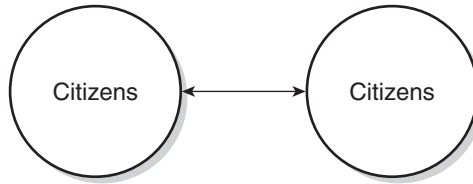


2

Conversation and Discussion



Conversation is the soul of democracy.

—Joohan Kim, Robert Wyatt, and Elihu Katz¹

Let's join an online conversation already in progress. And, yes, the following exchange is real. . . .

Eric shouts in frustration. He has just read a newspaper headline about New Jersey's troops that have died in the Iraq War: "Jersey's share of a somber toll: 53 who won't see home again." So he puts his fingers on his keyboard and writes his 1,997th post at conservative-talk.com. The point of that headline, he surmises, "was that, even if it had been worth it to end the rule of Saddam Hussein, there didn't seem to be a good reason why troops remain to secure a democratic Iraq. The subtler message was that their lives had been wasted." After comparing the Iraq coverage to reporting from World War II, he calls out to his fellow conservatives, "I think in order to get the [conservative/pro-war] movement some more momentum, we will have to eventually deal with the media. Thoughts?"

The first reply comes from a sympathetic reader going by the handle Mobile Vulgus: "I think Americans ARE 'dealing with the media,'" he says wryly. "Newspapers are falling apart in readership. The Network News is a shadow of its former self in viewership, and news magazines have lower subscription rates every year."

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The next reply, however, challenges Eric's main points. Ken's posting offers historical perspective by way of his own experience. "Eric," he writes, "I remember sitting at the radio listening to the grim facts of war. 'Today we lost a hundred and twenty aircraft over Germany' was typical. The movie news reels showed Tarawa beaches awash with Marine dead. [World War II] was started because we were attacked; we knew who was responsible." By contrast, Ken argues, the Iraq War is now officially being waged "to remove a dictator (who we placed in power, just as we did to Pinochet and Noriega). We have lost two thousand people for what, to establish democracy? Why don't we go after Malaysia—there you can get five years for not being Muslim but being Christian or Jewish. I think they need democracy, too, don't you? Let's invade them."

WIRichie1971 quickly comes to Eric's aid and offers this challenge to Ken: "Okay Kenny [sic], I call bs: where are your links supporting the claim the CIA installed Saddam in power? Every biography I have ever read about him claimed he murdered his way to the top."

As I write, Ken has not yet taken up that challenge.² I briefly consider whether to jump into the fray or maintain my professional distance. A quick search on Google confirms my recollection that the PBS program *Frontline* explored early links between Saddam and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA),³ but I don't want to register at conservative-talk.com to make that point. I have enough junk e-mail as it is. Instead of posting, I return to my day job—writing this book.

Conversations like these happen every day, more likely every minute, in the online community, just as they have happened face to face for millennia. In a democratic society, informal discussions make up a large percentage of the universe of political communication messages that people produce. Though political talk itself is ancient, how we talk, whom we talk with, and what we discuss has varied considerably. Like most of our other basic social practices, from standing quietly in elevators to wearing black at funerals, talking about politics is a cultural accomplishment that requires a set of general rules that we learn through childhood socialization and have come to take for granted as adults. Our knowledge of those rules is tacit in that we cannot always articulate them, but they are real, whether or not we can see them at work.⁴ To understand the hows and whys of modern political discussions, such as the one that took place between Eric, Mobile Vulgus, Ken(ny?), and WIRichie1971, it is useful to begin with a bit of history.

Historical Notes on Political Chatter

If the early political history of human civilization was one of repression and intolerance, it is fair to say that deliberative political conversation is on the upswing since those ages. As Susan Herbst has observed, "The hallmark of an

oppressive society is the absence of a rich and varied public sphere where citizens can convene to debate vital questions of the day.”⁵⁵

Where open, unfettered political conversation first became the norm remains unclear, but we do know some early forerunners of modern conversational practices. As early as 1617, the French developed salons in Paris, not for haircuts and spa treatments but for conversation among the social elite outside of the palace or other places of government. In this setting, conversation was refined as an art, purposeful in its ends but open in its structure. Satisfying and effective conversation required the advance planning and graceful facilitation of a hostess, or *salonnière*, typically a woman of high social standing.

Herbst offers us this quick peek into one such conversation, culled from the notes of Mademoiselle Quinault, who was leading a group through reflections on religion. At one point, Monsieur Duclos asked the group, “Where does this nation keep its reasoning capacity? It scoffs at people of other lands, and yet is more credulous [ready to believe] than they.” Monsieur Rousseau replied, “I can pardon its credulity, but not its condemnation of those whose credulity differs from its own.” Mademoiselle Quinault interjected that “in religious matters, everyone was right,” but “all people should stick to the religion in which they were born.” Rousseau countered that they should certainly not stay with their inherited faith “if it is a bad religion, for then it can only do much harm.” In the exchanges that followed, Mademoiselle Quinault decided that her own point of view lacked merit. The others, she recalled, “refuted me with arguments which did, as a matter of fact, appear to be better than mine.”⁵⁶ These conversations were not trivial intellectual or theological exercises because they provided at least a thin slice of French society the space in which they could explore new ideas that would, ultimately, challenge the power of not only the church but of the king himself.

Appropriately enough, it would be the Frenchman Alexis de Tocqueville, who would come to recognize a new kind of civic discourse taking place in the still-young United States. Americans had discovered their own brand of spirited exchange, but what made it particularly remarkable in de Tocqueville’s eyes was how far the Americans had gone toward overcoming the stiff reserve of the English:

If two Englishmen chance to meet where they are surrounded by strangers whose language and manners are almost unknown to them, they will first stare at each other with much curiosity and a kind of secret uneasiness; they will then turn away, or if one accosts the other, they will take care to converse only with a constrained and absent air, upon very unimportant subjects. Yet there is no enmity between these men; they have never seen each other before, and each believes the other to be a respectable person.

In America where the privileges of birth never existed and where riches confer no peculiar rights on their possessors, men unacquainted with one another are very ready to frequent the same places and find neither peril nor advantage in the free interchange of their thoughts. If they meet by accident,

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they neither seek nor avoid intercourse; their manner is therefore natural, frank, and open. . . .

What made white American men different from their English counterparts, whom most counted as their ancestors? The answer, de Tocqueville reasoned, was “their social condition”—the relative indifference to social rank and class.⁷

The cultural contours of conversation have ebbed and flowed in the United States, as elsewhere. One particularly important trend was the early 19th century movement from informal, one-on-one conversation to structured group discussion. Roughly one hundred years ago, it became fashionable to debate and discuss ideas in large groups, such as a debate club, an open forum, or a town hall.⁸

As the popular affection for discussion grew, educators adapted their pedagogy away from lecture toward a more interactive method of instruction. In 1928, two influential books appeared, *Public Discussion and Debate* and *The Process of Group Thinking*.⁹ These works helped to formalize emerging practices into a set of rules and procedures for effective discussion.

