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## Power and Citizen Deliberation: The Contingent Impacts of Interests, Ideology, and Status Differences

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## Power and Citizen Deliberation: The Contingent Impacts of Interests, Ideology, and Status Differences

### Abstract

Both advocates and critics of deliberative theory have regarded power relations as problems for public deliberation. Three aspects—interests, ideology and status differences—have been thought to distort deliberative processes. This article discusses a growing body of case studies that indicate that these “problems” may actually, under certain conditions, help facilitate inclusion and equality in deliberation. The crucial task is to specify the mechanisms that explain such unexpected outcomes and the conditions under which they may appear in other cases. This article specifies three such mechanisms that help explain positive outcomes in a number of case studies. The argument for focusing on mechanisms and conditions serves as a correction both to critics who find the theory of deliberation naïve and to advocates who have taken the critique against deliberative theory too lightly.

### Keywords

deliberation, power, interests, status, inequality, domination

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## **Power and Citizen Deliberation: The Contingent Impacts of Interests, Ideology, and Status Differences**

### **Introduction**

Interests, ideology, and status differences are often portrayed as problems for public deliberation. Early critics of deliberative democracy ask whether there is any reason for political elites to convene deliberative forums, if not for self-serving ends (Przeworski, 1998; see also Cohen & Rogers, 2003). Others question the role of ideology in shaping what counts as “good reason” in deliberation (Young, 2002). Moreover, social inequalities also constrain the possibilities for deliberation since people tend not to leave their prejudices behind once deliberations take place (Hayward, 2004; Olson, 2011). These kinds of critique generated debates about how to neutralize power relations in public deliberation (Fung & Wright, 2003; Fraser, 1990; Hayward, 2004). However, as these discussions have evolved, it has come to appear more fruitful to consider power relations to be part of the cultural and political contexts in which real deliberation takes place. While the first generation of deliberative theory applied idealistic standards to deliberation in practice, the central question today is: How does one assess the quality of deliberation “in ways relevant to specific contexts without losing its core in reason-giving and listening” (Bächtiger, Dryzek, Mansbridge & Warren, 2018, p. 19)? In other words, the normative project of promoting inclusion in public deliberation need to be sensitive to the ways that contextual factors shape concrete practices of deliberation. That power relations are part of such factors and, therefore, are constitutive parts of deliberation—rather than problems that must be overcome—is now a common view (e.g., Mansbridge et al., 2010; Blue & Dale, 2016; Curato, Hammond & Min, 2018; Bächtiger et al., 2018; Bagg, 2018; Felicetti & Della Porta, 2018; Holdo, 2019). As Curato and her colleagues (2017, p. 31) put it, research on deliberation has shown that power “pervades the very process of argumentation and communication, affects the remit and organization of deliberative procedures, and shapes the broader policy context.”

While the theoretical literature has evolved to recognize the role of power in deliberation, the question remains: What are the precise consequences that different forms of power have for deliberation? And must power always lead to domination or are there structural conditions and mechanisms that can override tendencies of domination in deliberation?

This article aims to answer these questions. I argue that citizens are not merely constrained in their deliberation by power relations but use different aspects of power to *enable* deliberation. By connecting theoretical debates on interests, ideology, and status to empirical research, I identify specific mechanisms that explain why expressions of power do not always undermine citizen deliberation. Sometimes, they lead to unexpected positive results where subordinate groups can defend their equal right to have their views and interests considered.

