RESEARCH ARTICLE

Reclaiming Civility: Towards Discursive Opening in Dialogue and Deliberation

Renee G. Heath and Jennifer L. Borda

In the midst of polarization often linked to incivility and a 'callout' culture, this paper re-imagines the role of civility. Moving away from reductionist definitions that claim civility is either oppressive or merely politeness, the authors argue for a civility that invites dissent and generates discursive openings. In this sense, civility in dialogue and deliberation settings fosters the conditions for managing the dialectic of calling out while calling in. Arguing that discursive openings are a better guideline for productive dialogue than civility, the authors draw on their work to suggest two conditions that foster civility towards discursive opening in situ. First, dialogue and deliberation designers can invite gracious contestation into the conversation through ground rules that prepare participants for earnest disagreement. The second condition that fosters discursive opening through civil deliberation is to bring forth contested language particular to issues and identities, and allow participants to determine its meaning rather than prescribe meanings that ultimately influence identities and policy. In this conception civility is what is needed to promote constructive conflict rather than being used to quell conflict altogether. The most important question becomes not, 'Was the conversation civil?' But, 'Will the conversation continue?'.

Introduction

Accusations of incivility and callout culture pose a challenge to deliberation across difference. For meaningful conversations to unfold in democracies, it is important to 'embrace the hard edges of dialogue' and extend openness in the face of inevitable conflict (Barna Research Group 2016: para. 9). This normative requirement, however, is difficult to realize in practice. In part, this is because democracies worldwide experience polarization along various identity boundaries such as religion, in India, and ethnic competition, in Kenya. The United States stands out as a country where political polarization has splintered collective identities *across* religious, ethnic, and ideological lines (Carothers and Donohue 2019: para. 12). Consequently, citizens in democracies are increasingly afraid to talk about their differences (e.g. Rossini 2019). A majority of US Americans (69%) find that absence of civility is a 'major problem' in both in-person and online communication (Civility in America 2018). This problem is compounded by a callout culture that may be as oppressive as it is justified.

The scholarship on deliberative democracy, we argue, needs to develop a richer vocabulary to attend to the hard edges of dialogue. The field needs precision in identifying the contexts of incivility and calling out, and the mechanisms that constitute productive outcomes in public deliberation. We find that part of the problem relates to the literature's tendency to construct an intractable dichotomy between civility and incivility, which has the unintended consequence of delegitimizing communicative practices that may actually foster public dialogue and deliberation. We are especially concerned with addressing reductionistic understandings of civility and calling out. We aim to move beyond binary definitions of these terms and their concepts by bringing them into conversation with public dialogue and deliberation practice and scholarship, where 'many scholars and political observers believe' the most viable solution to polarization 'is to embrace deliberation and civility *especially* when we disagree with one another' (Strachan & Wolf 2019: 134; see also Wolfe 2018).

We advance the concept of discursive opening as a guideline for determining what counts as civil interaction. Discursive opening shifts our attention away from strict definitions describing what civility 'is,' and asks instead *what work civility does*—that is, it initiates and maintains the possibility for further conversation among those with deeply held differences. Accordingly, we extend the work of organizational communication scholars' conception of discursive closure, while at the same time complicating definitions of civility and calling out, bringing them more fully into conversation with the work being done in public dialogue and deliberation. Drawing on an exemplar from our own work, we demonstrate how our conception of civility has practical implications that can improve deliberative engagement.

University of New Hampshire, US

Corresponding author: Renee G. Heath (renee.heath@unh.edu)

Our article is structured in three parts. In the first section we introduce the concept of civility and its role in civic discourse, and then review the links between civility and discursive closure, and the importance of dissent. Building on the arguments advanced in this section, we challenge the idea that civility is diametrically opposed to freedom of speech (Hentoff 1992), and posit that civil spaces can and do foster freedom of thought and expression. Following these assumptions, the second section introduces the concept of discursive opening as that which invites rather than steers away from contestation by both calling out injustices and calling in the opportunity to understand injustice from different perspectives. We posit ways we can invite civility into the conversation through language choices that open rather than shut down important, but often difficult, discussions. Finally, in the third section we conclude our arguments with an illustration from our practical work with the Civil Discourse Lab that fostered the conditions for civility in the service of discursive opening.

