on deliberative forums and reading deliberative democracy theory. In turn, our practical theory may potentially contribute to the ongoing social construction of the very practices we conceptualize if it is incorporated into everyday discourse.

To identify and examine deliberative moments, scholars must be able to directly observe interaction. A great deal of research on deliberation has examined it indirectly by looking for indicators that it occurred rather than directly measuring aspects of interaction (Black, Burkhalter, Gastil, & Stromer-Galley, 2010). Such research has
focused on anticipated benefits and outcomes of deliberation (Sprain & Gastil, 2013) such as attitude change (e.g., Barabas, 2004; Luskin, Fishkin, & Jowell, 2002; Niemeyer, 2011) or increased civic engagement (e.g., Gastil, Deess, Weiser, & Simmons, 2010). In contrast, understanding deliberative moments requires a focus on discourse and social interaction.

In this essay, we focus on exceptional moments of interaction wherein participants accomplish deliberation discursively. We call these relatively rare, but profoundly important, interactions *deliberative moments*. Despite extensive study of deliberation, communication scholars have not paid sufficient attention to identifying and describing these moments. Without description, it is sometimes difficult for groups to recognize when they are experiencing a brief, brilliant flash just as it may be difficult for a scholar to articulate what makes them so brilliant. This paper develops the concept of deliberative moments and suggests the necessary criteria for locating these moments in social interaction. We begin by reviewing the literature on deliberation and communication, highlighting how deliberative moments complement other direct measures of deliberation. Then we describe our analytic process and explicate the essential features of deliberative moments in interaction: reason-giving exchanges marked by disagreement, listening and respect, and inclusive discourse. We provide an illustrative example of a deliberative moment including these features, and we conclude by suggesting applications of our concept for research and practice.

**DELIBERATION & COMMUNICATION**

Deliberative democracy puts communication and reflection at the core of democracy (Dryzek, 2010). Rather than make decisions based on majority rule, early deliberative democrats like Habermas (1984) and Cohen (1989) promoted democracy grounded in exchanges between members of the public, wherein weighing of information and consideration of public interest would ultimately result in a rational consensus. These normative ideals valorized rationality, which prompted critiques from feminist scholars such as Sanders (1997) and Young (1996) who called for a wider range of communication practices such as emotional expression, testimony, and storytelling that would be more inclusive of modes of expression practiced by different communities. These challenges have been well taken. Deliberative theorists (e.g., Dryzek, 2010) offer expanded notions of deliberation that include argument, storytelling, humor, emotion, gossip, and more. Likewise, empirical research has demonstrated the frequency and importance of communication practices such as stories (e.g., Black, 2008) within actual deliberative events.

These developments within political theory continue to draw on Aristotelian notions of rhetoric and political life. As Yack (2006) argues, the impulse to think of public reason as constrained reason develops a form of deliberation that sharply limits both the form and substance of political argument to facilitate cooperation among equal individuals. In contrast, Aristotle puts rhetoric at the heart of political deliberation; identifying and using the available means of persuasion is the basis of political
talk. Rather than separate out a focus on logos, deliberative rhetoric should be evaluated on the model of pathos, ethos, and logos (Chambers, 2004)—making the idea of appealing to emotion as central to public discourse. Whereas Aristotle developed deliberative rhetoric as a particular genre focused on the civic requirements of establishing the law (Hauser, 1999), his conception of rhetoric provides a broader conception of the type of political talk at the core of deliberative democracy.

As conceptions of deliberation have broadened beyond reason-giving aiming at consensus, however, the communication dynamics of deliberation have become fuzzier as scholars struggle to identify the links between political ideals and communication practices. For example, Pan, Shen, Paek, and Sun (2006) note, “There is no doubt that deliberative talk must be defined in terms of the normative criteria of inclusion, equality, justice, publicity, and reason provision. To be useful in guiding empirical research, however, the concept of deliberation needs to go beyond the rigid normative confines” (p. 316). Yet their resolution is to embrace a broad definition of deliberation, considering “political talk among the mass public to be meaningfully deliberative in actual political processes” (p. 316). In essence, they conceive of all political talk in formal political processes as deliberative. This move fails to distinguish between forms of political talk that are more or less deliberative and ignores the role of context or topic in influencing deliberation. In their own attempt to disentangle treatments of deliberation, Bachtiger, Niemeyer, Neblo, Steenbergen, and Steiner (2010) remark, “It is not clear whether some commentators on deliberative democracy merely refer to any kind of communication” as deliberation (p. 33). We argue that not all communication is deliberation. Much of the talk in political contexts—including events explicitly designed to promote deliberation (Black, 2012)—does not exemplify normative ideals.