I present these arguments in four parts. I begin by revisiting the debates on deliberation and the problem of power. In this section, I characterize how deliberative democratic theory has developed to address issues of power. In the second section, I closely examine the problem of interest. Here I argue that when political elites use deliberation for the purposes of legitimation, they are also forced to offer something in return for participants. This opens the possibility for change as participants and facilitators negotiate the terms of cooperation to fit self-interests on both sides. In the third section, I revisit the debate about deliberation and ideology. Here I take

the position that, while ideological influences may block certain conversations, they can also make certain conversations about justice, equality, and social freedom possible. The impact of ideology, I suggest, is contingent on who uses it and for what purpose, as well as on the existence of spheres that allow people to develop counterdiscourses. Finally, I critically examine status differences and argue that, depending on the basis for such distinctions, these apparent asymmetries in power can promote norms of citizenship that favor mutual respect and recognition. Case studies indicate that citizens have used the status gained from participation to advance marginalized interests. For each of these aspects of power, I specify the mechanism that explains the unexpected outcome and discuss under which conditions it can be expected to be at work and cancel out mechanisms of domination.

Through my analysis of the content impacts of interests, ideology, and status differences, I make a case for empirical research that reveal the mechanisms of subversion that, under some circumstances, override tendencies of domination in deliberation. The three mechanisms identified here do not exhaust the possibilities for how power relations may affect deliberation in ways that advance inclusion and equality in public deliberation. Moreover, a crucial task for further research, I argue, is to explore in more detail the conditions that generate these mechanisms.

### **Deliberation and the Problem of Power**

Deliberative democratic theory's central argument is that the legitimacy of political institutions and decision-making rests on the free and equal participation of all citizens in the exercise of public reason (Bohman, 1996; Dryzek, 2000). The possibilities for citizens to encounter one another in the public sphere and freely exchange their views are thought to contribute to a more enlightened understanding of the stakes of political discussions, the positions of others, and the ways that political institutions respond. This ideal of public deliberation requires that citizens are able to think and speak in terms of public concerns rather than individual interests, that they can base their views on rational arguments rather than ideological conviction, and that they can treat each other as equals (Dryzek, 2000).

The original impetus for this conceptualization was the need for deliberative theorists to challenge the then dominant discourses of elitist or election-centered democracy (e.g., Mansbridge, 1983; Habermas 1989; Dryzek, 1990). However, as deliberative democracy moved "beyond the 'theoretical statement' stage and into the 'working theory' stage" (Chambers, 2003), advocates of deliberation had to specify deliberative models for real political contexts (see Fung & Wright, 2003; Mutz, 2006). To do this, deliberative democrats also began confronting questions about the desirability of deliberation as a democratic mode of participation. Critics argued, and have continued to argue, that the deliberative ideal would not only be difficult to realize but deliberative practices may even be harmful to the values deliberation was thought to advance. In particular, because a core deliberative principle is to treat all participants the same, only giving importance to the power of the argument, deliberation may, if power relations are ubiquitous, work to disguise acts of domination (see Olson, 2011; Hayward, 2004; Holdo, 2015). Does deliberation advance democratic values or, on the contrary, is it another instrument of domination?

Deliberative theorists have responded to these questions in different ways. Some argue that deliberative practice must be designed to neutralize power (see Mackie, 2018, p. 231; see also Bagg, 2018). Others, meanwhile, argue that power is constitutive of deliberation (e.g., Curato et al., 2017). Interests, ideology, and status are three aspects of how power shape deliberation. Interests, including incentives provided by social and political institutions, give actors reasons

to take part and act in certain ways within a context of deliberation; ideology affects cognitive frames where views and which language are accepted; and status distinctions subtly inform actors how to relate to other people and assess the authority with which they speak. Taken together, these aspects affect the possibility of realizing, or at least approximating, the ideal: oriented toward public interests, not self-interests; being inclusive with regard to others' points of view, not excluding them beforehand because of their failure to fit a preexisting frame; and treating people with equal respect, not discriminating based on class, gender, ethnicity, and other classifications that determine social status. However, as I will argue, these aspects of power relations do not, on their own, determine whether deliberation becomes fair, sincere, respectful, and public minded. Rather, the outcome depends on the specific mechanisms<sup>1</sup> that they set in motion.