Civility in Context: Discursive Closure, Calling Out and Dissent

Civility has become central to studies in dialogue and deliberation (e.g., essays in Boatright, Shaffer, Sobieraj & Young 2019), yet lacks conceptual clarity across disciplines. Most academic definitions of civility go beyond a colloquial understanding of politeness, etiquette, or manners (Laden 2019; Stuckey & O'Roarke 2014; Zurn 2013). More broadly, some have likened civility to forgiveness (Stuckey and O'Roarke 2014), and others to respect for persons (Reiheld 2013; Rood 2014). Critical conceptions have described civility as a 'cultural investment in consensual discourse, the rule of law and logic, and a "republican" political style that features open debate, oratory, agreement, and tolerance' (Ackerman 2010: 76). Furthermore, others argue that civility can be dangerous, given that what is characterized as civil behavior is most likely determined by hegemonic arrangements of power constituting censorship (Cloud 2015; Itagaki 2016; Reiheld 2013). Benson (2011) concludes that 'civil' behavior is not always 'civil,' as in courteous and considerate. He noted that we desire 'civil civic behavior' but tend to make exceptions for those with whom we agree (23). Accordingly, while there seems to be some agreement that (in)civility is playing a role in polarization, the lack of consensus on what counts as civility, and its legitimacy, makes it worth considering further its role in democratic deliberation.

This article approaches civility as situational (Spencer et al. 2016). Zurn (2013) argues that civility is dynamic and unsettled: 'Civility is then a democratically reflexive social practice: the meaning and requirements of civility change and develop over time as public actors actively contest and seek to modify its meaning and requirements' (346). Lane and McCourt (2013) claim that 'everyday incivility is not necessarily strategic and that uncivil communication may be understood as a result of norms that aren't shared and norms that are in transition' (18). In this essay, we move beyond binary conceptions of civility that reduce it either to a colloquial understanding of politeness or suppression in service of hegemonic arrangements (Cloud 2015). Our conception of civility *as generative* makes room for dissent while avoiding discursive closure.

'Civility' as discursive closure

In the context of organizational power, Deetz (1992) theorizes that discursive closure results from the suppression of conflict in decision-making. He explains how systematic distortion (Habermas 1990) occurs in conversation to obscure and reproduce particular power relationships in society. Thackaberry (2004) explains that 'communication is systematically distorted when an operative steering medium [such as money or power] cannot be questioned by appealing to any or all of the four validity claims inherent in communication interaction—clarity, truthfulness, correctness, and appropriateness' (322). As an example, dominant meaning systems distort when 'certain experiences and identities [become] preemptively preferred over equally plausible ones' (Deetz 1992: 174). Deetz also argues that specific discursive practices, though not necessarily strategic, nevertheless close conversations and obscure power by rendering certain claims uncontestable. For example, the practice of *legitimation* 'appeals to a higher order value [i.e., The American Dream] without allowing for examination of the embedded values' (347). Invoking civility as a reason to quell conversation exemplifies legitimation at work. As Deetz (1992) argues, 'When discussion is thwarted, a particular view of reality is maintained at the expense of equally plausible ones, usually to someone's advantage' (189). Thus, calls for civility often work as discursive closure.

This critique of civility is as relevant today as it was half a century ago. In 1967, Haiman noted the tendency of many critics of civil disobedience to assert that, 'in an orderly society, there must be prescribed and proscribed times, places, and manners for protest' (100). Yet protest tactically 'exceeds the bounds of permissible time, space, and manner' (100). Scott and Smith (1969) argue that confrontation violates the commonly held assumptions about rhetoric as an instrument of established society which presupposes the values of 'order, civility, reason, decorum, and civil or theocratic law' (7). They explicate that 'civility and decorum serve as masks for the preservation of injustice, that they condemn the dispossessed to non-being, and that as transmitted in a technological society they become the instrumentalities of power for those who "have"' (7–8). Hence, those who already hold power set the parameters for what counts as civil, closing the debate by reframing understandings of incivility from the actions and outcomes of an unjust society to an 'uncivil' act of disrespect towards such a society.

These interpretations of civility persist. At the time of this writing, protestors against police shootings of Black people, ignited by the death of George Floyd, have been characterized as 'thugs' (Chavez and Sanchez 2020). Reiheld (2013) notes that 'civility is often used to hush up those, especially oppressed sexual or racial or class groups, who point out violations of lack of respect [sic] for themselves. Such discussions are deemed "inappropriate" and cause social disruption. Thus, it is claimed they are uncivil' (70). Itagaki (2016) argues that civility is a proxy for racism or oppression, and Cloud's (2015) work envisions no project for civility

beyond perpetuating hegemonic arrangements of power. These critiques acknowledge an important appropriation of civility in contexts where it is used as a tactic for disciplining the calling out of injustice (Cloud 2015).