As recounted by communication scholar Ernest Bormann, discussion advocates insisted that “the individual citizen has an innate worth and dignity,” which means that they are not to be manipulated for the state’s purposes. Thus, each citizen should be free to discover his or her own opinions, and “public discussion gives citizens a chance to hear all sides of important public questions.” Specifically, discussion should deploy “the scientific method” to conduct a rational analysis after discussants have “purged themselves of all emotional prejudices, interests, and biases.” In the end, this process would benefit not only the individual but also the society, for “in the long run the majority of informed citizens would make the right decision.”¹⁰

This rational model of discussion is still with us today, and it shapes the way many Americans think about conversation and discussion. Most of all, it has a profound influence on modern conceptions of what it means to have a deliberative conversation.

Imagining a Deliberative Conversation

THE IDEAL SPEECH SITUATION

Modern deliberative democratic theory comes directly from the cultural tradition that Bormann calls the public discussion model. Among the most influential works setting the stage for modern theories of deliberation are two works by German philosopher Jürgen Habermas, the *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* and *Communication and the Evolution of Society*.¹¹ In these works, Habermas tried to conceptualize an “ideal speech situation,” in which two or more persons could infinitely question one another’s beliefs about the world

until each perspective had been fully scrutinized, leaving only a limited set of valid statements on which to base one's conclusions about an issue. Behind the abstract, at times impenetrable, philosophical language of Habermas's theory was none other than the public discussion model—the ideal of a rational exchange of views resulting in enlightened understanding.

There is no question but that this is part of what ideal deliberative conversation entails. In fact, the analytic process described in the left-hand column of Figure 2.1 conforms to this rational ideal to a degree. After all, gathering data and analyzing it systematically using consistent criteria is a relatively rigid way of deducing a solution.

DEMOCRATIC CONVERSATION

Deliberation, however, is more than this. Around the same time that Habermas was shaping his political theory, Benjamin Barber was capturing the imagination of scholars and citizens alike with his popular polemic *Strong Democracy*. Barber's book was an indictment of thin democracy, a bland soup of legal rights and institutions lacking in human connection and any tangible sense of a public. "At the heart of strong democracy," Barber insisted, "is talk."¹² By *talk*, Barber was not referring to the cold exchange and aggregation of individuals' predefined interests into a majority preference; rather, he imagined a more complex mix of imagining, wondering aloud, listening, and understanding. If thin democracy reduced talk to "the hedonistic speech of bargaining," then strong democracy would celebrate conversation.¹³

By *conversation* Barber meant a more open-ended process that was as much about mutual discovery as problem solving. In Barber's more florid prose, "A conversation follows an informal dialectic in which talk is used not to chart distinctions in the typical analytic fashion but to explore and create commonalities."¹⁴ Talk of this sort must be open, inclusive, and free flowing: "Because conversation responds to the endless variety of human experience and respects the initial legitimacy of every human perspective, it is served by many voices rather than by one and achieves a rich ambiguity rather than a narrow clarity."¹⁵

With that in mind, look at the right-hand column in Figure 2.1 and notice that the analytic process includes personal and emotional experiences as well as facts. It involves introspection on subjective values, rather than merely objective analysis. It also includes open-ended brainstorming, holding more than one perspective at a time, and possibly never reaching a decision. In other words, it may be enough to just talk and listen for a while.

The social process in Figure 2.1 draws on both the Habermasian and Barberic conceptions of talk. Equal access, comprehension, and consideration have a rationalist side, but the social process of deliberation also speaks directly to Barber's interest in mutual respect and the consideration of "the other" as a

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<i>General Definition of Deliberation</i>	<i>Specific Meaning for Conversation/Discussion</i>
<i>Analytic Process</i>	
Create a solid information base.	Discuss personal and emotional experiences, as well as known facts.
Prioritize the key values at stake.	Reflect on your own values, as well as those of others present.
Identify a broad range of solutions.	Brainstorm a wide variety of ways to address the problem.
Weigh the pros, cons, and trade-offs among solutions.	Recognize the limitations of your own preferred solution and the advantages of others.
Make the best decision possible.	Update your own opinion in light of what you have learned. No joint decision need be reached.
<i>Social Process</i>	
Adequately distribute speaking opportunities.	Take turns in conversation or take other action to ensure a balanced discussion.
Ensure mutual comprehension.	Speak plainly to each other and ask for clarification when confused.
Consider other ideas and experiences.	Listen carefully to what others say, especially when you disagree.
Respect other participants.	Presume that other participants are honest and well intentioned. Acknowledge their unique life experiences and perspectives.

Figure 2.1 Key Features of Deliberative Conversation and Discussion

whole person—more than just a source of ideas and information that happens to be human. Philosopher John Weithman describes this process as follows:

Citizens taking part in public deliberation should be willing to offer considerations in favor of their positions that will enable others to see what reasons they have for them. They must be appropriately responsive to the reactions and replies those considerations evoke. They must be appropriately responsive

to the considerations put forward by others in favor of their positions. And they must respect at least those other participants who show that they are willing to comply with the norms of well-conducted deliberation.¹⁶

GRICEAN MAXIMS

Lest the deliberative model of conversation sound like a political philosopher's ungrounded abstraction, we should notice the many ways in which it corresponds to the universally taken-for-granted assumptions of human conversation. Linguist H. Paul Grice posited a series of rules or maxims that we all unconsciously follow as listeners to make sense of everyday conversation.¹⁷ Figure 2.2 transposes each of the maxims into common expressions used in vernacular English. They can be summarized even more succinctly in the statement "Briefly tell me the complete truth I need to hear." The deliberative variant could be similarly summarized as "Let's briefly exchange the truths we need to share."

One of the ways we have confirmed that these maxims are at the core of our rules of speech is by watching the linguistic behavior of autistic children. Children with a specific language impairment have difficulty recognizing the

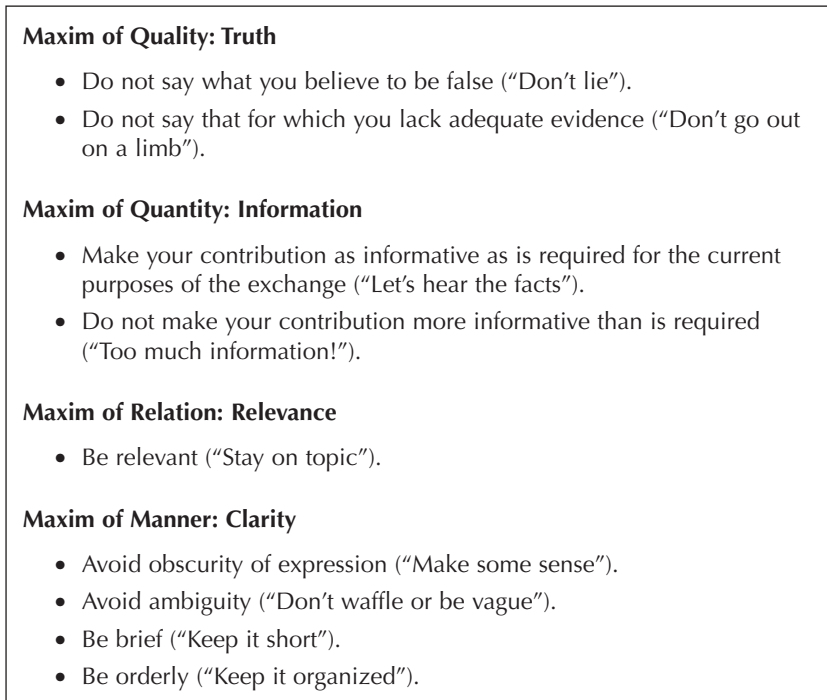


Figure 2.2 Gricean Maxims in Plain English

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violation of maxims, and this makes normal conversation tremendously difficult for them, both as speakers and listeners.¹⁸

In practice, we frequently violate the maxims to varying degrees. Normally, their violation simply prompts the listener to make an inference, such as when a truncated comment (“I’m tired”) prompts the listener to construct a more complete thought, based on the context (“I’m too tired to go out to a movie”). Other times, though, the accidental or careless violation of the maxims results in confusion, misunderstanding, and frustration. Their willful and malicious violation can result in manipulation or deception. And, more happily, their intentional, playful violation can result in comic genius.