The term deliberative moment has not been widely used. One exception is Robert Goodin’s (2005) “Sequencing Deliberative Moments.” In this article, Goodin develops a conception of deliberation that unfolds over time, including distinct time periods and settings that add up to a deliberative moment. His expectations included open participation, justification of assertions and validity claims, consideration of the common good, respect, aim at a rationally motivated consensus, and authenticity without deception in expressing preferences. Some of these criteria, such as the aim at a rationally motivated consensus, suggest an orientation to a rigorous process that is unlikely in the momentary experience of deliberation that we are exploring. The Discourse Quality Index (DQI) (Bachtiger et al., 2010) provides another approach to conceptualizing and measuring the quality of deliberative discussion across time. The DQI focuses on the discussion as a whole and does not provide tools for identifying intensely meaningful moments. A recent study by Jaramillo and Steiner (2014) proposed the use of “deliberative transformative moments” as a way of studying speaking turns that are influential in changing the quality of the deliberative discussion. This piece provides an addition to the DQI and highlights the way that individual contributions, such as personal stories, function to either improve or to detract from the deliberative quality of the conversation and thereby can “trigger” deliberative transformative moments. Jaramillo and Steiner’s work highlights that
deliberative discussions can include distinct moments, but their focus is on how a single speaking turn, like the sharing of a personal story, impacts the overall movement of the discussion. In line with the DQI, their concern is centered on locating turning points that allow them to better map the quality of the overall discussion.

Surprisingly, even scholars who work in Language and Social Interaction (LSI) traditions have often engaged deliberative theory without focusing on deliberation as an interactional accomplishment (Sprain, 2015). Following Gastil (1992), LSI scholars have used deliberative theory to evaluate political discourse. This can involve considering how discourse practices both follow and flaunt deliberative ideals (e.g., Fairclough & Fairclough, 2011; Lee & Lin, 2006). Yet this work tends to either evaluate a process as a whole, such as the European Union European Convention (Just, 2007), or find discourse falling short of deliberative criteria (e.g., Farkas, 2013; Windisch, 2008) without identifying moments in which the discourse succeeded in creating genuine deliberation. We agree with Tracy (2010) that insufficient attention is paid to the complexities of how multiple aspects of different deliberative ideals are related theoretically, not to mention how people might communicatively reach those ideals in talk.

There is a small body of work that considers deliberation an interactional accomplishment between interlocutors. This approach is best exemplified by a group of education researchers making links between deliberation and accountability talk in classrooms. For instance, Michaels, O’Connor, and Resnick (2008) develop a scheme for understanding “accountable talk” in the classroom that mirrors deliberation in several respects. They outline three forms of accountability: accountability to community, accountability to knowledge, and accountability to reasoning. Accountability to community is talk that attends seriously to and builds the ideas of others. Discourse practices include listening, asking each other questions, making concessions, and providing reasons when there is disagreement. Accountability to reasoning is talk that emphasizes logical connections, involves explanation and self-correction, and searches for premises rather than attacking conclusions. This work understands deliberative discourse as an interactional accomplishment that can be identified if scholars look at specific social practices. Nonetheless, accountability talk does not fully capture deliberative principles and practices beyond the classroom. We build on this work by conceptualizing deliberation as a coconstructed interactional accomplishment between participants and focus specifically on the striking moments where participants orient to self, other, and issue to accomplish deliberation. One way to clarify the idea of deliberative moments is to consider them in relation to their analogue: dialogic moments.