Calling out as discursive closure

The concept of calling out takes center stage in civility debates, especially in the activist community (see Mahan 2017; Trân 2013/2016). Activist Jennifer Mahan (2017) explains:

> Calling someone 'out' is typically a public performance in which a person self-righteously demonstrates their superior knowledge, shaming an individual for their oppressive behavior. Despite the fact that a person may utilize calling-out with the intention of engaging in social change or justice, calling-out is itself a form of oppressive behavior. (para. 3).

Accordingly, calling out can have a chilling effect (Reiheld 2013; Trân 2013/2016). For example, political correctness, as a form of calling out, has worked to thwart participation across the political spectrum and has been linked to polarization (Strachan and Wolf 2019). In Hawkins et al's (2018) report, *Hidden Tribes: A Study of America's Polarized Landscape*, 80% of respondents believed political correctness to be a problem. Though political correctness was left undefined, 'participants made clear they were concerned about their day-to-day ability to express themselves' (Mounk 2018: para. 15). When used to silence the speaker, the phrase 'politically correct' functions as a bullying and/or shaming discourse by participants *on both sides of the political spectrum* that shuts down conversation rather than allowing an opening for critique and contestation.

Weaponizing the words 'politically correct' works as discursive closure in several ways. First, claiming something to be politically incorrect enables the speaker to dismiss the power of the words which they invoke, allowing the practice of *plausible deniability* of the impact of what was said (Deetz 1992). The label also shuts down conversation by *legitimizing* some words over others, or rather delegitimizing certain phrases or words (Deetz 1992). Epstein (1992) describes invocations of 'political correctness' as 'attempts to define certain areas off limits for discussion' (151). Hess (2016) argues that 'the new anti-P.C. isn't so gloriously liberating as it purports to be, [since it] has emerged as its own form of speech policing' (para. 13). She further claims that 'many experience being told not to use certain words as a kind of violence' (para. 6). Finally, demanding political correctness shuts the conversation down via the discursive closure practice of *disqualification* (Deetz 1992), whereby some participants feel unqualified to speak for fear of saying the wrong thing. Disqualification is expressed by this woman (cited in Mounk 2018) who feared being called out for not being politically correct:

> The way you have to term everything just right. And if you don't term it right you discriminate them [sic]. It's like everybody is going to be in the know of what people call themselves now and some of us just don't know. But if you don't know

then there is something seriously wrong with you. (Mounk 2018: para. 24).

By claiming someone is being (or not being) 'politically correct,' as opposed to sincere or earnest, the claims of those accused are delegitimized, cultivating discursive closure. The accusation of political correctness, (i.e., 'you are just being politically correct') and the fear of not being politically correct (i.e., subtext: 'you are racist'; or 'you are misogynist') both work in direct opposition to discursive opening. The examination of the discourse around political correctness provides just one example of how calling out has worked to shut down conversation.

Calling out as dissent

To these ends, we reconceptualize calling out as dissent. Dissent is necessary in a democracy where communication draws attention to injustices. Bonnin (2017) distinguishes dissent, 'the single act of disagreement' from protest (219). He argues that protest takes place with an acknowledgement of asymmetry in the structures of power, while dissent 'does not gain legitimacy through confrontation, but through the institutional design that makes it possible' (220). Scott and Smith (1969) explain that confrontation achieves attention not available through rational means to certain groups. It is not just a means to an end (such as revolution), but is the goal itself; it justifies these groups sense of rightness, and demands a response. Scott and Smith argue that confrontation is a tactic for gaining attention that is not available through polite means. 'The act carries a message' (7). Confrontational tactics serve an important role in democracy, and are often the only tool available to marginalized groups that have not been granted a voice (see Smith 2020 for a discussion on violence as uncivil deliberation).

Both protest (working outside the boundaries of supposed legitimacy), and dissent (symmetrical disagreement), comprise elements of a larger democratic project that recognizes the importance of agonism in pluralistic societies (Mouffe 2013). According to Wiederhold and Gastil (2013):

> Agonism occurs when citizens seek to transform conflict in such a way that oppositional perspectives are no longer perceived as a pathology or enemy to be destroyed but as an adversary (i.e., someone whose ideas we combat but whose right to defend those ideas we respect). (116).

