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Toward a Sociology of Deliberation

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Keywords

Sociology of Deliberation, Deliberative Practice, Pierre Bourdieu

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Toward a Sociology of Deliberation

As the study of deliberative democratic practice has mushroomed in the last decade (two recent collections are Melo and Baiocchi, 2006; and Bachtiger and Steiner, 2005), its growth has largely taken shape around the concerns of deliberative democratic theory. In part, this means that, following theorists, researchers have approached deliberation as a procedural mechanism for decision-making (cf. Habermas, 1997). Indeed, the great bulk of research on deliberation examines the relationship between formal conditions as defined by the theoretical literature (equality, civility, diversity, etc.) and outcomes. It asks: have the formal conditions of deliberation been met? If so, do the outcomes match the expectations of the theory? Are people more knowledgeable? More engaged? Do they change their opinions? Are decisions viewed as more legitimate?

Much has been learned from this exercise (for reviews, see Delli Carpini, Cook, and Jacobs, 2004; Mendelberg, 2002; Ryfe, 2005). However, it tends to ignore the fact that deliberation is as much a cultural practice as it is a procedural mechanism. To note this is merely to say that, when deliberation is introduced in a community, people must make some sense of what it is, and what it is for. They accomplish this task by situating the practice in the context of what they know, who they are, what they do, and what they value. As Fischer (2006) notes, all of this involves issues of power, agency, and identity—in other words, sociological dimensions of human experience. These more sociological aspects of deliberation have received very little attention in the literature (but see Baiocchi, 2003; on the sociology of political talk more generally, see Eliasoph, 1998; Gamson, 1992; Walsh, 2004). The result is that the study of deliberation often seems overly formalistic, missing some of the most crucial social and cultural dynamics put in play by the practice.

As a step toward a more explicit sociological theory of deliberation, I offer Pierre Bourdieu's field theory of society. Anyone familiar with Bourdieu's work may think this an odd choice. Bourdieu's use of economic language (capital, interest, etc.), and his insistence that society is best understood as a ceaseless competition for social status, seem inappropriate when applied to deliberation. I wish to demonstrate, however, that Bourdieu's conception of society serves as an excellent foundation for a sociological theory of deliberation.

In particular, Bourdieu's theory affords a crucial insight into a basic dilemma of deliberative practice. On the one hand, deliberation involves a politics of the most fundamental sort: an effort to impose a definition of appropriate roles, values, and actions onto public life. Such a definition composes what Bourdieu

refers to as a "legitimate vision of society." For Bourdieu, the effort to impose this vision constitutes an act of "symbolic violence," in that it seeks to naturalize (make ordinary or commonsensical) a contingent symbolic vision of reality. On the other hand, whatever else deliberation might be, it is not, as yet, a cohesive, coordinated social practice. There is not, in other words, an established "field" of deliberation. There are no established norms for what deliberation is, or how to tell whether one is doing it well; there is not a shared common sense about which social roles are peculiarly deliberative, and how to tell if one has occupied these roles well; and there are no clear markers of status in deliberation. Thus, the dilemma: advocates of deliberation often wage political battles of the most basic kind without a shared understanding of what they are doing and why they are doing it.[1] Much of the activity associated with deliberation flows out of the necessity of managing this dilemma.

I elaborate this theory, and unpack its implications, with examples from fieldwork I recently completed in "Civicville," a mid-sized Southern city. In 2000, leaders in Civicville created an organization called Community Conversations (CC), and gave it the mission of fostering deliberation in Civicville's public life.[2] Its activities, undertaken from 2000 to June 2006, when it finally closed its doors, may be described as an effort to respond to a perceived problem in Civicville's public life, and to do so by redefining the preferred rules, identities, values and behaviors structuring that public life. It therefore represents a nice illustration of the theoretical model I develop here.

Of course, not every deliberative initiative has such broad and ambitious goals. Indeed, as Fung (2006) recently noted, most have more limited aims: they seek either to resolve a single policy issue, or to carry forward the ongoing mission of a particular agency or organization (see also Leighninger, 2006). One might say that where some initiatives respond to a perceived problem with the

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[1]In interviews with public managers around the country, Ruth Ann Bramson (n.d.) comes to the following conclusion: "The managers I interviewed are people who are so committed to the process of democratic dialogue that they were courageous enough, as one interviewee said, 'to take a leap of faith,' even though they did not have a clear understanding of how to make it happen" (p. 48). In other words, these managers chose to advocate for deliberation even though they had no settled idea of what it was, how to do it, or how to know when it had been done well (or poorly).

[2]The names of this city and organization are obviously fictitious. I have done this to protect the anonymity of those involved. My fieldwork involved interviews with over 30 individuals associated with CC as well as nearly two years observing CC meeting and events, and analysis of local news coverage.

public, most deliberative efforts respond to a specific public problem. This distinction is important. Fortunately, my fieldwork in Civicville led me to observe another organization—the Civic Hope Foundation (CHF)—that nicely illustrates the latter type of initiative. Through a discussion of CHF, I show that my theory is capable of capturing important sociological dynamics in both types of initiatives.

I begin, however, with a very brief introduction to Bourdieu's social theory. Recognizing that this can be a tedious undertaking, my review is very short. I have no interest in reviewing Bourdieu's entire *oeuvre*. Bourdieu himself encouraged others to approach his work as a set of "thinking tools" (Wacquant, 1989, p. 50) rather than a "grand theory." That is the spirit in which I work. Following this brief review, I move on to consider how Bourdieu's ideas help us to understand the practice of deliberation.