For our purposes, not only do the maxims parallel some of the principles of deliberative conversation, they also provide another illustration of what a conversational ideal looks like. It is important to remember, as we read about how people talk about politics in everyday life, that the deliberative ideal of conversation and discussion is just that—an ideal. Like democracy, the conversational ideal is something that we can use as a critical standard for judging the quality of actual talk, but it is not something humans can live up to, at least not all the time. Moreover, the deliberative ideal is something that—even if not always clearly articulated—is widely recognized, as shown in a pair of inductive studies on how professional facilitators or lay jurors understand the term.¹⁹

Informal Conversation

In this chapter, we consider two kinds of talk—casual political conversations and more organized group discussions. Both are informal processes, and neither has a direct link to official decisions. Conversation, however, has less structure and, more rarely, an orientation toward formal problem solving. We begin by studying the flow and content of conversation, but when we turn to look at the process of discussion, we examine a slightly different kind of deliberation.

DRAWING ON MEDIA AND PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

Sociologist William Gamson broke new ground in 1992 with *Talking Politics*, a careful account of how small groups of friends and acquaintances discuss political issues in informal chats. He used a modified focus group research method to bring together not strangers but small peer groups to participate in loosely moderated conversations on a variety of current affairs. He transcribed thirty-seven discussions involving 188 diverse working-class participants. Afterward, he concluded, “Listening to their conversations over a period of an hour or more, one is struck by the deliberative quality of their construction of meaning about these complex issues.” He saw the participants in the peer-group conversations “achieve considerable coherence in spite of a great many handicaps, some flowing from

limitations in the media discourse that they find available and others from their own lack of experience with the task.²⁰

The first point Gamson made in *Talking Politics* is that the conversations were deliberative. At the time he wrote his book, Gamson did not make an explicit link to work on deliberative democracy; rather, he used the term in its vernacular meaning. Nonetheless, it is striking how many of Gamson's specific findings highlight aspects of the definition of deliberative conversation in Figure 2.1. For example, Gamson's research often explores the development of opposition—how dissent can congeal into organized resistance to dominant ideas and institutions. In the study detailed in his book, he explored the balance between themes and counterthemes. For example, two contrasting technology themes are making “progress through technology” and maintaining “harmony with nature.”²¹ In the deliberative framework, discussing themes and counterthemes constitutes weighing alternative evaluative criteria or reflecting on your own values, as well as those of others present. Gamson found that groups readily drew on opposing themes or values in their discussions, implicitly considering each and weighing them against one another. In other words, Gamson's research showed evidence that everyday political conversation is, indeed, often deliberative.²²

Gamson's second point was that the quality of a group's conversation comes from drawing on its available resources, no matter how limited. Two principal sources of information and ideas in peer conversations are media content and personal experience. Probably the most common interpretation of Gamson's work is that he found out how, in more concrete detail, media content frames how citizens talk about issues.²³

For example, the citizens Gamson observed drew on media coverage to inform their discussions of nuclear power. Participants discussed the catastrophic 1986 accident at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant, in which a nuclear reactor collapsed and deadly amounts of radioactivity spread into the surrounding environment.²⁴ That they mentioned the topic is unremarkable, as it was a gripping current event. What was more noteworthy was that participants latched on to particular facts or arguments presented in the media to frame their understanding of nuclear power. For instance, one fact that had come up in media discussions of Chernobyl came into a conversation in this way: Ida, a bookkeeper in her late sixties, argued that Chernobyl should not make Americans worry about our own power plants. “You see,” she explained, “our plants are built better than that one.” She then added that “it didn't have the safety features that our plants already have.” In a separate conversation, Joe, a firefighter in his fifties, interjected, “Look at Chernobyl. They're comparing it to the nuclear power plants in the United States. They can't do that! . . . That plant's antiquated. Know what I mean?”²⁵

The plant comparison Ida and Joe heard in the media was not just an idle bit of trivia. Rather, it was an important piece of information that helped them

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understand a problem and, ultimately, judge the value of maintaining the nuclear power program in the United States. In the next chapter, we consider whether media coverage of issues such as these is “fair and balanced.” For now, it is important only to notice how conversations can help citizens broaden their base of information by facilitating the exchange of information they learn through the media.

A less widely recognized finding in Gamson’s work is that people’s conversations draw on personal experience as much as they do on media content. This is particularly true for certain issues, such as affirmative action, which directly touch on people’s daily lives. But personal knowledge came into discussions of every issue Gamson studied. Returning to the issue of nuclear safety, Gamson admitted, “Initially, I thought that the issues of nuclear power . . . were so far removed from people’s daily lives that it surprised me to find a substantial minority introducing experiential knowledge. . . .”²⁶ In one such conversation, two discussants in their early twenties had this exchange:

Rich: From my window at school, I could see the Yankee—no, what was it? What was the one in Vermont? Vernon, the Vernon power plant.

Pat: You could see that?

Rich: Yeah.

Pat: You could see the lights of the plant?

Rich: You can see the lights—about eighteen miles down the river. And they were busted every three or four months for venting off the steam, which is really illegal. You’re supposed to cool it with the water tanks and everything. But it cost a lot of money, and they didn’t care. I mean, they’re run so lax.²⁷

As this example illustrates, referring back to the definition of deliberation in Figure 2.1, political conversations like these touch on “personal and emotional experiences,” as well as “known facts.” In Gamson’s terms, conversations like these pull together personal and cultural knowledge to understand or “frame” issues. Gamson observes that “there is a special robustness to frames that are held together with a full combination of resources”—when conversants effectively marshal all their experiences and recollections.²⁸ In this way, conversation can help people analyze problems and arrive at judgments. By talking with others, they broaden their information base and the range of arguments they can consider; however, as we will see later, there is no guarantee that the conversation will include a diverse set of participants.