Phillips (1996) contends that dissent, 'though motivated by a sense of difference from and resistance to the background consensus, exists ultimately in the service of this consensus' (233). Moreover, 'objections from resistant communities must be dealt with in order to continue the work of public deliberation, to expand the knowledge of the public sphere, or to improve the procedure of deliberative practice' (233). Phillips concludes that to ignore dissent is also 'to ignore the growing diversity of discourses, reasons, rationalities, and arguments' as well as 'differences of knowledge and of power' (245). olfe (2018) conceptualizes fora of dialogue and deliberation *as*

agonistic resistance to authoritarian momentum. Building on her arguments, we conceptualize agonisms among pluralistic perspectives that are realized at the discursive level. Here, dialogue and deliberation work beyond protest (not despite or in place of protest) to create a discursive space in which conversational partners, whose protests demand legitimacy, may be moved toward understanding and temporal consensus on matters of civic importance (Arnett 2001). Thus, calling out, as dissent, is a necessary communicative part of bringing subjects to light for deliberation. This conception extends beyond viewing 'disagreement as a discursive *problem*' (Black & Wiederhold 2014: emphasis added), and instead views it as a necessary agonism and the potential for discursive opening.

Rethinking Civility: Discursive Opening and Dialectic

Next, we re-imagine civility as that which fosters discursive openings. Discursive openings allow for learning and understanding, shifts in language use, and ultimately, possibilities for equity and democracy in policy and community decision-making. We posit that substantive civility fosters the discursive conditions necessary to navigate the dialectic of calling in persons while calling out oppressive language, concepts, and behaviors.

Substantive civility and calling in

Attentive to critiques of civility and the practice of calling out, Reiheld (2013) theorizes that *substantive* civility regards how people handle moral diversity. She defines it as a respect for persons, arguing that to have respect for persons means that they cannot be marginalized in the process (see also Rood 2014). Reiheld centralizes the concept of power by advocating respect for persons 'with exceptions,' thereby allowing scrutiny of the rule of respect for persons. If the rule reproduces marginalization, an exception must be made. Central to her theory is activist Ngoc Loan Trần's (2013/2016) notion of calling in:

> Ngoc Loan Trần (2013) develops an idea of 'calling in' which we acknowledge that even those of us who have learned to account for the unheard voices, and indeed to hear them speak for themselves, didn't always know this. Rather than calling out those who don't know it, we should call them in, invite them into the space where one learns this. Trần argued, 'We have to let go of treating each other like not knowing, making mistakes, and saying the wrong thing make it impossible for us to ever do the right things.' Calling in allows us to speak *earnestly* rather than perfectly. 'Those who aren't doing a good enough job yet,' says Trần, 'cannot be treated as disposable "allies"' (Reiheld 2013: 73, emphasis added).

We contend that calling in addresses concerns about censorship and limited speech, and fosters discursive opening rather than discursive closure. This conception closely parallels Arnett's (2001) metaphor of dialogic civility, which he describes as 'an interpersonal learning key for meeting postmodern differences in the public domain' with the ethical objective of 'keeping the conversation going through reciprocal understanding and disclosure of ethical standpoints (Deetz 1983)' (319). Arnett argues that his metaphor addresses the need for public dialogue to allow face-saving, that is, 'trust that embarrassment will not enter the learning' (326), and trust in patterns that minimally 'keep the conversation going' (326). Extending this work, we illuminate calling in as one of the ways participants can begin to develop that trust. That said, even those speaking earnestly may unintentionally experience or cause embarrassment. Some scholars also warn that focusing too centrally on trust can work against holding power accountable (Wahl and White 2017). Though we agree that dialogic civility as a metaphor fosters an interpersonal ethic for engaging with different others, we broaden the location of responsibility beyond the interlocutors, to include the co-constructors of public dialogue design. Even those who do not cultivate a dialogic civility in their interpersonal relationships could participate in constructive public dialogue. Thus we place civility outside the context of individual behavior and foreground the communicative structures and conditions that work to keep the conversation open.

Discursive opening rather than civility

We argue that the primary concern made visible in contexts of dialogue and deliberation is not whether conversation *is civil*, but rather *what work the conversation is doing*. Does it promote discursive opening that disrupts distorted power arrangements, or does it shut the conversation down? This directs our attention differently than Black and Wiederhold's (2014) concept of civil disagreement, defined as 'a particular form of disagreement' (the outward expression of conflict), 'that conforms to rules of civility' (286). They contend that civil discourse is marked as much by the 'absence of insults and partisan attacks as it is by the presence of respect and fair-mindedness' (287). By focusing on discursive opening, we shift our gaze from 'norms of politeness' (287) and focus on what is being produced in the conversation. Discursive opening is an undertheorized concept (Ångman 2013) that has great relevancy for dialogue and deliberation. It provides a communicative goal for dialogue and deliberation that is a better determinant for what counts as civil discourse. Though Deetz (1992) initially focused on organizations, he was concerned with theorizing participatory communication. Ångman (2013: 12) argues that,

> According to Deetz (1992), democracy in the participative sense requires the capacity to mutually solve problems through exploration of different points of view. A democratic society depends on the promotion of conflict and discussion where various power configurations have closed discussion down (Deetz 1992). Deetz states that norms based in communication and democracy do not define the direction in which we should develop but provide a means to promote conflict and discussion, and this meaningful change could take place in everyday micropractices (Deetz 1992: 4).