Unlike deliberation, which is typically conceived to involve some kind of decision-making process, dialogue is a more open process, oriented toward shared understanding (Anderson, Baxter, & Cisna, 2004). Cisna and Anderson (2002) argue that people involved in conversation experience dialogue in fleeting, unplanned, often intense moments. The essence of dialogue is “an awakening of other-awareness that occurs in, and through, a moment of meeting” (p. 174). Cisna and Anderson (1998) describe the dialogic moment as “the experience of inventive surprise shared by the dialogic partners as each ‘turns toward’ the other and both mutually perceive the
impact of each other’s turning. It is a brief interlude of focused awareness and acceptance of otherness and difference” (p. 74). Dialogic moments involve deep listening, perspective taking, respect, and a sense of genuineness or honesty. These moments typically occur without being preplanned and cannot be produced by any single individual (Pearce & Pearce, 2000), but they can be cultivated by approaching others with an attitude of openness, imagination, and a desire to connect to others (Poulos, 2008). Dialogic moments are hard to maintain in a fully engaged sense during a group discussion where people are weighing tradeoffs and developing solutions (Black, 2008), but are nonetheless important for the kind of public judgment that deliberation aims to build. Indeed, scholars often theorize close relationships between dialogue and deliberation. Kim and Kim (2008) argue that deliberation has both instrumental and dialogic aspects; it is both a tool of using public reasons and making collective decisions, and a process of producing public reasons and reaching mutual understanding.

The attention to otherness and difference found within dialogic moments is also found within deliberative moments. To this focus, deliberative moments add an orientation to the issue under consideration. Deliberation necessarily involves approaching an issue from multiple perspectives. This includes the presentation of multiple perspectives. Deliberative moments are about awareness of self, other, and issue that is accomplished through multiperspectival inquiry.

In some cases, deliberative moments may be linked together to create an extended deliberative orientation to a broader discussion. In other words, deliberative moments may be elements within a broader deliberative process, the deliberative sequence that Goodin (2005) and others lay out. Yet deliberative moments may also be single, striking moments of interaction within a different type of public talk. In what follows, we flesh out the characteristics of deliberative moments and draw implications for the role they play in social deliberation.

METHODS

In order to develop our conceptualization of deliberative moments, we used an iterative process of moving between empirical data, direct measures of deliberation, deliberative theory, and engagement with deliberative practitioners. For our initial empirical data, we used transcripts of focus group discussions modeled on deliberative forums on immigration that were produced for a separate research project by the Colorado State University Center for Public Deliberation and Public Agenda. Working with eight groups, totaling over 250 pages of single-spaced transcripts, both authors independently looked at the data and noted moments that represented aspects of deliberation. Following Lindlof and Taylor (2010), both authors engaged in an initial categorization of the data to locate moments that seemed particularly deliberative. We then discussed those moments, noting discursive elements that stood out as potentially marking deliberation.
Following our abductive analytic approach, we returned to deliberative theory to see how these discourse markers might connect with broader conceptions deliberation. Tavory and Timmermans (2014) describe abductive analysis as “recursively moving back and forth between a set of observations and a theoretical generalization” (p. 4). Similarly, Reichertz (2010) argues that abductive inference involves a particular “attitude towards data and towards one’s own knowledge: data are to be taken seriously, and the validity of previously developed knowledge is to be queried” (p. 6). To accomplish this abductive analysis, we read widely across deliberative theory as well as direct measures of deliberative discussion reviewed above. In the iterative process of going back and forth between the data and theory, we developed the broad coding categories that include multiple discursive markers of moments where deliberation occurred.

In line with suggestions from practical theorists (Barge & Craig, 2009), we then engaged in prolonged conversations with deliberative practitioners to test out our initial coding categories and further develop our analysis. Over the course of 2 years we spent at least 32 hours in conversation with practitioners from the Kettering Foundation, one of the leading deliberative practitioner organizations in the United States, to discuss the idea of deliberative moments and the discursive elements we located in our research. Through these conversations we developed the idea of co-occurrence (multiple accomplishments happening simultaneously) and refined our categorization to three essential elements of deliberative moments. Finally, we engaged again in empirical discourse analysis. We applied our analytic framework to a different data set to locate and analyze deliberative moments. The exemplar included in this article comes from transcripts from 10 groups engaged in an hour and a half group discussion as part of a Leadership Task Force meeting of a nongovernmental organization doing regional visioning. The interactional context is described below.

In the next section, we provide a conceptual understanding of each category, drawing on deliberative theory to account for its importance and illustrate what it can look like in interaction. We then provide an illustrative example to demonstrate the co-occurrence of these elements in a prolonged deliberative moment.