COMMUNITY BONDING THROUGH CONVERSATION

Whatever its merits as an analytic process, political conversation serves other functions. Foremost among these is developing a sense of community, what

Barber calls “exploring and creating commonalities.”²⁹ The recent research of political scientist Katherine Cramer Walsh helps us understand this process. She spent three years with “the Old Timers,” a group of politically conservative, retired white men at a corner store in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Her goal was to better understand what informal political conversation accomplishes for its participants. At the conclusion of her study, she wrote a personal letter to the Old Timers. She explained her research to the corner store gang in these words:

Many political scientists believe conversation is the soul of democracy. . . . The idea is that by talking to each other, Americans can create a “better” society and learn to get along with many different kinds of people. By spending time with you (as well as a group of women who get together every week at a local church), I came to a different conclusion. When most people talk informally about politics, they aren’t doing it to solve the world’s problems. Their intent is not to improve democracy or foster brotherly love. Instead, their conversations are a way of sharing time, figuring out the world together, and feeling like part of a community.³⁰

Walsh acknowledged that she, along with many others, read that finding as a “pessimistic conclusion” because it implies that conversation reinforces borders between social groups rather than bridging them. The men at the corner store provide each other with a palpable sense of community, and that alone is valuable. To the extent that conversation builds strong, isolated communities, however, it cannot function to bring a diverse society together into a coherent public.³¹

DIVERSITY IN CONVERSATION

Turning away from her detailed case study, Walsh looked to survey data to find out whether other voluntary associations were as homogenous as the Old Timers. To her chagrin (but not surprise), she found that men tend to affiliate with men—not women—when they join senior groups, fraternal or service organizations, book clubs, civic groups, and the like. Women are even more likely to seek out fellow women. Moreover, racial or ethnic homogeneity in such groups is even greater. Thus, for example, sixty-one percent of women reported that their most important and active voluntary group had no racial diversity, and forty-one percent said their groups included no men. Even in the many associations with diverse memberships, the problem is that all too often, people tend to affiliate with members more like themselves and then place greater value on those particular affiliations.

Political communication researchers Diana Mutz and Paul Martin addressed this question more precisely.³² Their survey data focused on conversations, per se, rather than the voluntary associations in which such exchanges

take place. They also focused not on the diversity of participants' backgrounds but on the diversity of their political viewpoints. Their survey asked respondents to report their own political point of view and then compare that view with those they hear in a range of communication settings. Results showed that the setting in which participants were least likely to hear different views was in talking with their "primary discussant." Others' views begin to diverge significantly from one's own only after leaving discussants and voluntary associations and entering the workplace setting. Ultimately, it is the media sources that offer contrary points of view, and this underscores the importance of considering the potential value of mediated deliberation, which we do in Chapter 3.

Conversations and voluntary associations, however, are more politically homogenous for some than for others. Mutz and Martin found that Republicans tended to talk with Republicans to an even greater degree than Democrats kept to their own, and this was true both for individual discussants and voluntary associations to which respondents belonged. Independents, by contrast, had a harder time finding like-minded voices anywhere: primary conversation partners tended, on balance, to share their views, but in every other setting, independents found contrary points of view to be the norm.³³

DISAGREEMENT AND PERSUASION

If conversations are so often among like-minded persons, can they really be deliberative? This was one of the questions motivating the research of Robert Huckfeldt, Paul Johnson, and John Sprague. They reasoned that "the benefits of deliberation," such as promoting tolerance, compromising, and increasing political engagement, "depend on disagreement, which is defined in terms of interaction among citizens who hold divergent viewpoints and perspectives regarding politics." If we only talked with like-minded citizens, deliberation would become difficult because we would miss important information; misconstrue, forget, or overlook important alternatives; or never know others' value priorities. Even if people chatted with people whose views differed from their own, there is no guarantee that they would, in fact, deliberate. After all, "individuals may ignore, avoid, or dismiss politically disagreeable viewpoints."³⁴

Huckfeldt and his colleagues set out to understand what gives rise to "effective" political conversation (mutual "comprehension," when phrased in deliberative terms) and "persuasive" conversation, which results when people change their mind on an issue. A key consideration in studying conversation is an individual's partisanship. Strong partisans are those who hold the firm conviction that their political party is best. One variety of a strong partisan, for example, is the "yellow dog Democrat." The term comes from the 1928 presidential election, in which a prominent Democratic senator from Alabama

broke with his party to support Republican Herbert Hoover. Angry Alabama Democrats showed their party loyalty by boasting, "I'd vote for a yellow dog if he ran on the Democratic ticket."³⁵

Let's imagine that you are alternately conversing with Susan, with the "S" signifying a strong partisan, and Wendy, with the "W" representing her relatively weak partisanship. With regard to mutual comprehension, you might guess that relative to Wendy, Susan is a poor conversational partner because she tends to be bombastic, stubborn, and unwilling to listen to you. Quite to the contrary, Huckfeldt and his colleagues found that people are no more likely to avoid or misjudge people like Susan than they are anyone else. Susan is just as likely to be a good listener as Wendy, and Susan is more likely to be an effective communicator in that she will make more clear, memorable statements about her own views. Moreover, if you and Susan disagree, this is unlikely to upset or disturb you, because you come away from conversations with Susan more clear in your own views than if you had just spoken with Wendy.³⁶

Another important difference between weak and strong partisans is in their susceptibility to influence through political conversation. If you are trying to persuade Susan to change her vote, you are unlikely to make any progress. If you then try to persuade Wendy, you will be successful, so long as Wendy has other discussants who share your view. In other words, weak partisans might change their mind if numerous people in their social network try to convince them to change their vote to a rival candidate. One nudge is not enough, but when people get strong signals from different corners of their social network, the individual nudges add up to a sufficiently powerful push.³⁷

Huckfeldt's research team also found that both weak and strong partisans, along with independents, typically converse in interlocking networks. For example, Susan and Wendy might be the two people you most often turn to when you want to talk about politics, but you are not the only one they seek. Susan has two other friends and a co-worker with whom she frequently converses on public issues, and Wendy has a classmate she talks to, in addition to you and Susan.

This pattern of small, interlocking political conversation networks can make deliberative conversations a powerful force for changing attitudes. Figure 2.3 illustrates this process in the case of three connected conversation networks—A, B, and C. Imagine a series of conversations happening over the course of three years. In Year 1, the person who participates in networks A and B (person A3/B1) is influenced by the three Democratic partisans because this person's network consists of two strong Democrats (A1, B2), one weak Democrat (A2), and one independent (B3). During this same year, there are no other strong influences: the other independent (B3/C1), in particular, has a more mixed network consisting of two strong Democrats (B2, C2), one strong Republican (C3), and a fellow independent.