Organizational scholars Christensen et al. (2015), conceptualize discursive opening as a 'license to critique,' where participation is more critical than solutions, commitment may be more important than consensus and agreement, and good communication is not a matter of defining common ground or 'securing consensus across different interests' (140). Rather it fosters a variety of perspectives that challenge sedimented positions. However, little work has identified the micropolitical practices that constitute discursive opening, especially in the context of public dialogue and deliberation. This article is precisely concerned with *what constitutes fostering a variety of perspectives, holding power accountable, while at the same time nurturing the conditions to keep the conversation going.*

Calling in and calling out as dialectic
We rethink civility in terms of *what it does* in deliberative dialogue; that is, it holds in tension calling out and calling in towards the goal of discursive opening. Doing so allows us to preserve the importance of calling out as dissent, while maintaining respect for persons. Trần's (2016) concept of calling in is important because it reclaims earnestness as a key condition to nurturing discursive opening. Trần is careful not to reduce calling in to a simple binary to calling out. Calling in spaces include calling out injustice within the designs of the communicative forum. Calling in foregrounds, at a minimum, mutuality, patience, respect, and tolerance as a path forward when dealing with perspectives that we don't understand. Trần seems to suggest that calling in also demands humility (also a virtue of the Civil Conversations Project (2018)) arguing, 'we have to remind ourselves that we once didn't know. There are infinitely many more things we have yet to know and may never know' (63).

To hold in tension invokes the concept of dialectic—as we move toward calling out, we move away from calling in. Baxter (1990) defined dialectical tension as opposing needs that exist simultaneously, constantly struggle for dominance, and are inherent. In other words, in the act of calling something out, we move away from inviting in the other's perspective. Framed as dialectic, we try to honor these opposing needs. Calling in and calling out are held in tension, recognizing the role of both in deliberation, rather than giving primacy to one over the other at all times. Wahl and White (2017), building on Mouffe's concept of agonism, argue that public dialogue and deliberation, in the context of asymmetrical power relations, must hold in tension 'agonistic approaches to democracy and political change' that 'assume competing interests' and pressure accountability from those with power through deliberative approaches that focus on democratic procedures (490).

Language and meaning
In this conceptualization, calling in and calling out are operationalized by focusing on discursive constructions in the deliberative context. Calling in people works in dialectic with calling out language. Language actively produces and reproduces particular meanings that are frequently ideological in nature, yet a hypervigilance to language that lacks mutual humility and tolerance

may leave conversational partners discouraged about how to proceed in conversation with the other. Calling in, paired with explicit attention to language, nurtures the communicative environment needed to engage in conversation with respect for others. Grounded in assumptions of social constructionism, the words people say, their interactions, do work beyond the mere transmission of messages; they construct the world in which they live, the cultures they inhabit, the relationships they experience, and the social orders that structure power in society (Deetz 1992). Therefore, language *matters*; the way people talk about issues of import to a civil society frames how they ultimately make decisions about those issues. As an example of the power of language in public dialogue and deliberation, Smithberger (2016) studied the language changes that have framed immigration deliberation over the years. She found that specific phrases reflected shifts in the way US Americans had come to understand and value immigration. Today, terms such as 'chain migration' and 'anchor baby,' have become ideological (Cloud 2015), and influence policy by demonizing family relations as a pathway to citizenship. Thus, calling out language and calling in diverse others to determine its meaning, manifests this dialectic in deliberative contexts.

Another example of calling in while calling out is Megan Phelps-Roper's story of leaving the hate organization, the Westboro Baptist Church (Phelps-Roper 2019). As the granddaughter of the church's founder, and daughter of its leaders, leaving Westboro meant losing her family. Megan credits a Twitter user who never dismissed her, nor treated her disrespectfully, but rather thoughtfully participated in an ongoing discussion. This user called out the inconsistency of her arguments, which used the language of scripture to defend hateful actions. This engagement challenged her to examine the values and discourse in which she had been immersed, culminating in her leaving Westboro. Phelps-Roper's story establishes respectful dialogue and civil discourse as a vehicle for navigating pluralism. Reiheld (2013) articulates the tension:

> If we truly value pluralism in a morally diverse society, we will have to moderate our behavior in advocacy of our most deeply held values and, at some level, tolerate those with whom we have profound moral disagreements. In this sense, pluralism and civility work in harness. (60).