Thinking Tools

For Bourdieu, a sociological account of society must begin from the premise that social space is organized by, as he (1985) puts it in one essay, "the set of properties active within the social universe in question" (p. 724). He calls these properties forms of "capital," and they are the basis on which any particular social space is defined. This is not the place to explore why Bourdieu chose the language of economics (i.e., "capital") to describe society (see instead Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, pp. 118-120; Brubaker, 1985, pp. 749; Lebaron, 2003). It is enough for us to see that forms of capital—economic, cultural, social, and symbolic—constitute social space, and that they do so in two ways: by organizing reality into social oppositions, and by establishing the basis for social distinction and hierarchy (for a fuller discussion of these various forms of capital, see Bourdieu, 1986). Individuals, ideas, and things make sense only in the context of things they are contrasted to—the "real," as he says in one place, is "relational." These symbolic binaries are not natural, but instead are socially produced and maintained. Bourdieu uses the term "symbolic power" to express (1991) this thought: the "power," of constituting the given through utterances, of making people see and believe, of confirming or transforming the vision of the world…by virtue of the specific effect of mobilization" (p. 170). For him, the human condition is largely a competition to fashion the symbolic world in which we live. This is another way of saying that social space takes shape within defined symbolic oppositions, and that people compete to define the relevant oppositions and to occupy their preferred sides; to, in a word, achieve "distinction." Since one can only gain status through accumulation of capital, and capital is a scarce resource, social space naturally positions actors hierarchically: some individuals

possess more of a preferred species of capital than others. In turn, these others are distributed in objective positions according to the amounts and kinds of capital they possess. Each therefore is also in possession of more or less power to compete within and define that social space.

Bourdieu goes on to argue that different social spaces are organized according to different forms of capital. His term for these spaces is "field." He borrows the word from science, which uses it to describe invisible relations of force like a gravity field (cf. Martin, 2003). Bourdieu often refers to social fields in a similar way, as invisible "relations of force" that cannot be shown except through their influence on actors. For instance, here (1971) is his description of the "intellectual field:"

> [it] is, like a magnetic field, made up of a system of power lines. In other words, the constituting agents or system of agents may be described as so many forces which, by their existence, opposition or combination, determine its specific structure at a given moment in time (p. 161).

The analogy to a scientific field can be pushed too far. "Social agents," Bourdieu (and Wacquant, 1992) insists at one point, "are not 'particles' that are mechanically pushed and pulled by external forces" (p. 108). Still, Bourdieu clearly believes that social capital organizes fields into definite shapes by endowing actors with attributes that set them off on a trajectory of action.

Bourdieu argues that over time modern societies have become differentiated into a great number of fields and subfields. As Wacquant (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) describes it, "in advanced societies [there are any] number of differentiated fields that have both invariant properties and varying properties rooted in their specific logic and history…" (p. 109). Spurred to distinguish themselves, humans have invented a dizzying array of venues in which to do so—each constituted by its own distinctive forms of capital.

While individuals engage in personal efforts to achieve status within fields, Bourdieu argues that the real action takes place at the level of "classes." For him, classes are never objective and fixed. Rather, he (1985) argues that, until they are named and mobilized, classes are only "classes on paper" (p. 275). The interests of their individual members may be aligned, but the actors involved may or may not recognize this fact, and if recognized, they may or may not act on these common interests. Classes must be recognized, and once recognized, mobilized into action. Particular individuals (whom Bourdieu refers to as "spokespersons") must do the work of nominating classes, naming them, and then hailing and persuading individuals to join in common cause on behalf of the class.

This work is empirical rather than theoretical, and since some efforts will succeed and others fail, it is a necessarily contingent process.

As this discussion of classes indicates, actors have a complicated existence in Bourdieu's theory. On the one hand, he wishes to avoid the structuralist trap of assuming that fields simply determine action. On the other, he clearly believes that the properties of fields are independent of human volition, and that they exercise a force on actors. The path he has chosen out of this thicket is to argue that fields shape "habituses" rather than action. The notion of a habitus is perhaps one of Bourdieu's most contested terms (cf. 1984, pp. 758-760; Dimaggio, 1979). He (1977) notes that were it not for its connotation of rote reproduction, he would have preferred to use the more conventional term "habit" (p. 218, n. 47). Bourdieu defines a "habitus" as a "practical sense of things," or "sense of the game" which actors acquire as they are socialized into a given field. He then links to the term directly to the body, arguing (1980) that it is "a state of the body" rather than a "state of mind" (p. 68). Inhabiting a habitus is a matter of bodily disposition, of implicit, largely unreflective manners and sensibilities. It "designates a way of being, a habitual state (especially of the body) and, in particular, a disposition, tendency, propensity, or inclination" (1977, p. 214). Upon entering a social field, individuals naturally acquire its habits—its dispositions toward the world. In this way, fields (or structures) endow individuals with the capacity to act. While not determining any particular action, habituses form the basis of action itself.

In another place (1998), Bourdieu uses the term *illusio* to describe the investments individuals are required to make in the logic of a field—a "tacit [recognition] that it is worth the effort to struggle for the things that are in play in the field" (p. 78).[3] Understood in this way, why is a habitus not simply a habit? The distinction has been lost on some commentators (for discussions, see Alexander, 1995, pp. 128-202; Calhoun, 1993). Bourdieu's response is that fields are rarely so uniform as to produce singular, cohesive habituses. Rather, by distributing capital differentially, fields become lumpy. Different fields produce different habituses; different habituses grow up within individual fields; individual actors may fit in the seams between habituses, partially socialized into two or more. This unevenness is the source of dynamism in Bourdieu's theory: "The principle of the dynamics of a field," he (with Wacquant, 1992) writes, "lies

[3]John Dewey (1944) expresses Bourdieu's conception of *illusio* well: "To be interested [or invested] is to be absorbed in, wrapped up in, carried away by, some object. To take an interest is to be on the alert, to care about, to be attentive. We say of an interested [invested] person both that he has lost himself in some affair and that he has found himself in it" (p. 126).

in the form of its structure, and in particular, in the distance, the gaps, the asymmetries between the various specific forces that confront one another" (p. 101). In other words, faced with a cross-cutting set of fields and habituses, individuals face choices. These choices are admittedly pre-structured by habitus and field—the stakes and preferred routes to achieving them are set in advance—but nonetheless they introduce an element of individual agency into his theory.