**IDENTIFYING DELIBERATIVE MOMENTS**

Deliberative moments are intense instances when participants accomplish profound awareness of self, other, and issue in talk. As such, we distinguish between deliberative moments and related speech genres, including discussion, conversation, decision-making, dialogue, negotiation, and the like. To make these distinctions clear, we need to do more than point to discourse practices generally associated with deliberation. Based on previous research, we know a fair amount about the general types of talk that occur within deliberative forums. Participants state opinions and make arguments to support their ideas (Stromer-Galley, 2007). They also challenge each other’s positions by expressing disagreement (Stromer-Galley, 2007), asking questions or raising issues (Leighter & Black, 2010), or telling stories that offer an alternative
viewpoint (Polletta & Lee, 2006). Participants accomplish relational aspects of deliberation through listening (Black & Wiederhold, 2014), expressing emotions (Mansbridge et al., 2006), and making identity statements by using collective pronouns to indicate membership in some group or explicitly labeling themselves or others (Black, 2008). Notably, none of these discourse practices are unique to deliberation. Trying to find deliberative moments by looking for arguments or identity statements would be like diamond hunting by looking for pebbles—the categories are too broad. Even more specific discourse practices like indicating a stance of openness (Sprain & Ivancic, 2017) or perspective taking (Black, 2008) can be found in other types of group interaction and discussion. None of these discourse practices alone reveal essential aspects of deliberation or deliberative accomplishment.

Instead of building a comprehensive catalogue of discourse within deliberative forums, we focus on the necessary and essential elements of doing deliberation in interaction. Each element brings together deliberative theory and discursive practices: a reason-giving exchange marked by disagreement, stance indicators of listening and respect, and inclusive discourse. These three elements work together in a deliberative moment.

Reason-Giving Exchanges Marked By Disagreement

The first element of a deliberative moment is a reason-giving exchange marked by disagreement. Disagreement is essential to our conception of a deliberative moment due to the role it plays in democracy despite it not being a preferred move in interpersonal conversation (Stromer-Galley & Muhlberger, 2009). Disagreement often prompts participants to develop more sophisticated reasons and justifications to support their arguments. This argument development is what Goodin (2005) is looking for in the justification of assertions and validity claims. Moreover, disagreement signals the possibility that participants are weighing tradeoffs and working through different perspectives since these moves require a consideration of conflicting impulses, a core aspect of deliberation (Carcasson & Sprain, 2012). Through disagreement and reason giving, participants orient to the issue, not just each other, which distinguishes deliberative moments from dialogic moments.

Reason-giving exchanges are not purely rational or based on “facts.” In deliberative moments, participants engage in both logical and emotional discourse, often simultaneously. Instead, reason giving suggests a more generic form of providing support for positions. This support can come in a range of different forms (e.g., testimony, storytelling, and other forms of rhetoric) and draw on a variety of different resources (e.g., authority, values, principles, personal experience). But the minimum requirement is that participants offer support for their positions rather than simply referencing previous statements.

These exchanges do not need to follow an exact act sequence where disagreement initiates the exchange. Instead, a reason-giving exchange starts when someone introduces a topic and the participants continue to discuss that same topic, often for at
least four turns. In some cases, this exchange can be sustained for much longer. The four-turn expectation establishes reason giving as a joint accomplishment between participants rather than a single person disagreeing without any response by other participants. To conceptualize disagreement, we followed Stromer-Galley (2007; Stromer-Galley & Muhlberger, 2009), who notes that participants within deliberation can disagree through both overt means (e.g., actually I disagree…) and the use of politeness markers before presenting a challenge (e.g., I think you are right, but perhaps…). Discursively, participants can use talk tokens that minimize the face threat while still doing disagreement (Tracy, 2008).

Reason-giving exchange can be relatively rare within deliberative forums, not to mention other contexts. This happens for a variety of reasons, including frequent topic changes, simplistic agreement without any challenges, and tangents that do not involve the public problem of concern. Therefore, a focus on reason-giving exchanges helps scholars ignore a lot of other speech moves that are not unique to accomplishing deliberation.

Respect and Listening

Respect and listening capture the social dynamics of how participants treat each other, representing key features distinguishing deliberation from decision-making. These elements also capture the profound orientation between self and other within dialogic moments. Obviously respect and listening do not equate to agreement since we are looking for evidence of these moves within disagreement. Nonetheless, this seeming contradiction between respect and disagreement highlights two important points: (1) we are looking for evidence of respect in exchanges where demonstrating respect could be difficult since people are actively disagreeing and challenging each other, and (2) respect and listening must occur within the context of disagreement rather than in lieu of real engagement. As Gutman and Thompson (1996) argue, reciprocal discussion of disagreements can actually be a deep form of respect because participants take each other and their arguments seriously as they work through the issue under discussion.