I argue that identifying specific mechanisms of interests, ideology, and status distinctions would contribute significantly to our understanding of the challenges of inclusion in public deliberation. The focus of such research on mechanisms of power should be to specify the precise conditions under which they are set in motion and when they override mechanisms of domination.

### Interests

There are two problems with interests in deliberation. They belong to two sides of the same coin for both concern the risk of domination. The first focuses on the intentions of powerful actors, while second focuses on possibilities for less powerful actors to defend their interests while engaging in deliberation.

The first part is that initiators of deliberation try to appear motivated by sincere deliberation in which people explore issues openly but in practice they act to pursue their self-interest. This problem is often raised when actors in deliberation are unequal, as when political elite groups invite ordinary citizens to deliberate. The powerful would not usually see a need for asking powerless actors to exchange views about a topic of importance, would they (Calhoun, 1995, p. 52)? Unless such self-interests were involved, powerful actors would not spend time and resources on deliberation, critics argued (Shapiro, 2009; Cohen & Rogers, 2003). “Deliberation can occur—a public discussion can take place—only if someone pays for it” writes Adam Przeworski (1998, p. 148). That is, deliberation is costly: at a minimum, it takes time, and one would only invest if one had reasons to think it will pay off. From this realist perspective, deliberation is “prima facie evidence that someone is irrational” (Przeworski, 1998, p. 147): either the more powerful have initiated deliberation to try making the less powerful support positions that are not in their best interest, or that *they* are the ones acting irrationally.

The second part of the problem adds to the first. We usually think of deliberation as exchanges in which participants are willing to think and speak in public terms rather than private ones. They must disregard their own stakes and interests for shared stakes and interests. This assumption, critics argue, makes it difficult for participants to see and address conflicts of interest. It becomes especially difficult for the less powerful to object when public reasoning is skewed to the advantage of the more powerful; “the transformation of ‘I’ into ‘we’ brought

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<sup>1</sup> By “mechanism” I mean a kind of explanation that focuses on the situational logic of an action (see Holdo, 2018). In other words, a mechanism explains the outcomes in particular cases through a claim of what seems to be a reasonable behavior given the circumstances. Thus, if similar circumstances would exist elsewhere, the same mechanism would be expected to occur.

about through political deliberation can easily mask subtle forms of control” (Mansbridge, 1990, p. 127). Jane Mansbridge (1983) has argued that deliberation, oriented toward mutual understanding, requires the kind of trust that is characteristic of friendship, which is unlikely between strangers or adversaries and may be undermined by apparent inequalities in power. In most public deliberation on issues of political relevance, participants need to be willing to involve others by raising questions of public relevance and, at the same time, make sure that what are alleged to be public interests do not depart too far from their group’s interests or their interests (Mansbridge et al., 2010).

This two-part problem demonstrates some of the obstacles in deliberation. The first part concerns the risk that dominant actors use deliberation to manipulate, while the second concerns the difficulty for all actors to be, at the same time, public minded and cautious not to forget their interests. However, even if these may often be important obstacles to deliberative politics, it is premature to conclude that their implications are disastrous for deliberation. Even if interests are constitutive features of deliberation, it does not follow that deliberation will result in domination. The argument that interests are harmful to deliberation is typically underpinned by the idea of politics as a zero-sum game. While low trust and weak institutions may certainly make self-interested reasoning crucial for surviving in politics, competent actors usually deliberate in order to reach agreements or articulate ideas that resonate with others (see Fligstein, 2001). Actors may choose to be open about their preferences and interests to improve deliberative processes and make it possible to coordinate actions in ways that are seen mutually beneficial and legitimate (see Mansbridge et al., 2010). But even if initiators are less explicit and transparent about their interests in deliberation, a reflective understanding of their own interests and goals may convince them to take seriously the various concerns and motivations of other participants. This would be the case, Joshua Cohen and Joel Rogers (2003) argue, if participants, including less resourceful participants, possess some form of information or knowledge that initiators need. Or, as argued by Brian Wampler (2010) in the case of participatory budgeting, if the initiators (i.e., municipal governments in the cases he examined) risk facing public protests unless they seriously consider the views and interests of participants. Hence, a fuller notion of the problem of interest in deliberation should incorporate the rationality of sustained cooperation, which lies at the heart of deliberative theorizing (see Habermas, 1984; 1985). The presence of interests does not seal the fate of deliberative initiatives. While there is a possibility that interests are susceptible to dominating less powerful players in deliberation, interests might also create space for genuine dialogue and sustained cooperation.