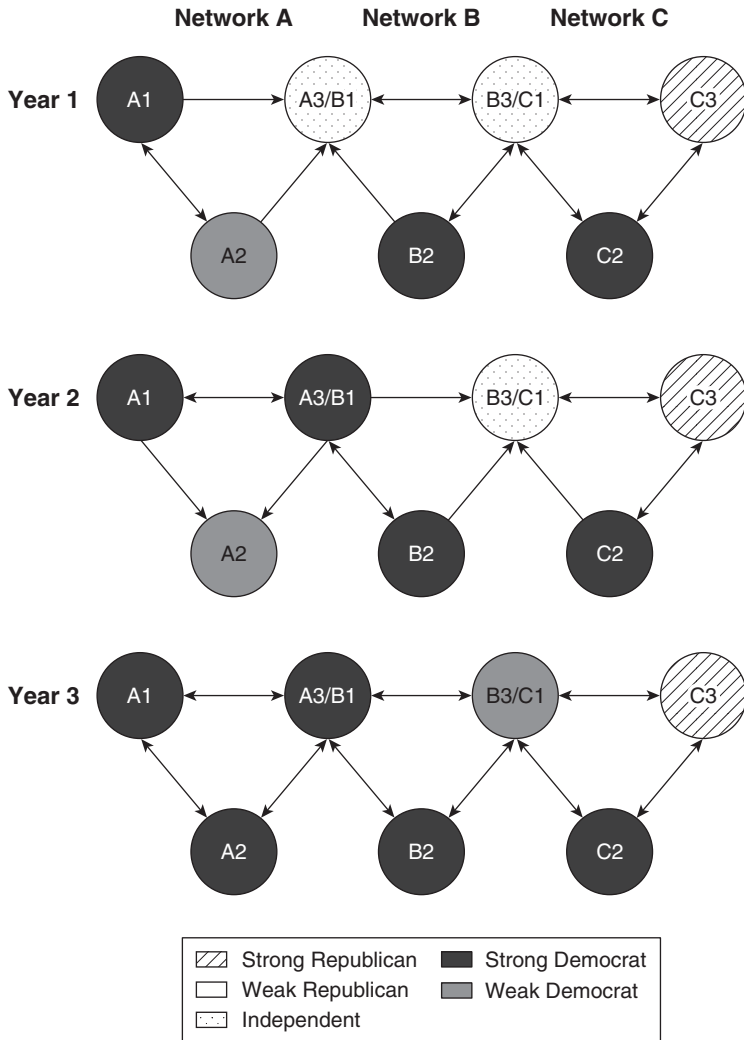


Figure 2.3 Changing Patterns of Partisanship Over Three Years of Hypothetical Conversations

Turning to Year 2, person A3/B1 has become a strong Democratic partisan as a result of Year 1 influences. Now the remaining independent is getting more consistent pressure to swing to the left because his or her former independent ally (A3/B1) is now a strong Democrat. Three-quarters of the person's conversants are Democratic, and that is enough to convert him or her to

a weak Democrat by the beginning of Year 3. This former independent may never become a strong Democrat, owing to the steady counterarguments coming from C3, but without a change in the size or composition of the individual's network, he or she is likely to remain a Democrat indefinitely.

Something else is happening in Year 2 as well. The weak partisan Democrat A2 is now being persuaded by A1 and A3/B1 to firm up his or her convictions. By Year 3, A2 has moved from weak to strong Democrat.

At this point, all three networks in this diagram stabilize, with no further shifts to the left or the right. Notice, though, that even this diagram is a simplification of the interlocking nature of conversation networks. For instance, it is likely that persons A1 and A2, along with B2, C2, and C3, have additional conversational partners not shown in Figure 2.3. In other words, the effects of shifts in these three networks could radiate out even farther. As Huckfeldt and his colleagues concluded, "The conversion of any single individual to a particular candidate's cause is not only important in terms of a single vote or a single unit of social influence. It is also important in terms of the enhancement and attenuation effects that it creates throughout the networks of relationships within which the individual is imbedded, quite literally transforming entire patterns of social influence."³⁸

This is not to say that it is conversations alone that change people's attitudes. Quite to the contrary, recall from the work of Gamson that the ideas and information people receive from the media constitute much of the meat in their conversations. Add to this a separate study's finding that people who get issue-specific news from the media are also the most likely to engage in issue-specific and general political discussions and one can see more clearly the media-conversation connection.³⁹ As Huckfeldt and his fellow researchers concluded, "Political interdependence among citizens might actually *magnify* the importance of events in the external political environment."⁴⁰

As a final note, it appears that the conversational influence Huckfeldt and others found in the United States is common in European nations. A study of Britain, Germany, Spain, and the United States found that spouses, relatives, and friends influenced voting choices in each country during elections in 1990–1993, with the strongest influence coming from persons in the communication network who were closest to the respondent (e.g., spouses and close personal friends).⁴¹

Moving From Conversation to Discussion

To this point, we have examined the informal political conversations that occur among family, friends, and acquaintances. One of those conversational settings included the Old Timers, who met each morning over coffee in Ann Arbor.

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Their conversational ritual was unusual in that it occurred regularly in a public setting. Most political conversations occur spontaneously in more private settings, such as the home, work site, or office.⁴² Even in a public venue, however, it was still a closed conversation among friends.

Public discussions are a bit different. Participants in these discussions can include complete strangers, their occurrence is more programmed, and sometimes their process is managed by a facilitator or otherwise governed by a set of explicit ground rules. Discussions are important forms of political talk, but they are so varied that it is useful to look at discussions one setting at a time. We begin with one that is half conversation, half discussion—the online chat room or discussion board.

CYBERCHATTING

Let's return to the exchange that began this chapter, the exchanges about Iraq involving Eric, Mobile Vulgus, Ken, and WIRichie1971. That conversation could be categorized as many things—socializing, seeking information, debating, or venting frustration, among others. These things can take place during both conversations and discussions, but what gives us the first glimpse of a discussion is a stricter requirement of topical coherence and the presumption that the exchange is “public.” In the opening excerpt, Eric was not sure who would reply to his initial post, but he was reasonably sure his suggested topic would generate discussion. In fact, he could not be sure anyone would reply. Not every topic posted on a discussion board or offered in a chat room has takers because there is no social sanction against lurking silently or ignoring other visitors in cyberspace.

Because the Internet is a relatively new communication medium, extensive research on its use as a means of generating discussion does not exist. It is common knowledge that Internet users are disproportionately younger, as is typical of any new communication technology. A representative telephone survey of Americans' Internet use patterns suggests a less obvious finding—that the Internet may be drawing young people into politics and civic affairs who would otherwise be unlikely to engage in such activities.⁴³ Though it is clear that the Internet is yet another medium for politically active persons to express themselves and obtain political information, it appears that the Internet may draw in some of the nonvoting, politically disaffected younger demographic, which includes anyone less than thirty years of age.

Another indirect piece of evidence for the impact of Internet use is how information exchange online sparks social capital—the network of personal associations and mutual trust that are essential for democratic society.⁴⁴ A national survey found that casual Internet use for entertainment and socializing

had no connection to one's social capital or political participation, but the use of the Internet for information exchange did have such a relationship.⁴⁵

What about the content of online discussion? Little research has investigated the subject, but at least one finding is very encouraging. A concern addressed in more detail in the next chapter is the spiral of silence, whereby people choose not to express their opinions when they perceive that theirs is the minority or dissenting point of view. A comparison of face-to-face and online groups found that in both cases persons in the minority were willing to speak their minds on the controversial subject of abortion.⁴⁶

Even if one person in the minority is reluctant to speak, so long as another speaks up, the view is brought into the discussion; in an online discussion, it is not always easy to see how many people are present, so it is even more ambiguous whether one view or another is being underrepresented in the discussion. Moreover, members of the majority, more so than those in the minority, may choose not to speak up simply because they have already had their view articulated by others.⁴⁷ From the standpoint of deliberation, what is more important than hearing every person's voice is hearing every perspective, and in this sense it appears that online discussions are at least as valuable as those that occur offline.