Identifying respect is not an easy, straightforward task. As Bachtiger et al. (2010) warn, surface-level gestures of respect may actually be used with irony, sarcasm, or signal social pressure to appear deliberative. To untangle these challenges, we turn to the extensive interdisciplinary literature on politeness and respect. Anthropologists, sociolinguists, and communication scholars have long argued that ideas about respect are socially constructed judgments (Lo & Howard, 2009). The specific ideals of what counts as respect vary both across cultures and within a single culture (Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989; Brown & Levinson, 1987). As Lo and Howard (2009) outline, categorizations about what counts as “respect” and “disrespect” are influenced by: (1) semiotic practices, including forms of speech, gesture, and dress; (2) social values that those practices are thought to point to, such as being rude or considerate; (3) images of personhood that are linked to the use of such practices, like being a strong man or a
dutiful citizen; and (4) people for whom such practices, values, and images matter. Thus ideas about forms of behavior that signify politeness or respect are contingent, multiple, and always changing. A sociolinguistic perspective does not make respect unimportant or irrelevant to deliberation; however, it does suggest the extreme difficulty in determining what does and does not count as an indicator of politeness or respect (Craig, Tracy, & Spisak, 1986). This difficulty takes us well beyond attending to ironic uses of politeness markers.

What might count as doing listening or respect? Both respect and listening signal how participants are orienting to each other’s statements. Within research on listening, scholars note that certain moves may be preconscious, such as mimicry in dialect, accent, speech rate, vocal intensity, and the like (Berger, 2011). This seems like too low of bar for determining the social aspects of listening and respect that we seek. Burleson (2011) defines listening as the process of interpreting communicative behavior of others in the effort to understand the meaning and implications of that behavior. Our goal is to focus on the discursive rather than cognitive aspects of this process. Certain discourse practices could indicate respect, such as role reversal (Rogers, 1952) where participants take the perspective of another person or more generic moves like paraphrasing. But it is possible that either role reversal or paraphrasing can be intentionally done inaccurately to gain strategic advantage.

Rather than presume a single discourse practice will always indicate respect or listening, we consider listening and respect stances toward other participants. Stances are speaker-based approaches that can be analyzed based on the lexical and grammatical expression of attitudes, feelings, judgments, or commitments (Lempert, 2009). Analyzing stances is an interpretative move that can be accomplished by a scholar based on the discourse practices within a given interaction and the scholar’s knowledge of the sociocultural means of demonstrating listening and respect. In some cases, participants may also describe an interaction as particularly respectful or report feeling heard.

When transcripts are available, scholars can also draw on established traditions of studying facework, including actions geared toward giving deference (negative politeness strategies) and attending to competence (positive face) in order to identify listening and respect stances (Tracy, 2011).

Inclusive Discourse

Within deliberation, inclusion is often connected to values of equality, mutual recognition, and diversity. This focus stems from the foundational importance of inclusion for democracy (Schneiderhan & Khan, 2008) and as a response to critics of deliberation who claim that deliberation often excludes certain groups (e.g., Sanders, 1997; Young, 2001). Some of the classic concerns about inclusion focus on how a focus on reason giving may unduly exclude women, ethnic minorities, and other groups that prefer other modes of argumentation (Sanders, 1997). Moreover, calls for “civility” can be used to silence dissent and uphold the status quo (Lozano-Reich & Cloud, 2010).
As a democratic value, inclusion is a radical call for standing for all—especially groups that may otherwise be marginalized—within deliberative interaction. Inclusion is also central to the epistemology of deliberation. In multiperspectival inquiry, the coconstruction of knowledge comes from the rigorous exchange between diverse perspectives (Bohman, 2007).