Agency allows for the possibility of heterogeneous values in society—and provides the basis for social conflict. "This element of play," Bourdieu (1985) writes, "of uncertainty, is what provides a basis for the plurality of world views…and to all the symbolic struggles for the power to produce and impose the legitimate world-view…" (p. 728). Indeed, on Bourdieu's view (Ovenden, 2000), "conflict is built into society" (p. 19). Why? Because people with investments in particular social fields will always attempt to extend the forms of capital preferred in that field to other social domains. Bourdieu refers to this process as one of "conversion," as when individuals convert one species of money into another. For example, when wealthy individuals use their money to attain certain skills, manners, and knowledge, they are converting material capital into cultural capital. When they then seek to establish this cultural capital as naturally "better" than others, they are attempting to transform their cultural capital into symbolic capital. Bourdieu refers to this process as a kind of symbolic violence because it is an outcome of conflict and competition. Ultimately, Bourdieu argues that money is the most easily converted form of capital. Therefore, the wealthiest among us are likely to define the "legitimate social vision" guiding society.

Deliberation: an effort to remake the world

How does this view of society illuminate the practice of deliberation? In the first instance, it places the practice in its proper light. On a Bourdieuan perspective, deliberation represents a form of politics of the most fundamental kind. For Bourdieu, politics is at bottom a question of authority and legitimacy—who has the authority to speak? On what terms? About which issues? In society generally, social classes compete to answer these questions, usually on the basis of the forms of capital preferred in the social fields they dominate. Deliberation is a form of politics in precisely this sense. As Dryzek (1999) argues, for advocates of deliberation "the essence of democratic *legitimacy* is to be found, not in voting or representation of persons or interests, but rather in deliberation [italics mine]" (Dryzek, 1999, p. 276; on this point, also see Leib, 2004). Advocates of deliberation resist others who claim that the most privileged role in public life should be reserved for political representatives, or that the best way of reaching judgment on issues is to aggregate individual preferences. For its adherents,

deliberation is the most legitimate mode of public decision-making, and other modes, by definition, are less legitimate. One might say that advocates of deliberation are engaged in a battle to name the public as an inclusive, vibrant conversation inhabited by participatory actors. When advocates of deliberation press to make public life more deliberative, they compete with others to set the "legitimate social vision" on the basis of which public life will be organized; they compete to name, classify, organize and authorize public life. This work represents a politics of the most basic sort.

An example from my fieldwork in Civicville illustrates the point. Early in its career, CC became involved in a heated political issue: whether casino gambling ought to be allowed on the city's riverfront. In 2001, a local businessman proposed to redevelop a property along the riverfront for this purpose. The issue became something of a political hot potato, with interest groups (especially churches and business groups) and politicians organizing on both sides. Typically, though the public might become quite vocal, such issues are usually decided by elites, and something like this process began to happen in Civicville. Leaders of Downtown Civicville, Inc.—an economic redevelopment organization—were generally favorable to the idea, as were a few members of the City Council. In January of 2002, Downtown Civicville held a forum to educate the public about the issue, just as local churches conducted a campaign against the idea. If nothing else had happened, the decision would have been made in the usual way: by local political representatives in consultation with interest groups.

However, largely at the behest of one of its Board members, who saw the issue as an excellent opportunity to prove the value of deliberation, CC sponsored a series of three forums. CC's Executive Director, Norma Tyler, recalls there being some resistance on the Board to tackling such a hot-button issue. They did not want to appear as if they were taking one side or the other. Others argued that it is precisely on such difficult issues that deliberation is most needed. The latter view won out, and the results of the forums were published on the front page of the local newspaper. CC discovered that, even after the forums, the community was split on the issue. Some people remained against gambling and others were in favor. But as Nate Powell, one of CC's Board members put it in the local newspaper, for CC "the critical thing that occurred was that people engaged in a civil dialogue…" This is to say, for CC the important outcome was that more and different kinds of people became engaged with the issue and had their views heard. Unlike with routine politics, this was a politics in which "citizen to citizen" conversation, as Tyler put it, came front and center. At least on this one occasion, CC succeeded in reorienting public life toward deliberative principles.

This is precisely the outcome that rankled one of the local elected officials with whom I spoke. "Public input isn't necessary," in such situations, he argued. Instead, representatives are elected to weigh public views, make a judgment of their own, state it clearly to the people, and then stand by the decision. To this official, the critical question with regard to CC was this: who elected them to engage in this activity? While CC has a perfect right to believe that all "elected officials are arrogant," this official argued that the organization had no authority in the public process of decision-making. For him, public decision-making ought to revolve around the representative system.[4]

Like any such group, the people of Civicville engaged in this competition with no firm sense of deliberation as a practice. This is necessarily so, because deliberation does not constitute an independent "field" of activity. Recall that for Bourdieu, a social field is defined as a relational configuration of properties that structure social space into an organized "game." Together, these properties push and pull their participants. They lead actors to move in particular directions; they order and distribute actors across social space in a predictable fashion; and, they form the basis for specific types of relations between actors. As a relatively new social practice, deliberation has few of these qualities. Across any group of people, understanding of what deliberation is, and what it is for, will vary. Individuals will come to the practice with different senses of how to identify good and bad deliberators; they will have different ideas about what counts as deliberation and what does not. As yet, there are no markers of status or distinction within deliberative practice, and so no stakes for individuals to invest themselves in. Many national leaders in the practice of deliberation recognize as much. Here is Matt Leighninger (n.d.) describing the current state of the discipline:

> The latest shift in the evolution of democracy is sometimes referred to as a "deliberative democracy movement." But the leaders who are launching these civic experiments are extremely diverse and largely disconnected from one another…They are focused mainly on involving citizens in a particular issue or decision; they may not even think of their work as civic or democratic. And until recently, the civic researchers and practitioners were segregated by their professional backgrounds and their attachments to particular models for deliberation. Overall, the people who are pioneering deliberative democracy are isolated from one another geographically and professionally, and seldom feel a part of anything as large and united as a "movement."