That is good news because there are a growing number of sites appearing on the Internet devoted to promoting online discussion. One of those is e-thePeople.org, which first appeared online in August of 2000. Every day, hundreds of new articles and comments are posted on this site, and the subjects range from longstanding political debates to issues of the day, such as hurricanes, international crises, and political scandals. A study of the site conducted in 2002 found that the most common reasons for participating in the e-thePeople discussions were "to voice my opinion" and "to influence policy makers," specifically the elected officials who sometimes take part in e-thePeople's discussions. In addition, more than a third of users reported coming to the site "to listen to others," which is encouraging from the standpoint of deliberation. More than a quarter of the regular users of the site, in fact, reported that participating in online discussions gave them greater "awareness of viewpoints" and helped them follow the news and current events. Those are central purposes for traditional political conversation, so e-thePeople is likely extending the same habits and benefits of political talk to its users.⁴⁸

From the standpoint of the organizers of e-thePeople, there are also some disappointing findings about their site. More often than not, it is replicating the offline reality of homogenous conversation: fifty-seven percent of its users rate the other users whom they interact with as "like-minded" people. More discouraging is the finding that only seven percent of the thousands of conversations begun in the past year were "successful," as measured by a decent popularity rating and at least twenty or more replies.⁴⁹ Thus, most of the conversations

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are like the Iraq thread that Eric began at conservative-talk.com, a perfectly interesting topic that attracts some attention but then essentially ends, often in what would seem to be the middle of a discussion.⁵⁰

NATIONAL ISSUES FORUMS

From the most critical standpoint, cyberchatting is a glorified form of political conversation, and as such it is usually unqualified to call itself a true discussion. Michael Schudson takes the position that public discussion distinguishes itself from mere political conversation by being more strictly rule governed and goal directed (i.e., oriented toward solving public problems, choosing policies, or arguing on behalf of one's principles, rights, or interests). In his view, conversation is not the soul of democracy because it is too often aimless, unstructured, and inconsequential, and it typically fails to bring together sufficiently divergent views to really call it an inclusive, public activity.⁵¹

Fortunately, there exist a wide range of public discussion projects active in the United States.⁵² Each provides a glimpse of the kind of power that discussion can have, even when it is not strictly oriented toward decision making. The best contemporary political discussion programs address public issues of immediate local or national relevance. Since 1990, the number of modern discussion programs has proliferated, and two of the most widely used and influential are the programs developed by the National Issues Forums (NIF) Institute.

The NIF is a decentralized public discussion program for which thousands of conveners have received training. Political deliberation is the central concern of NIF, which promotes the idea that citizens must make hard choices and take responsibility for the public judgments at which they arrive through deliberation. All of the national issues that NIF addresses, such as health care and criminal justice, are those that "engage our most deeply held convictions about what we value." On these issues, "policy options pull and tug on our values." Real "choice work" forces us to acknowledge the negative implications of our favored choices and the positive value of alternatives; we must see the effects of policies on ourselves as well as others. Through careful and empathic listening, we force ourselves to come to understand and respect other people's perspectives, and we combine diverse viewpoints to create "a sense of the whole." When we engage in this kind of deliberation, political "conflict is not only among us, it is within us."⁵³

NIF presumes that the best context for doing this kind of work is face-to-face deliberation among fellow citizens. In NIF parlance, deliberation is "the act of weighing carefully. . . . It's a process for determining what action is in the best interest of the public as a whole." During a forum, we have the opportunity to "talk through" an issue with peers; we begin "talking to understand our options, face up to our limitations, and put ourselves in a position to make a serious choice." After a forum, citizens continue talking and thinking about both facts

and values, further developing their views on the issues they discussed in the forums. Eventually, preferences evolve into choices and private opinions become “public judgments.” Judgment is distinct from mere opinion because it “rests on what we think the second time—after we have talked with others, considered the consequence of our options, and worked through the conflicts that arise.”⁵⁴

Does NIF, in fact, teach participants how to develop more informed and reflective opinions on current policy issues? More broadly, does it achieve its goal of educating citizens in the art of public deliberation? Considerable research has been done on NIF, and the balance suggests that it does, indeed, have some of the anticipated impacts on the people who take part in the forums. Among its effects are broadening participants’ outlooks, causing them to think beyond their narrowly defined self-interests to arrive at more well-conceived judgments on public issues. In addition, NIF appears to teach participants new ways of participating in groups and talking about politics. Though NIF may not make people ideal deliberators, it does appear to reduce the likelihood that they will be domineering or unwilling to listen when talking about politics with fellow citizens.⁵⁵

So many people want to improve the quality of discussion in their communities that NIF has become remarkably popular. During 1993, for example, by NIF’s best estimate, forums were convened by approximately 1,440 adult literacy programs, 2,600 high schools, and 1,360 civic organizations.⁵⁶ Given the success of NIF’s book publishing, the number of forums has likely grown in the years since.

In the end, even the NIF forums are like political conversations in that they often involve like-minded, self-selected participants exchanging information and ideas in a way that arrives at no final conclusion. Moreover, there is evidence that people leave NIF forums more convinced of their original views than newly aware of a publicly shared common ground.⁵⁷ Even in these cases, though, it is clear that participants learned something about themselves, their own views, and deliberation itself. There is also evidence that participants can then apply those lessons outside the forums to change how they talk about and address public problems.⁵⁸

Dialogue and Deliberation

Before you reach the back cover, this book will provide many examples of deliberative innovations that aim to improve how we talk to one another—conversationally, in more formal discussions, and in official meetings. Almost always I emphasize decision making, which is appropriate given the decision-oriented meaning of deliberation. At the level of conversation and discussion, though, this decision requirement can be relaxed somewhat, and participants can orient themselves more toward an open-ended dialogue.

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This idea of having a dialogue holds great appeal for many civic reformers and citizens, many of whom worry that focusing exclusively on policy debate could cause us to overlook the important work that must be done before we can deliberate effectively. In their book *Moral Conflict*, communication scholars Barnett Pearce and Stephen Littlejohn argued that there are many instances where people come to public meetings unprepared to deliberate because they do not yet understand how other parties in a conflict reason and talk, let alone what views these other participants might have on the issue at hand. In these situations, dialogue might help to develop a kind of “creole language in which one side can communicate with the other.”⁵⁹

THE PUBLIC CONVERSATIONS PROJECT

To get an idea of the power of dialogue, consider the case of the Public Conversations Project, an entity that weaves together the virtues of conversation and discussion into a single process. Since 1989, the project has tried to help apply the principles of family therapy and alternative dispute resolution to public conflicts. In their official materials, project staff define dialogue as “any conversation animated by a search for understanding rather than for agreements or solutions. It is not debate, and it is not mediation.”⁶⁰

Though they advocate an exploratory, open-ended conversation, one should not get the impression, however, that the project’s approach to dialogue is loose. On the contrary, dialogues set up by the project follow a complex sequence of steps, as dialogue can be difficult to generate in the midst of bitter personal, partisan, and often moral or ideological conflict. Though each instance is unique in one or more respects, the project generally begins with these steps:

1. In response to an initial request, project organizers assess whether the participants in the conflict have the time and resources necessary to engage in dialogue.
2. Project staff research the issue and speak with conflict participants to learn the contours of the debate they are stuck inside, as well as those moments—if any—when they appeared to be having more fruitful exchanges.
3. Staff then create a meeting design and clear meeting objective, which is then communicated to the invitees from all parties involved in the conflict. Only those who agree to abide by the meeting’s ground rules—or at least try to do so—are encouraged to attend.
4. The dialogue occurs in one meeting or a series of meetings, which always begin with a reiteration of the meeting’s goals and rules. Thereafter, the structure of the conversations varies considerably, but there is always emphasis on asking questions, listening carefully, and taking turns speaking—the basics of an open-ended, exploratory conversation. Professional facilitators help participants stick to the rules and purpose of the meeting, but participants do the hard work of speaking frankly and listening attentively, even when hearing words that hurt or offend them.