Deliberation professionals must meet the challenge of creating space that allows for disparate views, while not equating moral relevancy with the experiences and perspectives of the disempowered, thereby disrespecting them, and recreating civility as discursive closure. Valuing equal participation in deliberation processes does not mean that all perspectives represented are equally valid. Phelps-Roper experienced saving face to the extent that she was willing to stay in conversation with the Twitter user who called out the inconsistency in her biblical reasoning. The conversation constructed through calling in and calling out allowed for the reconstruction of

meaning, in particular, for Phelps-Roper, as she and her online friend actively co-participated in interpreting and deliberating the Bible's meaning. Managing this dialectical tension is at the crux of public dialogue and deliberation work and demands that designers nurture *earnest* spaces.

Creating Conditions for Discursive Opening

A focus on the micro-practices of discursive opening in public dialogue and deliberation elucidates *formal civility* (Boyd 2006). Formal civility refers to the procedures that govern face-to-face interaction. Formal civility potentially facilitates *substantive civility* because it is concerned with leveling power, both by thoughtfully including marginalized voices, and purposefully executing ground rules that allow for equal and equitable participation in the conversation. While rules for appropriate decorum can silence less powerful voices in spaces of protest, rules associated with public dialogue and engagement aim to invite dissent, storytelling, and thoughtful reflection (Black and Wiederhold 2014). These practices foster symmetry for persons who experience marginalization and vulnerability. Identifying practices of formal civility can be helpful; however, an overemphasis on formal practices can also undermine substantive civility, if for example, emphasis on finding commonality muzzles the acknowledgment of differences of privilege. Black and Wiederhold (2014) admit that the micropractices of civil disagreement that they identified (e.g., silence) could also be perceived as negative experiences for public dialogue participants. Building on their findings, we suggest focusing formal procedures on what conditions constitute discursive opening through calling in participants and enhancing the co-construction of meaning around difficult subjects.

We draw on our experience with the University of New Hampshire's Civil Discourse Lab to demonstrate an approach to civility that works to hold in tension calling out while calling in. The Lab trains students to design and facilitate public dialogues on topics of import to the community. Its mission is to strengthen the ability of students and community members to conduct meaningful conversations, collaborate, and weigh decisions around sometimes difficult but important topics to a civil society through research, experiential learning, and praxis. Students from campus groups representing diverse perspectives on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict approached the Lab to organize a public dialogue that did not 'once again' devolve into verbal attacks. They sought a forum that fostered sincere inquiry regarding policy and positions on the conflict. To accomplish this, we employed two specific practices that cultivated civility toward discursive opening: First, constructing and honoring ground rules that foster gracious contestation, and second, calling out language associated with the issue, and calling in the conversants to negotiate what that language means. These practices constitute purposeful conditions, that are not provided as a fixed template but as an exemplar of how the goal of discursive opening can influence public dialogue and deliberation design.[1]

Gracious contestation

The first condition we sought was to foster gracious contestation (Heath and Isbell 2017). Grace at its etymological roots implies mercy and forgiveness. Yet contestation is what is necessary to challenge systematically distorted power (Habermas 1990) or in contemporary terms—inequity. Gracious contestation is similar to Black and Wiederhold's (2014) conception of civil disagreement, but instead of positioning disagreement as a problem to navigate in public dialogue, gracious contestation *invites* conflict as a norm of decision-making in the public sphere. With a focus on forgiveness, gracious contestation is the communicative enactment of calling out while maintaining earnestness and humility. This is a calling out that is approached with authenticity.

With discursive opening as the goal, gracious contestation is achieved by constructing ground rules to open conversation, not close it down. Those outside the dialogue and deliberation discipline sometimes view ground rules as censorship. Harvey (1992) questioned ground rules for the purpose of ensuring 'that no one can be offended?' (142). In this interpretation, ground rules work to limit conversation rather than open it. Characterizing civility, or thoughtful language, as aiming to not offend dismisses the power and responsibility of language. With the aim of discursive opening, goodwill is built into the conversation through ground rules, so that participants have the grace to call in and allow for mistakes or missteps. Ground rules should foster calling out while calling in. They are not about limiting speech, or limiting offense, but about creating earnestness and facilitating respect. This calls for responsibility on the part of the speaker and the listener, where the listener may believe: 'I don't like what you said, but I am going to presume you do not say it to *intend* me harm.' In this sense ground rules are authored with participants, and in light of civility as discursive opening. Several of the ground rules we constructed for the Middle East discussion responded to behaviors that shut down the conversation the first time our partners tried to engage the community on this subject. In the previous forum, photos were taken and posted on social media to out people's positions, and slogans silenced productive conversation without exploring the meaning invoked with the slogan. Accordingly, the ground rules we initiated included: Every voice and experience is valid; maintain confidentiality; listen to understand, and avoid interrupting; focus on the issue not the person, and avoid generalizing. Our intent was not to create an exhaustive list nor unintentionally limit conversation. Ground rules instead worked to foster earnestness by cultivating gracious contestation, thereby nurturing the environment needed for constructive disagreement.