Empirical research of deliberation supports this line of argument where positive outcomes have been achieved not despite, but with the support of interests. Several case studies of Latin American participatory budgets demonstrate how the presence of interests among powerful elites can lead to positive outcomes. For example, in his research on Brazilian cases of participatory budgeting, Wampler (2010) concedes that elites usually have strategic interests in deliberation, but so do participants. The critical variable, Wampler suggests, is the capacity of civil society groups to protest and challenge public administrations when they fail to deliver (Wampler, 2010). This capacity allows participants to take advantage of elites’ interests to advance their own interests too.

My study of participatory budgeting in the city of Rosario, Argentina, showed similarly that participants used elites’ interests in political legitimacy to their own benefit (Holdo, 2016a). Here, political leaders hoped that deliberative forums could help them regain citizens’ trust in

a time of political crisis. Thus, both these case studies indicate that deliberation, although shaped by elites' interests, sometimes lead to cooperation and deliberation without domination.

These two examples demonstrate, moreover, the general mechanism involved when interests can serve deliberative ends: *Initiators use deliberation to gain legitimacy, but thereby allow participants to challenge the terms of legitimization, and this gives them a more powerful position than they previously had.* Initiators are thus forced to substantiate promises of meaningful deliberation by, for example, facilitating and acknowledging the process's impact on actual decisions. This mechanism thus works in favor of actual inclusion and equality in public deliberation, at least in some empirical cases.

A necessary condition for this mechanism to appear is that the actors who initiate deliberation must acknowledge that considering the interests of participants is in their interests too. Such understanding can be facilitated by structural conditions that give active citizens an important role of helping to diffuse a sense of legitimacy. Conversely, citizens can threaten to withdraw such support to underline the significance of their roles.

## **Ideology**

The influence of ideology, or ideological bias, refers to how commonly held assumptions constrain public discourse in ways that limit which perspectives can be taken up in deliberation. In early debates about the idea of public deliberation, critics argued that the emphasis on thinking and speaking in terms of "public" concerns (not "private" ones) and providing "reasons" (not "feelings" or "stories") had been used historically to legitimize exclusion or marginalization of groups such as women, working class, and subordinated ethnic groups or races (Kohn, 2000; Young, 2002). More recently, several authors have pointed to how ideological assumptions shape deliberation. In environmental political deliberation, for example, neoliberal assumptions about competitiveness and profitability have been argued to shape assessments of proposed strategies of sustainable development (Spash, 2017; Holdo, 2019a). More generally, Azmanova (2010, p. 52) criticizes "the dubious mystique of the 'better argument' and the resort to a holistic fiction of a community" that she finds in James Fishkin's work.<sup>2</sup> This critique is an example of the more widespread view that the orientation toward consensus and the claim that there is a form of communication based on reason and genuine listening, which are characteristics of deliberative theory, are myths that only serve to disguise subtle exercises of power.

The claim that power relations constitute deliberation means that concepts such as rationality, reason, and public have developed in a context of power that continues to impact interactions where these concepts are applied. The problem of ideological bias in deliberation is that the terms of public reasoning (e.g., the stress on mutual understanding) become oppressive when they force participants to downplay or reject differences in perspective, and that a particular view is claimed or implicitly understood to be the only, or only legitimate, view (Mouffe, 1999). The problem is that the conditions of deliberation are constructed in a context of power and thereby is biased and blind to its own circumstances to begin with.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> However, Azmanova also claims in the same essay that deliberative polls may counteract manipulation by encouraging contestation.