Consider the case of abortion—the issue that sparked the Public Conversations Project.⁶¹ The idea of bringing together prochoice advocates and pro-life activists may sound crazy to anyone who has seen these factions clash outside an abortion clinic or at a public rally. One side stands for personal liberty, grounded in the principles of liberal political philosophy and the principle of sexual equality advanced through the women's rights movement, whereas the other is led by its understanding of biblical scripture to oppose all threats to the life of the unborn and to challenge the spiritual health and morality of abortionists and the women who turn to them. Not fertile ground for dialogue, it would seem.

Since 1990, the project has used its approach to address this issue in Massachusetts and elsewhere. The questions posed to participants are deceptively simple:

(1) How did you get involved with this issue? What's your personal relationship, or personal history with it? (2) We'd like to hear a little more about your particular beliefs and perspectives about the issues surrounding abortion. What is at the heart of the matter for you? (3) Many people we've talked to have told us that within their approach to this issue they find some gray areas, some dilemmas about their own beliefs or even some conflicts. Do you experience any pockets of uncertainty or lesser certainty, any concerns, value conflicts, or mixed feelings that you may have and wish to share?⁶²

Questions such as these can get a conversation started, which invariably leads to both parties in the conversation acknowledging the issue's complexity and the difficulty they have talking constructively with their respective opponents. Consider how this comment from an online conversation moves from expressing hurt at being personally attacked to seeing some basis for common understanding:

I certainly have felt stereotyped over the years. The pro-life community is very aggressive; I've had friends called "baby killer" and been told that we are "damned by God." Many people on both sides of the issue see it in very black and white terms—which, of course, is the ultimate silliness, since all reality is merely shades of gray.⁶³

In moments like these, speakers move from reciting their own experience of being stereotyped and misunderstood to acknowledging, even if only fleetingly at first, the problems created by "people on both sides of the issue."

Once again, the purpose of such dialogue is not to resolve the abortion debate. Dialogue, instead, aims to promote understanding, appreciation, and respect. Instead of debating the issue of abortion, participants in these dialogues have—sometimes for the first time in their public lives—the experience of listening to the other side. As a result, common ground can be found on

occasion, such as in improving prenatal care for low-income pregnant mothers or in providing women with birth control to prevent unwanted pregnancies. If the parties in the debate continue to debate, but more deliberatively and honestly, with a newfound respect for one another's views and commitments, the project has done its job.

NARRATIVES AND STORYTELLING

One of the most striking effects of dialogue is the personal stories that emerge. These stories, which sometimes include very detailed narratives about people's lives and their policy-relevant experiences, can arise in any number of deliberative settings, but processes that are too solution oriented and heavily facilitated tend to snuff them out.

For instance, when communications scholar David Ryfe conducted a study of the NIF, he was struck by participants' eagerness to tell stories, as well as the way forum facilitators cut stories short. "Strong facilitators," Ryfe concluded, "tend to short-circuit the storytelling process." They control the flow of conversation "by asking questions like, 'What bothers you about that?' and, 'What is your reaction to that?'" Seemingly helpful summarizing can also strip stories of their power. When facilitators continue to interject themselves into conversations, "forums tend to have a rapid-fire, scattershot quality. Participants tend to say less, to tell fewer stories, and to talk more directly to the facilitator . . . and there is less of the thinking-out-loud."⁶⁴

By contrast, many stories emerge in a series of online forums about what to build at the site of the former World Trade Center in New York City. Ryfe found the NIF stories helpful in getting participants down to the business of deliberating, and communications scholar Laura Black found that this was also the case in the online forums. Black distinguished among Introductory, Adversarial, Unitary, and Transformation story types.⁶⁵ Introductory stories served to engage participants in the task of deliberation by connecting abstract issues with their lived experiences. The two most common story types (Adversarial and Unitary), however, served as relatively straightforward means of argumentation. The Adversarial story amounts to an often emotional narrative argument for one side of an issue, whereas the Unitary story argues more tentatively and in a way that aims to include all participants. Consistent with Ryfe's findings, Black found that these stories can serve as a kind of evidence, furthering the deliberation on the policy question at hand.

Black also theorized that narratives can help groups work through values conflicts and form a shared identity—larger tasks that address the problem. Qualitative and quantitative analyses of the stories participants told showed that each of these types of story serve a powerful purpose for online discussion groups. Black found that the Unitary stories "can be useful to help group

members move beyond the limitations of seeing their differences as simply a two-sided debate.”⁶⁶ Though told from one person’s own experience, these stories had the power to evoke a shared experience—in this case, that of a great sense of loss in the collapse of the Trade Center buildings. That, Black explains, can serve to bring participants together and lead them to “find areas for compromise or consensus within the group.”⁶⁷

A more uncommon variety of narrative Black encountered earned the label of Transformation stories. These stories are characterized by “mixed, contradictory, or changing emotions” entailed in “personal and social transformation.” A typical Transformation story tells how a person “has changed his or her perspective” on the matter at hand, and it invites other participants to consider the fluidity of their own positions. Consider this example of a participant who changed her own sense of what would be an appropriate replacement for the Twin Towers:

In the days after nine eleven I put up pictures of the Towers in my apartment. Coffee table books were returned to the coffee table and opened to those glorious pictures of downtown. . . . And then, after several weeks, the Towers—my beautiful Towers—began to look like two giant tombstones. It took a while for this to sink in, but it happened. A pair of tombstones standing over a soon-to-be cemetery. How ironic. And again I cried because I knew I would never be able to look at them the same way again. Yes, I’d love my Towers rebuilt. I’d love to go back to nine ten. But it can’t happen. Everything is different. The terrorists “win” if we live in the past. Our spirit will not be broken. We will turn adversity into strengths. We will move on.⁶⁸

Typical of this genre of story, the teller moves toward an inspirational tone, asking listeners to understand the transformation as a positive move to a place of greater serenity and clarity. It is not a smooth argument for a particular position because the teller is able to empathize with conflicting points of view. The telling of such a story makes it safe for other participants to express uncertainty. It provides others with the freedom to openly explore their own doubts and shifts in their thinking. And that, in the end, is one of the points of a dialogue—helping participants move from fixed positions in a tense debate to more flexible reflections open to discovery.

Conclusion

There is no inevitability to the occurrence of such dialogue, let alone more conventional political conversation and discussion. Though we can take discussion for granted as a common practice in a free society, it is just that—a practice, an activity that is socially constructed to be done a certain way, with

certain people, at certain times, and in certain places. The historical record shows that modern political discussions, study circles, and issues forums are something that a culture invents and practices over the years, sometimes abandoning old practices in favor of new ones. National Issues Forums take us back to past ways of holding public discussions, and online chats are likely a sign of how we will discuss politics in the future, for better or worse.