Calling out language

The second condition set the stage for calling out language. We encouraged participants to identify something they loved about their city in the introduction part of the public dialogue, intentionally sequencing familiarity and commonality before potential conflict (Black and Wiederhold 2014). Next, to ensure an authentic experience that allowed multiple perspectives to move beyond slogans and open up dialogue for understanding,

we drew attention to the language around the conflict and facilitated open dialogue and deliberation about what these terms meant with respect to one another. The tension we held was to call out language, while respecting persons, and acknowledging that meaning is negotiated among persons. Calling attention to language does not amount to censorship, but instead fosters an approach to complex, and often divisive topics. This awareness of language does not grant designers the authority to prescribe meaning to any one word or phrase. Social constructionism posits that meaning is dynamic and negotiated among interactants. We contend that the best way to handle this confusing terrain—which leaves people perplexed by what words to use, or worse yet, cynically leads to cries of being politically correct—is to explicitly bring language to the forefront of policy discussions. Through an exchange of one another's 'vocabulary of motives,' or invitations to identification (Burke 1969), participants subsequently begin to negotiate the acceptable language they will use to discuss the topic and better understand the way the words they use reflect choices about how they wish to convey their place in the world.

As a practice, we write a program with diverse members of the community and then send it out for review to stakeholders to test our language, questions, assumptions, and supporting information. A regular feature entitled, 'Language Matters' allows participants to respond to the language associated with the topic. In this case one such phrase contributed by the Jewish student organizing the event, was 'self-hating Jew.' For context, Epstein (1992) argued:

> Many people in the organized Jewish community have habitually equated criticisms of Israel with anti-Semitism and have been ready to call any Jewish person who consistently makes such criticisms a self-hating Jew. This has been a problem not only for Jews who are critical of Israel and do not want to be written out of the Jewish community, but for the peace movement as a whole. (151).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, one reviewer of the program draft commented, 'You cannot have the phrase "self-hating Jew" on this program.' We explained that the opportunity to discuss its meaning was precisely what we hoped to create. Rather than censor language, our approach is to draw attention to the hegemonic power of language and slogans (i.e., calling out in pursuit of discursive opening), and examine how language choices influence our thinking by tackling it head on. This allows the interactants to negotiate the meaning among themselves rather than have the program prescribe meaning for them.

One outcome of the Middle East dialogue was that one table of diverse participants spent the entire two-hour discussion unpacking one of the program's terms, 'diaspora,' and its disparate and consequential meanings. This table of participants stayed for more than 30 minutes after the forum discussing their experience and asked us to design another, more structured, dialogue on that specific subject. The goodwill created in this process is what we seek to promote in service of understanding across differences and diminishing polarization. By discussing language upfront, participants determine together what counts as 'civil' and acceptable language, and that becomes a foundation for greater empathy and understanding. Additionally, deliberating the meaning of diaspora demonstrated how calling out language and collectively unpacking meaning undermines the discursive closure practices of allowing experts to define terms, 'neutralize' (make incontrovertible), and 'naturalize' (claim inevitability) (Deetz 1992) definitions that systematically distort power. The program received high marks rated most favorably 4 or 5 on a scale of 1–5 by more than 85% of the 38 participants composed of community members, students, and university staff.

We developed this condition in other public dialogues and found it empowers vulnerable participants. For example, in a public dialogue focused on solutions around addiction, we began the program by giving participants an opportunity to identify the language they wished to use. Despite research that cautions against using the word 'addict,' many of the participants who were in recovery appropriated this word to refer to themselves, claiming it helped them understand their recovery as a journey. Thus, as designers we do not attempt to define terms for participants but find by identifying controversial terms and allowing participants to address them before engaging in policy discussions, they mutually unpack the power, ownership, and meaning of phrases. The explicit calling out of language gives permission to participants with a range of views to weigh in regarding how they have come to understand a particular term, thus calling in what it means to them. It focuses calling out on the object (of language), rather than the person.