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[4]In his survey of dozens of these initiatives, Leighninger (2006) notes that this reaction is common among policymakers. See especially his discussion of events in Kuna, Idaho (pp. 119-126).

At any given moment, in other words, it can be difficult for advocates of deliberation to come to a shared understanding of the most basic elements of the practice.

Bourdieu's ideas suggest that the meaning of deliberative practice will take shape in the cracks and crevices of these two social facts: deliberation is at once a highly charged effort to refashion public life—and a practice with little distinctive shape. Managing deliberation without falling into these cracks and crevices becomes a fundamental social and political dynamic in deliberative initiatives.

Deliberation and the Political Field

The manner in which leaders of any particular deliberative initiative manage this dilemma will vary somewhat. But the variance will not be totally random because the dilemma isn't random. Just as we can predict the situation they collectively face, we should be able to foresee how advocates of deliberation are likely to respond.[5] This is especially so for initiatives animated by similar goals—whether those goals involve an aspiration to transform public life or merely to push forward a particular agency's agenda.

Let us consider first the situation of initiatives with very broad aims. In this instance, our theory predicts that deliberation will come to be understood relationally—*in relation to* contiguous social fields. Moreover, of these social fields, the political field is likely to be most important. This is so for both conceptual and practical reasons. The conceptual reason is this: *When people seek to infuse deliberation into a community, they do so only when they are unhappy with some aspect of conventional politics*. Conceptually, in initiatives seeking to respond to problems with the public, deliberation is seen as a remedy for

[5]By "prediction" I do not mean that we should be able to develop iron-clad natural laws of deliberative behavior. Bourdieu cast his sociology as a "non-predictive science." He meant by this that a sociological theory should never be evaluated according to how well it predicts outcomes. In the real world, outcomes are never predictable. They are, however, estimable. To say that an outcome will predictably happen is not to say that it must happen, but rather that, given the context, it is more likely to occur than other outcomes. Thus, I intend my theory to estimate the probability of a certain result without predicting that it will occur in precisely such and such a way.

conventional politics, and as a remedy, its meaning takes shape in relation to that practice.

There are also practical reasons for deliberation's close relationship to the political field. For reasons I will discuss more fully below, individuals most likely to instigate deliberation often are some of the most politically active people in their communities. This means that they are very familiar with local policymakers; indeed, they often *are* such policymakers. It is also the case that today the various layers of federal, state, and local government have encroached on nearly every aspect of civil society. During the 20th century, government experienced exponential growth (cf. Holcombe, 2002). In the past, scholars have argued that this growth has had negative consequences for civil society (for a review, see Cohen and Arato, 1992; for a major statement of this position, see Habermas, 1989). More recent research shows, however, that government and civil society cannot be so easily separated (cf. Chaves, Stephens and Galaskiewicz, 2004; Skocpol, 1999). In fact, government often offers crucial subsidies to civil society organizations. While one might wish to separate the two in theory, in practice they are deeply entangled. Any effort then, to insert deliberation into a local community will naturally be understood in political terms.

As Bourdieu counsels, however, a new deliberative group will have strong reasons to resist being labeled as "political," if by political is meant "just another interest group." After all, very often the appeal of deliberation is precisely that it is not the usual interest group politics. Moreover, any new group will wish to distinguish itself from the crowd; if deliberation is seen as utterly ordinary and conventional, why would people support it, much less invest themselves in it? There are strong sociological currents then, pushing deliberative groups to define themselves as different from, if not in opposition to, conventional politics.

Let me illustrate the point, and its consequences, with a story from Civicville. As our theory predicts, civic leaders in this town came to deliberation out of a sense that ordinary politics was not working. Conventional wisdom in town had it that political decisions were made by a small group of white men. People had never felt good about this situation, of course, but in the mid-1990s civic leaders worried that the city had never faced such difficult or complex problems. They came to believe that deliberation might move the town beyond conventional politics toward solutions to these problems. At the same time, and also as our theory predicts, many of the civic leaders involved were themselves powerful civic actors. The two men who drove the process owned the local paper, and belonged to a well-known family whose influence in the city stretched back

to the early 1900s. Nearly every founder of the group belonged at one time or another to a major civic or political organization—from the Chamber of Commerce to the biggest non-profit health and human services organization in the community.

It was not surprising then, that others in Civicville saw the formation of the organization as a political act—or that its founders would resist that conclusion. Very soon after the organization was created, Norma Tyler, the organization's Executive Director, began paying visits to community groups. In an interview, she recalls being struck by how most everyone she met assumed that the organization was a new interest group in town. "Never ever did I attend a forum or any function," she told me, "that somebody didn't come up to me and say, 'Who's behind this? Where do you get your funding?' Never." She concluded: "Every time we'd go out people would say, 'Who's behind this?' I mean it was always, 'Who's running the show behind this?'" A local public official put the issue this way: "[This deliberative organization] is in that group that wants to promote change…it's a change agent…when you put things on the table of course you're going to be perceived as political."

One way of putting the point is to say that people viewed the organization as *self-interested*: it had been organized to further the political interests of a particular group. For obvious reasons, this is a view that its organizers resisted. As its Executive-Director put it, for the group to thrive it had to "establish [itself]," to "get its feet firmly planted and [get] who [it was] out there among the organizations…" It had, in other words, to distinguish itself from the myriad self-interested groups that populate conventional politics. What's the use of another interest group in town? Who would support such an organization? The organization's founders believed that the group's very survival depended on its ability to show others that it was different, and therefore worthy of their attention and support.