In research on facilitators’ perceptions of deliberation, Mansbridge et al. (2006) connected inclusion to giving every person the right to speak. Given our focus on momentary exchanges, it seems impractical to focus on inclusion by requiring that every participant speak in a particular exchange. Instead, inclusion is an orientation to recognizing other perspectives about an issue. We can trace this aspect of deliberation by looking for participants doing “conversational work to recognize that they were deliberating about issues that others could have perceived differently” (Tracy & Muller, 2001, p. 98). This conversational work can include raising different perspectives by sharing one’s own perspective that counters the dominant perspective in the conversation or by invoking the voice of people not present. This focus on interaction is an important addition to how many scholars treat inclusion as a structural feature of deliberation (e.g., who is in the room) rather than how people talk with each other. Our focus on inclusion rather than civility stems from a consideration of how people use discourse to understand other perspectives on an issue instead of policing people for violating civility norms. This provides a way to account for social power and hegemony, while recognizing that not all groups will rely on reasoned discourse in presenting a viewpoint.

ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLE OF A DELIBERATIVE MOMENT

This deliberative moment comes from a meeting of a nongovernmental organization seeking to do regional visioning in Northern Colorado. Members of a Leadership Task Force were engaged in a planning game where small groups worked with a facilitator to consider how they wanted to see the region grow. Groups were given a map of the region and asked to place stickers representing additional development onto the map. The following deliberative moment comes from early in the session when the group was asked to set aside open land and agricultural land that would not be developed by marking the area with a green pen. Since we cannot include the entire interaction due to length constraints, we have included line numbers from the full utterance-level transcript of the deliberative moment (138 lines of text).

The deliberative moment begins when a man we call R suggests that agricultural land should be saved.

1 R: I agree with the comment that preserves agricultural land and that’s that’s important for what Northern Colorado is so I would support that um
2 K: If that’s the case I’m mean it’s
3 Q: Cou-could I interject?
4 K: Sure
Q: I'm the only one sitting this table that owns farm land I assume. I live in North Windsor. Um when people that don't own the farmlands start talking about preserving it it scares the hell out of us hell out of us that own that land. Ahh [pause] wh what I'd like you to consider I'm not saying don't like preserve it anything what I'm saying to you is when you're thinking about these things there agricultural land is not just agricultural land there's irrigated agricultural land there's dry agricultural land. Umm today farmers in our area are are doing OK because their prices are OK but most of my lifetime prices were very depressed. And by you drawing on a map and saying this is an area we want to preserve you're some from our perspective limiting the potential of managing our asset in the Windsor area. Where I live I have potential to develop my land at some point in time ok. I believe that ought to be my choice so long as there is a structure involved in the land use approval process…

Q goes on through line 61 to provide reasons why farmers prioritize property rights to maintain flexibility in how to use their land. The president of the organization walks by during his turn, leading to a discussion about the level of detail about the conversation. T interjects to correct the president and get the discussion back on track.

T (at table): his point you came in late is
NGO president: oh sorry
T: is to say preserving farmland means I can’t sell my farm and develop in the future
NGO president: oh I see oh OK
T: I think what I hear you say is
NGO president: you're kind of on the other end of that statement
T: don’t preserve farmland for perpetuity preserve open space
maybe there are other things but that shouldn’t be the key category forever because it limits restricts the future use of those properties at a time at a time
Q: I think that’s fair

Having captured Q’s argument, the group returns to discussing whether to preserve agricultural land. As people disagree about whether and how to set aside land, Q interjects that he will “be quiet because I don’t want to derail this.”

K: yeah so preservation of farmers is is important [umhmm] at the detail level there could be a number of ways to compensate you know for the prerogatives of that property as developable
Q: I’ll be quiet on that because I don’t want to derail this out
P: no
K: no this is great that’s a really valid point
Facilitator: it definitely
Q: I appreciate it
T: this effects the whole discussion whether we want to set aside that land...

The group continues to discuss and disagree about agricultural lands within a broader discussion of density until the facilitator makes the group start drawing on the map at line 138.

Accomplishing Deliberation

Within the interaction above, participants simultaneously accomplish the three elements of a deliberative moment: reason-giving marked by disagreement, respect and listening, and inclusion. In line 7, Q introduces himself as a farmer, noting that farmer’s voices are otherwise missing in this discussion. Thus his turn becomes a way of accomplishing inclusion by bringing in a new perspective that otherwise could be marginalized. The group affirms the importance of these contributions in lines 110–117 when four participants plus the facilitator note the importance of his contributions for deciding as a group about whether to set aside farm land.