Testimony from one of our student facilitators, Jocelyn, demonstrates how these conditions were achieved via purposeful design.

> We were able to organize a dialogue that allowed people on various sides of one of the most heated subjects, to sit in a room, share stories and begin to understand one another despite not agreeing. One Jewish student told the story of how her cousin had been killed by a Palestinian group and a Palestinian student responded 'I am so sorry for your loss. I was raised being told that they are heroes.' The students cried together and shared a hug and to this day it continues to be one of the most powerful things I have been able to witness.

We share this illustration from our practice to demonstrate how calling in and calling out can be achieved in public dialogue and deliberation. And how working toward discursive opening allows for civility that does not seek to censor or limit disagreement, but to encourage the continuation of the conversation.

Conclusion

By positing discursive opening as the goal of civility, this paper adds to both theory and practice. First, rethinking civility in these terms preserves calling out

as dissent, while maintaining respect for persons. In this article, we complicate reductionist perspectives of civility by bringing into a single conversation previously disparate literatures on civility, discursive opening, and public dialogue and deliberation. Public dialogue and deliberation fora are exemplary in demonstrating how discursive closure can be mitigated with careful attention to managing differences through a dialectic of calling in people and calling out language. Civility in this context can be a vehicle for disrupting hegemonic understandings of power. Therefore, public dialogue and deliberation offers a promising forum for enacting civility in pursuit of discursive opening. Public dialogue and deliberation fora show how we can rehabilitate the notion of calling out away from a culture that constitutes polarization, and instead reconceptualize calling out and calling in as inevitable agonism present in dialogue and deliberation.

Additionally, we answer the call by Black and Wiederhold (2014) to 'further investigate processes and outcomes regarding establishing principled guidelines for various types of disagreement in public dialogue groups' (303). A second contribution arises by considering what constitutes nurturing the conditions to keep the conversation going. We build on previous work by directing attention to *inviting* civil disagreement into the conversation, not as a problem, but as a necessary check on inequity. We advocate bringing contestable language to the forefront of public dialogue and deliberation, allowing participants to negotiate their own meanings. The conditions of fostering gracious contestation and calling out language, in our case, constituted discursive opening by leveling power, not only between the participants but between the facilitator/designer of public dialogue and the participants. They shifted the responsibility to the parties as communicators to negotiate meaning together. They fostered respect by focusing on the language particular to issues, rather than the person. By keeping in mind opportunities for conversants to collectively call out while calling in, the practice of identifying problematic language can help later build a common vocabulary, and adhere to ground rules that foster gracious contestation. Hence, this work responds to Wolfe's (2018) question, 'how do we design processes to make likely or possible dialogic and deliberative moments across perceptions of difference?' (8).

Practical implications of framing civility toward discursive opening may lead to different decisions made by facilitators and designers. For example, Black and Wiederhold (2014) warn that silence can be understood as respectful, deferential listening displayed by participants, or disengagement related to participants' sense of time passing. Some critical scholarship on civility argues that silence could be demonstrating censorship (discursive closure). Our work provides an alternative guide for facilitators. Instead of focusing on whether or not disagreement or silence are present, facilitators can make choices based on whether that disagreement or silence is the fruit of productive conversation or the muting of marginalized voices.

Additionally, foregrounding discursive opening over civility may provide a better guide for executing temporal shifts in public dialogue and deliberation events. As designers and facilitators, we are often focused on moving participants through the program in the hope that it will have served its intended purpose, whether that is greater understanding, or deliberation of issues, or both. With a focus on discursive opening, we may be less tempted to stick to the agenda and become better at gauging productive conversation. Indeed, in our structured dialogues, we allot times for particular prompts or questions, but when that designated time is up, we encourage groups to decide whether to stay in the conversation they are having, or move to the next prompt. This is how the table of participants ended up discussing the meaning of diaspora the entire evening. This conversation, we believe, will lead to many more discursive openings. Hence, focusing on discursive opening provides a different frame for understanding the significance of civility in designing and facilitating interaction in dialogue and deliberation.

Note
[1] Our exemplars serve as illustrative examples of how dialogue and deliberation practitioners may practice civility as discursive opening. Data were collected in anonymized evaluation forms that are made public through reports. They do not derive from an exhaustive case study. Table discussions were reported during a facilitator debrief session, where notes were taken. They were not recorded or transcribed. The name of the facilitator is not anonymized. Her reflection is shared with permission.

Competing Interests
The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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