The consequences of this decision were profound. At every turn, the organization faced a choice between making a "political" decision—and thus losing its deliberative ideals—or remaining true to those ideals at the loss of political efficacy. Consider, for instance, the question of how the organization ought to choose its Board members. From its beginnings, the group had a volunteer Board of Directors and one paid staff person, its Executive-Director. But who should serve on its Board? Consistent with its profile as a disinterested organization, a few of the organization's founders wished the Board to include all sorts of people, from elites to the working-class. "I don't think," one person told me, "that we ever attracted enough of a diverse profile in the community." These

people tended to lament the fact that the organization never reached out to the working classes and poor people in town. If it was truly different from conventional politics, then it ought to be absolutely inclusive. This "inclusiveness" criterion for selecting board members satisfied a sense that deliberation required the equal participation of all. This city, one of these individuals told me, is a "Wal-Mart kind of town." The group's Board should reflect this fact.

Others thought of Board selection in ways that made concern for politics more central. A number of Board members believed that the group had to engender support from the portion of the community that controlled resources. Primarily, this meant business leaders. "It was…a little bit closed in…" one former Board member recounts, "There wasn't a lot of diversity…if there was a high profile or [person] with a particular social status that became involved in it [it] might have attract[ed] like people." The assumption here is that in matters of Board selection, the organization ought to be thinking of ways to advance its own interests. Establishing links with the business community was one time-tested way of doing so. Still others imagined diversity in a political sense. An early member of the Board recalls attending his first Board meeting and thinking that the group was "totally…outside of everything going on in the community…There are some people that play in the field and there's some people that sit on the bench…Many of the decision makers were those people who weren't picked to be on the team…They're not decision makers in the community…" According to this view, what was the point of deliberation if it was not connected to the political process? When selecting Board members, it was just common sense to some people that the organization ought to recruit politically influential people.

This example illustrates that, when tried in society as a whole, deliberation quite naturally is understood in relation to the political field, with all the dynamics this entails. Motivated by a desire to make their communities better, deliberation's sponsors ironically often end up facing a choice between adhering to their ideals or being politically effective.[6]

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[6]This conclusion is consistent with Mark Warren's (2001: pp. 80, 164) analysis of deliberative associations. He notes that most deliberative groups seeking to transform public life strive to be neutral toward specific political issues.

Deliberation and Social Identity

If managing this choice were not difficult enough, advocates of deliberation must simultaneously contend with issues of identity and purpose. Recall that for Bourdieu identity is strongly shaped by the contours of social fields. That is, by working to acquire forms of capital peculiar to a social field, people come to be particular kinds of persons, and to play distinctive roles. This is the point of the concepts habitus and *illusio*. People adopt, or better put, invest themselves, in the habits of mind (or dispositions) peculiar to a social field. Investment is necessary for a social field to be reproduced. People must not only recognize the game being played in a social field, they must also view the game as worth being played. It is through these investments that individuals come to be particular kinds of people.

For deliberation, the dilemma is immediately apparent: it is impossible to make investments in deliberation because it is not an autonomous social field. As I have argued, deliberation has no preferred (or shared) forms of capital—no forms of status or distinction—in which individuals might invest. It has no distinctive habits of mind. At any given moment it can be unclear what the "game" of deliberation is, or whether the game is worth being played. In what would one invest? How would one gain status by doing so? Simply put, it is difficult for individuals to invest themselves in deliberation, and therefore to develop a social identity peculiar to this practice.

And yet, it is clear that many people invest in *something* when they deliberate; some even become highly motivated by their participation and keep coming back for more. Moreover, these tend to be the same kinds of people. It is the oldest finding in the literature: deliberative initiatives tend to attract highly educated, highly engaged people who, while middle class, aren't especially wealthy (on this point, see Button and Ryfe, 2005; Ryfe, 2002). Leighninger (2006), who has witnessed hundreds of initiatives, claims that those who initiate and participate in these programs "cannot be easily categorized." But his list of such people fits this basic description: "nonprofit directors, clergy members, human relations commissioners, community organizers, school superintendents and school board members, police chiefs, youth program directors, recent retirees, members of the League of Women Voters, neighborhood association presidents, and activists" (p. 18).

Thus, we have something of a conundrum. On the one hand, as a social practice deliberation lacks the integrity necessary to attract participation. Yet, on the other hand, very particular kinds of people clearly invest themselves in something when they deliberate. If not to deliberation, then in what are these people investing? What leads them toward deliberation?

The answer, I think, is two-fold. The first part has to do with social class. In Bourdieu's terms, the demographic profile of people who reliably participate in deliberative activities—relatively well-educated, well-off, but not wealthy, similar occupations, highly engaged in civic affairs—places them in close proximity to one another on what Bourdieu calls the "field of power." The field of power represents the broadest of class divisions in a society—roughly corresponding to upper, middle, and lower classes—that are made manifest in culture, taste, and education (1984). Advocates of deliberation find themselves in close contact with one another on this field. They therefore find commonality in the habits of mind peculiar to this class. Key to these habits of mind is the set of skills and dispositions promoted by the educational system. As Gutmann and Thompson (1996) argue, "the single most important institution [for deliberation] outside of government is the education system" (pp. 359-361). This is so because the skills and habits fostered by education—reflection, tolerance for differing views, a facility with language and argument, acceptance of "best" arguments—are intrinsic to deliberative practice. To use Bourdieu's terms, education links advocates of deliberation into shared habits of mind by bestowing precisely the kinds of capital (skills, knowledge, manners and values) associated with a deliberative mindset (on this point, see Sanders, 1997).

The second is a shared dissatisfaction with politics as usual. A shared demographic profile often means that advocates of deliberation are close observers of the policymaking process. Indeed, often they *are* policymakers. As actors in this field, they recognize and invest in its stakes. But there are degrees of investment. Depending on where one is positioned in the field, one's investment can vary. For example, a scientist may work for the Environmental Protection Agency and yet invest more in her identity as a scientist than as a government manager. A business man-turned-mayor may do all the things that a professional politician does, and yet retain more investments in the field of commerce than in politics. A member of Congress may play the game of politics, yet have more connections to the people she represents than to moneyed interests. Fields, this is to say, are not absolutely distinct and impermeable. To the extent that they overlap, individuals may be positioned in their creases. It is such cracks and crevices that make room for people to gravitate toward deliberation.