This support of inclusion does not, however, preclude the group from disagreeing and offering reasons in support of divergent positions. Indeed, Q’s initial turn is also a way of initiating disagreement and providing reasons why farmers want to maintain private property rights to ensure control over how to use their land. He continues to support this position by offering additional reasons in two subsequent turns. In response, T raises concerns that a lack of planning will result in no farmland. Respect and listening is accomplished when T—who disagrees with Q about whether to set aside land—jumps in to correct the president by accurately paraphrasing Q’s argument about problems with setting aside land in lines 79–87. Q agrees that this is a fair characterization, affirming that T has been listening to Q’s argument. The group’s affirmation of Q’s contribution is also a sign of respect for him and his contributions.

DISCUSSION

Three elements occur together in a deliberative moment: a reason-giving exchange marked by disagreement, stance indicators of listening and respect, and inclusive discourse. These elements highlight essential functions that must be accomplished simultaneously in deliberation. Our conception of deliberative moments contributes to existing work by treating deliberation as an interactional accomplishment and highlighting the elements of deliberation that occur together in exceptional, brilliant flashes of deliberation. Our definition moves away from the Habermasian tradition of Type I deliberation (Bachtiger et al., 2010) focused on traditional expectations about rationality. By focusing on reason giving, we open up a model of deliberation that is situated, relational, and social that can be accomplished by diverse discourse practices. By explicitly discussing how reason giving and respect are understood differently across
cultures and within them, we have identified key aspects of deliberative moments and recognized cultural variation in how these moments occur in different communities.

This conceptualization of deliberative moments has several implications for research and practice. Deliberative scholars could use this concept to study the interactional dynamics within forums. Rather than catalogue typical practices like making arguments, scholars could identify deliberative moments in context and then ask a range of questions: What do participants or facilitators do to bring about or hinder deliberative moments? What moves sustain deliberative moments? What happens interactionally after these moments? All of these questions require looking at deliberative moments in context to understand the interaction that proceeds and follows from them.

Following Michaels et al. (2008), we imagine that certain discourse practices or norms might inhibit a deliberative moment. Rather than hypothesize about the practices that may work against deliberative moments, future research can identify when deliberative moments occur and how other factors complicate the situated accomplishment of deliberation. In this respect, we are not arguing that our definition of deliberative moments is necessarily fixed. Instead, we offer our practical theory as a heuristic for looking for and studying deliberation in a wide number of scenes and settings—from Internet chat forums to personal conversations to classrooms and beyond.

Our conceptualization could also prove useful to people wishing to spread deliberative discourse in interactions that occur outside of organized forums such as educational settings, family dinner conversations, or coffeehouse chats. Given Mansbridge’s (2012) discussion of the importance of deliberation in everyday speech, it seems likely that civic organizations may desire to cultivate deliberative moments beyond established forums. Indeed, our example of a deliberative moment came from a meeting that was not framed as a deliberative session. Our concept of deliberative moments is a particularly useful heuristic for field researchers attempting to identify deliberative discourse in a wide range of settings. Disagreement, respect, and inclusion may be achieved through different discourse practices in different social scenes in different speech communities. Indeed, we account for social power and hegemony by not overspecifying how these can be accomplished to allow for multiple cultural forms of deliberation. Nonetheless, a researcher with knowledge of local practices should still be able to use this conception to locate deliberative moments in any culture.

**Practical Implications**

Practical theory can be used to help guide practice. An overarching way this happens is when the theoretical metadiscourse produced by scholars is taken up and used within practical metadiscourse in everyday life (Craig, 1999). Our ongoing collaborations with deliberative practitioners suggest that practitioners
could use the term deliberative moment to facilitate deliberation within group discussion. That is, the concept becomes part of the way that they talk about their own talk. Within our example, T and Q did not—to our knowledge—knowingly engage in a deliberative moment. But the type of practical theory developed here makes it easier to teach people about this type of interaction and, potentially, result in improved deliberation.