<sup>3</sup> It is therefore not sufficient to state, as do Mansbridge and colleagues (2010) that "as Foucault points out, every human being is constituted by power relations" and therefore "the absence of coercive power is a regulative ideal, impossible to achieve but serving in many circumstances as a standard against which to measure practice." The point, famously developed by Michel Foucault, is not simply that social practices often

This argument has led critics to the conclusion that public deliberation will work in favor of the socially and politically privileged by confirming their views as reasonable (Young, 2002; Olson, 2011) or make deliberation hostile to perspectival differences (Mouffe, 1999; Laclau, 1996). Critics of deliberation, such as Ernesto Laclau (1996; 2001), Iris Marion Young (2001) and Chantal Mouffe (1999), stress that “public reason” always comes in a culturally specific form, which needs to be acknowledged by participants to not reinforce the perspectives of dominant cultures and perspectives. However, Jürgen Habermas, too, clearly admits that deliberation in practice is always shaped by culturally specific norms.<sup>4</sup> While this argument suggests a need for critical self-reflection on the norms that guide deliberation in practice, biases do not necessarily foreclose political contestation. It might often, on the contrary, open new terrains for political contestation. The same is true of democracy itself (Cruikshank, 1999): the relationship between the universal notion of democracy and its particular manifestations can serve both to legitimize inequalities *and* politicize them (see also Laclau, 2001, p. 10).

Thus, while cultural norms and ideological preconceptions shape deliberation, this does not preclude that they may also facilitate the inclusion and recognition of claims from the marginalized. For example, at the time of the formation of the bourgeois public sphere, which serves as the model for Jürgen Habermas’s initial articulation of the deliberative ideal, plebian publishers and intellectuals also sought to advance their arguments and their positions on the basis of the same bourgeois discourse—they insisted, that is, in “proto-Habermasian fashion, that public debate was the way to advance reason” (Calhoun, 2010, p. 328). They were usually excluded from the finer circles anyways—they were, after all, workers and therefore not regarded “independent” intellectuals—but nevertheless, they found in the notions of “public” and “reason” symbolic resources that could also work to their advantage, and through which they could question, for example, the view that reasoning required economic independence. In a different context, Nancy Fraser (1995, p. 69) makes a similar point, with a different historical reference,<sup>5</sup> to argue that theories that are claimed to be inherently oppressive have sometimes historically served emancipatory purposes whether they work to advance equality and freedom or domination depends, she argues, on historical contingency. In other words, in the cases discussed by Habermas and Fraser, the idea of “public reasoning” allowed marginalized actors to challenge arbitrary exclusions and self-serving claims. This suggests that public reasoning is a useful kind of discursive practice for questioning narrow understandings of “public” and “reason” and other concepts that might be used for purposes of exclusion as well as inclusion.

Ideological bias does not only concern the uses of such basic concepts as “public” and “reason,” however, but also the specific terms that become central in public conversations. Discourse reinforces power relations through concepts that are used to delegitimize potential participants in public debates and depoliticize views and agendas that could become objects of critical discussion. Much research has served to show how domination takes place through discourse, but a number of studies have also explored how actors reclaim terms from ideological discourse

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do not live up to our ideals; it is that the ideal itself is constituted in a context of power in which it serves the ideological function of elevating a certain practice or view to the status of the universal or ideal (cf. Laclau, 2001, p. 5).

<sup>4</sup> Habermas does this in his conceptualization of the public sphere as a linguistically constituted space where people address one another as, and grant each other the recognition of being fellow citizens. This space is, at the same time, a space for social critique. In particular, see his treatment of civil disobedience, which, in his argument, is crucial for democracy precisely because it disrupts and demonstrates the necessity of understanding democracy as an always “unfinished project” (Habermas, 1996, pp. 383-384; Habermas, 1985).