However, shared class attributes, or reactions to politics as usual, are thin reeds on which to hang deliberation. They lack the strength of cohesive fields that contain specific capital for preferred identities, values, and behaviors. This means that when individuals come to deliberation, they share broad experiences and perspectives—and little else. They share no firm understanding of deliberation. They lack a common sense about what deliberation is, what its purpose might be,

who "good" deliberators are and how to tell them apart from bad ones, or how one might know that deliberation has "worked." The practice is simply too undefined to emit of answers to such questions. This means that groups sponsoring deliberative initiatives must constantly work to invent and reinvent answers to these questions. They must work, in other words, to build the rudiments of a social identity that participants might appreciate and in which they might invest themselves. The necessity of building and rebuilding these connections represents a key dynamic in deliberative practice.

Again, an example from Civicville illustrates the point. CC's founders—all eleven of them—worked for 20-months with a large non-profit foundation to develop a common understanding of deliberation. "We got so worked up," one of them recalls of these workshops, "mainly in disagreement about some of the ways that we thought [the foundation] was pushing us…" Another recalls that after the first few meetings, he thought, "I've had enough of this. This is a couple of days out of my life…I'm a busy man and I've got a lot to do…" Even for this relatively small group, most of whom had known one another for years, the process of developing a shared sense of deliberation was difficult. "It took many sessions," one says, "to grasp what we were doing. We were a bunch of analytic thinkers being presented with theoretical knowledge…" Eventually, however, the eleven grew to develop what they thought was a shared sense of deliberative practice. "There were lots of things we were learning," one of the eleven recalls," that were not only relevant, but we thought very doable here in Civicville."

What exactly were they learning? Those with whom I talked used a language of process to address this question. That is, they saw deliberation as a process of conversation that involved, among other things, naming and framing issues. They also shared a sense that the conversation ought to be inclusive of the entire community. Beyond that their ideas diverged from one another. One person talked a great deal about "public judgment." Norma Tyler emphasized that deliberation was a process of "connecting citizens back to institutions." Others referred to deliberation as a process of "public education." None of these terms are necessarily opposed to one another. Then again, they aren't necessarily congruent either. My point is that even for a group of people who worked for 20 months to find common ground on these basic issues, a shared conception of deliberation slipped their grasp.

It is no surprise then, that finding common ground proved even more difficult when it came to keeping a more diverse set of Board members on the same page. My informants tell me that the relationship between the original eleven and other Board members were always a bit strained. One member's

memory of attending her first meeting of the Board was that there was a definite sense of a divide between the eleven and other Board members. The founders tried to educate others about the process—they trained many in facilitation and the other parts of the deliberative process as they understood it. But they were continually frustrated by the experience. One complained that new members "didn't understand [deliberation]. They didn't grasp it." Norma Tyler told me several times that many Board members almost willfully refused to "get it,"—that is, to get the point of deliberation. Instead, a diverse range of ideas on these issues mushroomed. "Deliberation," one person said, "is a way of looking at issues from different perspectives." Another said that deliberation is a "process of learning pros and cons of an issue." It is not necessarily different from dialogue, this person said, "but deliberation has a framework," it is more of a "formal conversation" in which people broaden their perspective on issues. Still another Board member likened it to "an old Town Hall meeting" where people got an opportunity to talk and learn about public issues. Here is how one Board member put the point:

> Realistically I think of success for [CC] is when we can bring together people to talk about something that's of interest to them, of maybe even a very serious concern of theirs, in a way that's non-threatening and as objective as possible and people are able to sit around at a table with other people who don't agree and learn from each other and maybe go away with a better understanding.

This conceptual heterogeneity led to different interpretations of what CC was doing when it promoted deliberation. One way of capturing this difference is to say that CC's Board disagreed about what a deliberative "game" entailed. For the founders and their advocates, it involved the creation of a certain kind public *judgment*. They saw their role as creating conditions in which this judgment might arise, detecting the judgment once it had developed, and publicizing their results to the community. For others, it involved a certain kind of public *action*. They saw CC's role as creating conditions for action—whether that meant painting bridges or creating a new healthcare policy. Seeing the game differently, these individuals naturally also disagreed on the roles and rules appropriate to the game.

Managing this conceptual heterogeneity became a full-time job for the Board. For individuals who served over several years, the ebb and flow of this shared understanding produced a consistent feeling of groundlessness. "We had an identity crisis," one long-time Board member said, "that really has extended the life of the organization…" This identity crisis demanded a great deal of repair work. Every meeting became another occasion on which to talk about these fundamental issues. The constant need to engage in this work led to a recurring sense of déjà vu. One member expressed amazement that the same conversation

"continued, continued, continued…" in the years she sat on the Board. Many others used the same exact phrase: "I am a busy person…" they told me, "and I don't have time for all this talk…" Finally, many Board members simply "got tired of the talking," and resigned.

As this last quote suggests, many of CCs Board members considered the incessant talk about basis principles and purposes as a kind of navel gazing. But when a social practice like deliberation is so undefined, such talk is necessary. Generally, individuals who come to deliberation share certain class characteristics and experiences (especially educational experiences). These experiences, however, are too ephemeral to form a basis for shared understanding. In this vacuum, individuals bring to bear their investments in other social practices, and when these investments conflict with one another, the group must repair the fabric of their common understanding. They must, in other words, talk, and talk, and talk.