Whatever form conversation and discussion take in the future, it is certain that they will both remain connected to other communication channels, particularly mass media. Whether in coffee shops, chat rooms, or issues forums, participants bring to their discussions things they have picked up from television, newspapers, radio, Web sites, and other media. In the next chapter, we consider just what those mediated messages add up to. If conversations and discussions can sometimes sustain one kind of deliberation, can the media produce another?

Notes

1. Kim, Wyatt, and Katz (1999, p. 362).
2. This conversation is posted online at <http://forums.conservative-talk.com/t1764-treacherous-journalism.html>. To protect the innocent, the grammar has been changed (a little).
3. See *Frontline* (<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/saddam/interviews/aburish.html>).
4. This conception of tacit knowledge comes from Giddens (1984).
5. Herbst (1999, p. 187).
6. Quoted in Herbst (1999, pp. 192–93).
7. Tocqueville (1835/1961, book III, Chapter 2). There is no doubt that in many respects, de Tocqueville idealized American society. If Americans of today seem more guarded and class conscious than these romanticized cultural pioneers, it is partly because the past is routinely lionized as a period of great civic spirit. Thus, Michael Schudson (1998) observed that “intellectuals have complained that ‘we no longer have citizens’ since at least 1750,” when French political philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau lodged this very complaint about his own era (p. 295). There is little hard evidence tracking political conversational habits over long periods of time, so the question remains unsettled. As one exception, Huckfeldt, Johnson, and Sprague (2004, p. 44) cite a 1972–1990 longitudinal data set that shows decreasing correspondence between social networks and political preference. That might signal an increase in disagreement within conversations, but in the United States, increasingly sharp partisanship could signal the opposite trend (Abramowitz and Saunders, 1998).
8. See Mattson (1998), Levine (1990), and Gastil and Keith (2005).
9. Baird (1928) and Harrison (1928), respectively.
10. Bormann (1996, pp. 101–3).

11. Habermas (1979, 1989).
12. Barber (1984, p. 173).
13. *Ibid.*, p. 179.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 183.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 185.
16. Weithman (2005, pp. 282–83). In Weithman's view, these are aspects of democratic character. I prefer to describe these as behaviors enacted during deliberation, not requiring that they reflect an ongoing disposition toward particular interactive norms. As long as one behaves in this way during a discussion, we can say deliberation took place without having to judge the underlying character of the participants.
17. Grice (1975).
18. Surian (1996).
19. On forum facilitators, see Mansbridge et al. (2006); on jurors, see Sprain and Gastil (2007).
20. Gamson (1992, p. 175).
21. *Ibid.*, p. 136.
22. On the link between media use and deliberative conversational habits, see Moy and Gastil (2006).
23. Scheufele (1999, p. 106).
24. For background on this incident, see <http://www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/doc-collections/fact-sheets/chernobyl-bg.html>.
25. Gamson (1992, pp. 120–21).
26. *Ibid.*, p. 131.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 132.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 128.
29. Barber (1984, p. 183).
30. Walsh (2004, p. 233).
31. *Ibid.*, p. 234.
32. Mutz and Martin (2001). The authors also validate the accuracy of self-reported estimates of other points of view by comparing independent ratings of other sources (newspapers, discussants) with self-reported ratings and finding a remarkably good fit.
33. *Ibid.*, pp. 101–2. Similar research on presidential voting in 2000 found that, on average, forty-eight percent of those who voted for Bush had conversation networks consisting exclusively of Bush voters, whereas forty-two percent of Gore voters had exclusively Gore-voting networks (Huckfeldt, Johnson, and Sprague, 2004, pp. 38–39).
34. Huckfeldt, Johnson, and Sprague (2004, pp. 13–14). See also Huckfeldt, Mendez, and Osborn (2004). On the benefits of conversational network diversity, and disagreement, for democracy, see Mutz (2006) and Scheufele et al. (2006).
35. Modern yellow dog Democrats are celebrated at <http://www.yellowdogdemocrat.com>.
36. Huckfeldt, Johnson, and Sprague (2004, pp. 68–97).
37. *Ibid.*, pp. 54–60.
38. *Ibid.*, pp. 121–2.
39. Kim, Wyatt, and Katz (1999, pp. 371–73).
40. Huckfeldt, Johnson, and Sprague (2004, p. 122).

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41. Schmitt-Beck (2004).
42. Wyatt, Katz, and Kim (2000).
43. Krueger (2002).
44. On social capital, see Putnam (2000).
45. Shah, Kwak, and Holbert (2001).
46. McDevitt, Kiouisis, and Wahl-Jorgensen (2003).
47. *Ibid.*, p. 466.
48. Weiksner (2005, pp. 220–25).
49. *Ibid.*, pp. 220–21, 225.
50. For research on organized online deliberation, see Muhlberger and Weber (2006) and Price and David (2005).
51. Schudson (1997).
52. For overlapping reviews of public discussion programs, see Button and Mattson (1999), Button and Ryfe (2005), and Ryfe (2002).
53. McAfee, McKenzie, and Mathews (1990, pp. 10–15).
54. *Ibid.*, pp. 17–22.
55. Melville, Willingham, and Dedrick (2005). See also Gastil and Dillard (1999a), Gastil (2004), and Gastil, Black, and Moscovitz (forthcoming). A study of the deliberative poll used methods similar to the Gastil and Dillard study and did not find evidence of increased sophistication (Sturgis, Roberts, and Allum, 2005). For more on deliberation and thinking in terms of the public good, see the discussion of the general will in Chapter 7.
56. National Issues Forums (1990, 1992).
57. Gastil and Dillard (1999b). Schkade, Sunstein, and Hastie (2006) also found evidence of polarization, which Sunstein (2002) views as a common result of deliberation. My own research suggests that polarization occurs only in a limited range of circumstances (Gastil, Black, and Moscovitz, forthcoming); for a critique of Sunstein's view, see Kahan, Slovic, Braman, and Gastil (2006).
58. Daugherty and Williams (2007).
59. Pearce and Littlejohn (1997, p. 123).
60. This and other material come from the project's Internet archive at <http://www.publicconversations.org>. Those interested in reading more about the project's work should refer to Chasin et al. (1996). On how the project's work fits into the larger dialogic approach to conflict, see Gergen, McNamee, and Barrett (2001), Pearce and Littlejohn (1997), and Tonn (2005).
61. On this particular aspect of the project's work, see http://www.publicconversations.org/pcp/resources/resource_detail.asp?ref_id=97.
62. Gergen et al. (2001, p. 687).
63. Excerpt from project online dialogue available at http://www.publicconversations.org/pcp/index.asp?page_id=194&catid=66#Q2response.
64. Ryfe (2006, p. 88).
65. Black (2006) also identified Introductory stories, which are similar to some of the stories Ryfe (2006) identified as serving to get participants engaged in the task of deliberation. Note that Black refined her story typology in the second of two qualitative case studies (see Chapter 5 of her study).
66. Black (2006, p. 252).

67. Ibid. McBride (2005) points out a logical implication of deliberation's tendency to promote a shared civic identity—its threat to more group-specific identities. Thus, deliberation may threaten politically salient identities, which entitle minority groups to special recognition as underrepresented constituencies or voices.
68. Black (2006, p. 130).

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