<sup>5</sup> Fraser takes the example of the revolt against France by the “Black Jacobins” of Haiti. The Black Jacobins used the slogans of the French Revolution—liberty, equality and brotherhood—to legitimize their struggle against the French colonial power (see also James, 2001).

to serve other purposes. For example, social movement research has examined how discursive frames are used strategically by actors to influence the terms of discussion and thereby open up for new questions to be discussed (Benford & Snow, 2000), or similarly how they make the frames of dominant actors the object of discursive activism (Earl, 2000; Giugni, 2008). Spyros Sofos and Roza Tsagarousianou (2013) apply such a perspective in their analysis of the construction of European Muslim identities. Challenging hegemonic views about the place of Muslims in Europe, actors used dominant frames to create shared identities and bonds of solidarity between Muslims across ethnic and national origins. These frames structured explorations of different possibilities of what it could mean to be Muslim in Europe, and what it meant to belong in Islam *and* a European country, which enabled them to challenge practices of exclusion based on preconceptions of what being a “Muslim” entailed. This study exemplifies how subordinate groups challenge the meanings and connotations of terms used to undermine their participation in the public sphere. Another example of this is the way that feminist activists reclaimed the term “nasty woman” in the Women’s March on Washington in 2017. Initially used by then presidential candidate Donald Trump to characterize his opponent, Hillary Clinton, the term became popular among activists who used it sarcastically to refer to men’s outrage over women fighting for their right to speak and defend their interest. Similar subversive use of political concepts has been found in more structured political deliberation. For example, Esther Hernández-Medina (2010) shows in her study of participatory budgeting in Sao Paulo that participants were able to challenge preexisting ideas of citizens’ identities and capacities by forming a counterdiscourse and capitalizing on the local government’s expressed commitment to ending discrimination of “socially vulnerable segments.” While this term implied a lack of agency on the part of marginalized communities, members of such communities were able to make strategic use of this framing of participatory budgeting.

These examples suggest the following general mechanism: *By introducing political concepts, ideological biases constrain actors and enable contestations of particular interpretations and uses of such concepts.* Such contestation can gradually lead to greater pluralism, for example, by challenging illegitimate exclusions (cf. Connolly, 1993). This mechanism of discursive opening may set in when there is an attempt to use universal categories (e.g., reason, justice) to promote particular interests or justify particular positions.

However, we need to know more about the conditions that favor such subversion and contestation, because not all public deliberation appears as open to questioning the assumptions on which deliberation proceeds. The works of several theorists, including Nancy Fraser (1990) and Kevin Olson (2011), suggest that such discursive activism requires that there exists multiple spheres of deliberation and that some kind be occupied by marginalized actors to be used as “counterpublics” or protected spheres of deliberation, where they are allowed to bring their experiences and everyday discourse to bear on the issues of wider public deliberation. The existence of such separate spheres may be a necessary condition, but other theorists argue that it is not sufficient for change to take place. There also needs to be some mechanism that connects these separate spheres to dominant public spheres (Calhoun, 2010; Holdo, 2015). While counterpublics provide a fruitful starting point, further research is needed to explore other necessary conditions.

## Status

Status differences refer to how people’s sense of their place and relations to other participants in deliberation influence the extent to which people find it important to hear others’ views and consider their interests. In theory, participants should disregard any markers of prestige and authority and respond only to the soundness of arguments. The goal of deliberation is to make

status differences irrelevant and uninfluential in public spheres. The important question is thus not whether actual deliberation accomplishes this ideal, but under which conditions it comes closer to the ideal.