This talking, of course, takes place against the backdrop of a profound political struggle. Not only must advocates of deliberation engage in an incessant discussion of basic principles, they must do so in the face of more or less (but almost always more than the deliberative advocates themselves) cohesive antagonism from contiguous social fields. Juggling the politics of deliberation at the same time as the identity and purpose of deliberation is a difficult task, to say the least. It is, perhaps, no wonder that few initiatives with such broad goals survive for any length of time.

Deliberation in Social Fields

As I have suggested, not every deliberative initiative seeks to remake the public life of an entire community. In fact, most initiatives have more limited aims. Given that their goals are something other than the entire reconstitution of public life, these initiatives will have a different arc. This is so because in such initiatives deliberation is likely to be *embedded* in—rather than placed in relation to—an ongoing social field. The character of deliberation, therefore, will be defined not in relation to other social fields, but in the terms and categories of a particular field. The result is more conceptual and ontological stability, but at the cost of an independent deliberative "game."

As it happens, the Civic Hope Foundation (CHF)—which has picked up some of CC's work since its dissolution—is a nice illustration of this point. Paul Tiger—one of the original sponsors of CC—created CHF as his own personal foundation in 1996. At that time, the organization adopted a three-pronged approach to its work: information-deliberation-action. This approach involves

CHF in aggregating information about community issues, framing these issues for deliberation, facilitating public events, and then fostering public action. Of the three prongs, CHF stresses public action most. CHF, its President Danny Plum, says, has a "strong action component." In other words, of the three prongs in its model, CHF gives greatest weight to the third. The other two are seen as lead-ins to civic action. Indeed, CHF devotes a good deal of its resources to fostering the development of civic groups capable of taking such action. For any particular group, this assistance might include further research, administrative and organizational support, staff support, office space, use of computers, telephones and other office equipment, or strategic planning, organizational development, and fundraising. Currently, CHF provides such support to eight on-going citizen groups.

Along the lines of our theory, we can say that CHF is embedded within the field of community organizing/civic action. This is a longstanding social field, stretching back to the work and writings of people like Saul Alinsky (Horwitt, 1989). It is also a well-populated practice; civic action groups exist in every community of any size across the United States, and they have formed networks and alliances across states and regions, and even across the globe. Foundations, institutes, and think tanks ring these groups, providing valuable material and symbolic resources to their participants (see, for instance, the Civic Practices Network). It is, finally, a dense intellectual field. Academics and practitioners have built an impressive literature on the history and practice of civic organizing (for a recent review, see Sirianni and Friedland, 2001). All of this means that community organizing contains preferred forms of capital—ways of being and doing things that mark it as a distinctive social activity—and that it has a specifiable and determinable purpose: to organize citizens in such a way that they can make concerted change in their communities.

Nothing in the field of community organizing says that the process must be deliberative. In fact, deliberation may at times be a hindrance to achieving public action. And in any event, within this field, deliberation will at all times be seen as a means, or tool, for achieving ultimate goals. Deliberation, in other words, is not the fundamental purpose—the end—of community organizing. This is the case at CHF. Every issue of *The Public Agenda*—CHF's monthly magazine—includes a feature that "frames" a public problem. Plum tells me that this is the most popular part of the magazine—and the part that takes the most time to put together. However, as Plum himself says, CHF's emphasis is not on deliberation, but on "facilitat[ing] the process of bringing people together." So, for instance, Plum doesn't open the process of naming and framing public problems to the community. He mentioned that doing so would be preferable, but that the time

and resource constraints of making it happen were prohibitive. Instead, with the consultation of experts, Plum takes that burden on himself. Also, CHF doesn't use deliberation in every one of its initiatives. Depending on the issue, and the kind of action CHF expects to come out of its activities, it might use expert panel discussions or town hall meetings instead. "We use different formats," Plum says, "for different situations." If CHF wishes to make a quick impact on a timely issue, it might hold a town meeting. If an issue is just coming onto the political radar, it might hold a panel discussion. If it has the time, it might convene citizens to weigh options. Part of this process involves helping individuals reach an informed judgment—but it does not necessarily mean helping a public reach judgment, or investing in a struggle to make public life generally more deliberative.

The practice, in other words, is defined in the context of the broader purposes of community organizing—to foster civic action rather than to refashion public life on deliberative terms. In this sense, CHF's use of deliberation is no different from any other limited use of the practice—such as when schools, government agencies, or churches practice deliberation. In each case, the goal of the practice is defined in terms of a pre-existing social field. Deliberation comes to be seen as a way of provoking civic action, or seeking public input, or educating students—in other words, as part of an ongoing social practice rather than as a practice in and of itself.

One consequence of this fact is that such limited initiatives rarely experience the kinds of crises over meaning and identity that plagued CC. It should come as no surprise, for instance, that many of CC's former Board members with community organizing backgrounds have come to CHF, and caused much less friction in doing so. As an independent social practice, it is unclear what deliberation is, or what its purpose might be. As an extension of community organizing, its meaning and purpose are more readily defined, and this definition is more easily shared. At the same time, this stability is bought at the cost of losing the truly disruptive nature of deliberation. Focused on organizing communities for political change—whether that has to do with healthcare, crime, or public schools—groups like CHF leave the fundamental terms of public life in place.

Having said this, it is true that deliberation often works a kind of magic on its sponsors—even when they initially perceive it as a means to an end. This has not happened in the case of CHF. But there are many other examples in which this has been the case. Bramson (n.d.), for instance, reports that many of the public managers she interviews came to deliberation almost out of exasperation. Since traditional approaches to decision-making had simply failed to work, they were

willing to try anything that promised a different outcome. However, over time many came to see their work through a deliberative lens—and were transformed by the experience. "In my career," one public manager said, "I have learned to appreciate democracy and how fragile it is and how it is tied to the health, safety, and well being of citizens. I have learned to stop everyday and say. 'What do citizens need to know about this?' 'How do citizens need to be involved in this decision?'" (p. 36). These public managers came to see their work in different terms—less in terms of the application of expertise and more in terms of the facilitation of public work.