Focusing on accomplishing deliberation in interaction may be particularly useful for deliberative practitioners, facilitators, and educators. Our attention to interactional dynamics as core to deliberation has several practical implications for holding deliberative forums. Facilitation and note taking are typically viewed as essential to deliberative forums, and deliberative organizations such as the Kettering Foundation, Everyday Democracy, and others provide training materials for people who wish to host forums (Carcasson & Sprain, 2016). Typically, note takers orient toward statements, ideas, and positions that most group members agree with, and these things get recorded as the official record of the deliberation. Or note takers attempt to capture every contribution. These procedures may overemphasize preexisting opinions and disagreement and not recognize the potential for creation of high-quality deliberation. As an alternative, note takers could be encouraged to look for those times of sustained disagreement where participants are exchanging reasons, demonstrating stances of respect and listening, and making efforts at inclusion. These moments, although they may be more difficult to see than statements of agreement, demonstrate when the group is doing its most deliberative work. A consideration of these deliberative moments may uncover important tensions and therefore make it easier to achieve high-quality deliberation. The insights gleaned from these deliberative moments are arguably more significant than those ideas or positions that achieve quick and easy agreement from the group.

Understanding deliberation in terms of moments can also be useful for facilitators. Our conceptualization sheds light on an insight recognized by experienced facilitators: that some moments in forums are more meaningful, helpful, and deliberative than others. Facilitators can use the practical theory developed here to help groups create deliberative moments (Barge & Craig, 2009). As Tracy and Mirivel (2009) argue, describing discursive details can help people make wiser choices about how to act and interpret others actions. Our construct provides a way to direct facilitator attention to productive and meaningful deliberative interaction, building on their existing practices and ideas about deliberation (Dillard, 2013). It may also lead them to nurture behavior like disagreement that may otherwise be seen as conversationally inappropriate yet plays a vital role within deliberation.

Within higher education, educators are likely to include political discussions in their classes and hold an interest in developing more deliberative interaction (e.g., Muller, 2014) yet lack a clear typology for identifying productive deliberation. Deliberative moments as a concept provides instructors with key tools for facilitating genuine deliberation in class discussion (Sprain, Carcasson, & Merolla, 2014). The concept could also be used by students to foster critical thinking and reflection about their discussions.
CONCLUSION

Drawing on practical theory, we have highlighted three elements that occur together in a deliberative moment: a reason-giving exchange marked by disagreement, stance indicators of listening and respect, and inclusive discourse. This definition shifts away from a focus on making a decision to the type of interaction at the center of deliberation. We acknowledge that deliberative moments theory sets a relatively high standard for deliberative talk; after all, we focus on the brief, brilliant flashes (Gastil, 1993) to understand the interactional accomplishment of deliberation. Nonetheless, this high standard is also realistic because it was developed by looking at practice. By working abductively between deliberative theory and actual talk within group conversations, we were able to develop a normative model that is grounded in practice. That we were able to find deliberative moments within political conversations that do not employ deliberative designs (Sprain et al., 2014) demonstrates that our standard—although high—is realistic.

The markers of deliberative moments identify the interactional accomplishment of deliberation. In some cases, deliberative moments may add up to a broader orientation to a situation—deliberative movement toward a decision. Empirical work can clarify the role of deliberative moments within deliberation. Even as a moment, this talk has democratic value because it means that participants are engaged in multiperspectival inquiry about a political or other issue. Through deliberative moments, participants consider an issue by simultaneously offering reasons, disagreeing with other perspectives, and bringing in perspectives they might not have considered, all while demonstrating listening and respect between participants. Future research should consider the relationship between deliberative moments and scores on deliberative process assessments such as the discourse quality index (Steenbergen, Bachtiger, Sporndli, & Steiner, 2003) or deliberative evaluation models (e.g., Knoblach, Gastil, Reedy, & Cramer Walsh, 2013).

A large interdisciplinary field of scholars and practitioners is interested in better understanding the interactional dynamics of deliberation, as suggested by repeated calls to study interaction during forums (e.g., Ryfe, 2006). By identifying core functional elements of deliberative moments, this essay positions communication scholars to contribute to these discussions.

Not all democratic action will be deliberative in nature. Democracies need protest, agitation, persuasion, invitational rhetoric, and more (Kim & Kim, 2008). Nonetheless, the idea of deliberative moments is useful for identifying markers of everyday political talk that accomplishes deliberation. Recognizing this type of talk may also help us cultivate it where it is most needed to build understanding about self, other, and issue.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to acknowledge the support from the Kettering Foundation, who assembled a fantastic, collaborative team to study deliberation in everyday speech. The discussions of this team shaped our work, and we thank Margaret Holt, Erika Imbody, Windy Lawrence, Amy Lee, Jay Leighter, Katya Loukianva, and Mary Margaret Popova.
References