Because it involves straying from the logic of an ongoing social field, this transformation does not come without substantial professional risk, ranging from ridicule by one's peers to outright rejection. The story of Roger Bernier, an epidemiologist with the Centers for Disease Control, is a nice illustration of this point. As he had done many times before, in 2001 Bernier found himself testifying before Congress on the issue of pandemic flu. The federal government had no set policy on how to handle vaccinations if such a pandemic occurred. Bernier testified as a scientific expert on vaccinations. As Bernier tells the story, at the end of the proceedings, a member of the audience told him that, while his testimony had been persuasive, ultimately it would prove useless. Why? Bernier wanted to know. Because, this person told him, the public will not trust the science, and the science can have no influence without public legitimacy. The comment led Bernier to something of an epiphany about himself, his profession as a public scientist, and its relationship to the public. And this epiphany led him to innovate a new public engagement model called the "Vaccine Policy Analysis Collaborative" (VPACE).[7] One has only to listen to Bernier tell his story to recognize that it has involved a personal transformation. Where at one time he had been deeply invested in the values of government-based expertise and science, he had now come to see his role as a facilitator of public engagement. As I observed one of VPACE's events, and talked with the CDC scientists in attendance, I came to understand that Bernier was taking a great professional risk. The scientists were happy to participate, but to a person they were puzzled by the exercise and skeptical of its outcome. As individuals with great experience in the matter at hand, they felt that they already knew what ought to be done, and they did not think "ordinary" citizens could contribute much to their settled opinions. To other advocates of deliberation, Bernier had become something of a hero. Indeed, the sixteen earliest champions of VPACE had been mythologized as the "Racine

[7]The reader can obtain a copy of VPACE's final report at: http://www.keystone.org/spp/health-pandemic.html.

16,"—named after their first meeting in Racine, Wisconsin. Bernier himself has won awards and accolades from the deliberative community (including a "Purpose Prize" from CivicVentures, a national think tank). But to the scientists around the room that day, he was something of an odd character. To the extent that Bernier was no longer invested in the logic of the scientific field, his values and motives became less recognizable to his peers.

Nonetheless, this kind of personal transformation often radicalizes sponsors of deliberation. They come to see deliberation less as a means to an end and more as an end in itself. In this way, initiatives with limited initial aims can become more ambitious enterprises. To the extent that they make this transition, such initiatives begin to look more like CC—and to experience many of the same dilemmas. However, the story of how these initiatives work through these dilemmas is different from that of an organization like CC. Most importantly, they tend to be highly personal stories—narratives of heroic (or tragic, depending on one's perspective) efforts to change the culture of an ongoing social field. People like Bernier come to see their investments in a social field in a new light; they experience a conversion, of a kind. Therefore, the question that animates these stories is this: will their champions succeed in convincing others that the deep investments of their shared field—the rules of their "game"—are in need of change? As the story unfolds, every gain and loss is seen as a reflection on its champions. For a group like CC, the storyline is different. The question for them is: can they create an entirely new deliberative "game" in public life? Can they fashion deliberative stakes worth pursuing? Their energies are devoted not to changing deeply felt investments in an ongoing game but to creating wholly new investments. This challenge is more institutional and less personal. Where CC tried to change an entire public life, people like Roger Bernier try to change a social field. Therein lies the difference.

Conclusion

In summary, I have outlined a theory of deliberation that contains the following propositions:

(1) Wide-scale deliberative efforts represent a politics of the most basic and fundamental sort, but deliberation does not constitute an autonomous social field, and therefore does not contain preferred roles, values, or behaviors.

> ***Consequence****: Individuals who sponsor these initiatives engage in political struggle with a fragile sense of what*

deliberation is, what it is for, how to do it, or how to evaluate it once it is done.

(1a) Due to (1), advocates of deliberation will tend to define the practice in opposition to attributes of the conventional political field.

(1b) Due to (1), we should expect that its advocates must continually invent and reinvent the "game" of deliberation, including a shared understanding of appropriate roles, rules, values, and values.

(2) Deliberative efforts with more limited aims define deliberation in the terms of (rather than in relation to) on-going social fields.

***Consequence**: Deliberation is seen as a means to an end defined in the terms of the on-going social field.*

(2a) Advocates of deliberation in such initiatives will likely suffer fewer identity crises than those who seek broader political change. Engaged in a relatively stable, ongoing social practice, they will feel less need to invent and reinvent the "game" they play.

(2b) When such initiatives become radicalized, however, they will be viewed in personal terms, as heroic (or tragic) campaigns waged by champions intent on altering the investments of an ongoing social field.

At the center of this theory lies a principal insight: that deliberation lacks the cohesiveness of an autonomous social field. According to my theory, the absence of such a field is a driving catalyst for deliberative practice. It leads to deliberation's deep entanglement in the political field, or its immersion in other ongoing social fields. Is it possible for this situation to change, for deliberation to become an independent social practice? Another way to put the question: might forms of capital—social, cultural, and otherwise—develop to lend the practice a degree of autonomy from the political field? There are indications that this process is underway. Consider the activities of groups like the National Coalition for Dialogue & Deliberation, the Deliberative Democracy Consortium, and the International Association for Public Participation. These groups offer deliberative practitioners opportunities to share experience and knowledge. In so doing, they provide a breeding ground for status distinctions. As practitioners compete to define more and less "rigorous" deliberative practices, or more and less

"professional" methods of deliberation, the field as a whole may come to be defined by its own peculiar forms of capital. Bourdieu's theory offers a set of tools for investigating this process.

Given the paucity of research in this area, my work is necessarily tentative. I think the theory I have outlined takes account of recurring patterns in the practice of deliberation, but ultimately proof of the theory's value awaits more empirical research. Here, it is enough for me to have provoked this research. In the end, I am less wedded to particular hypotheses, or even to Bourdieu's social theory, than I am to the proposition that a more vigorous application of a sociological imagination to deliberation will have important empirical pay-offs.

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