In practice, however, this appears very difficult to do (Hayward, 2004). Part of why this is so is because people tend to respond unreflectively to the ways people speak, their accents, body language, and other features of speech associated with different levels of authority (see also Olson, 2011). An often cited version of the claim is Young's (2002, pp. 39-40) statement that the norms of deliberation usually privilege "allegedly dispassionate speech styles" that are not typically associated with marginalized groups such as women, working class, or racialized minorities. This is not a coincidence. According to Young (2002), if power relations and interests constitute the conditions of public deliberation and if usages of the concepts of "reason" and "public" tend to reflect such relations and interests, then it is not surprising that patterns of privileging certain speech styles reflect speakers' social statuses too. People tend to know social distinctions in practice, even when they do not know them in theory or claim not to know them or not to care about them. Such social distinctions undermine deliberation partly *because* they are part of our practical, implicit knowledge, and therefore impact the understanding of who is a competent speaker and who is not (Hayward, 2004; Kohn, 2000).

Pierre Bourdieu's (1991) theory of social practice highlights this phenomenon with the concept of *habitus*, the practical knowledge that is "embodied history," which makes it possible to orient in the social world without constantly making reflective and conscious decisions. Empirical research supports the central claims of that theory by demonstrating, for example, how men and women differ systematically regarding styles of conversation, and that "male" conversation styles, such as interrupting others and speaking with certainty, are generally taken as signs of knowledgeability and authority even when the content is identical to speakers who do not receive such favorable responses (Hayward, 2004). According to Bourdieu, listeners do not respond primarily to the validity of a claim but to the social status that is communicated to us by the presentation of the claim: the confidence of the voice, the "eloquence" of the body language, the dialect and so on, all of which correlate with social position. Hence, if deliberation means making talk more central for democratic participation, then "in every pluralistic and hierarchical society, speech will introduce to politics, even as it disguises, class-based forms of distinction" (Hayward, 2004, p. 12). The combination of the universalist stress on reasoning and the social world's distinctions would be potentially disastrous for equality (Olson, 2011).

This argument has important implications for deliberative theorizing and practice. For example, it is unlikely that social distinctions and power imbalances can be fully overcome by holding participants accountable to norms of deliberation or by "lowering" the standards of deliberation (see Mansbridge et al., 2012). Moreover, when these solutions fail, they leave a gap between theory and practice, and the idea of approximating, or "mirroring," this ideal may further undermine equality by implicitly idealizing the circumstances that shaped the views and practices that now seem natural (see also Olson, 2011; Young, 2001; Curato et al., 2018, p. 18). Empirical research, too, may miss the ways that status differences affect deliberation if these fit their biased perceptions of competence and authority. While gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic differences are widely recognized to impact deliberative processes (Hayward, 2004; Hernández-Medina, 2010), they may do so in ways that researchers are not yet aware of, just as other context-dependent differences may also influence speakers' and listeners' ways of interacting.

This argument does not mean, however, that participants always passively accept the sources of status that are accepted elsewhere. Historically, people have challenged discrimination and illegitimate exclusion by criticizing them in public. Alternatively, they challenge existing status hierarchies by refusing to adjust to them in practice. Fraser (1990) developed her concept of “subaltern counterpublics,” partly to conceptualize spaces protected from the devaluing treatment subordinate groups experience in dominant public spheres (see also Olson, 2011). Empirical research has explored ways that people appropriate identity markers and construct positive associations and sources of esteem. Some research, for example, have used Bourdieu’s concepts of “field” and “capital” to capture the ways that subordinate groups claim a legitimate place in the public sphere (Ryfe, 2007; Calhoun, 2010; Holdo, 2016a). This research shows that status differences are negotiable and can serve the interests of both dominant and subordinate groups. The central argument is already foregrounded in earlier works by Habermas as well as Bourdieu.<sup>6</sup> While deliberation seems to always be shaped by status differences, this does not necessarily mean it benefits existing privileged groups. The impact of status differences is contingent, because although public deliberation can never escape people’s ways of distinguishing between people, deliberation does not always lead to domination.

Empirical research demonstrates, more specifically, how marginalized groups gain inclusion into public deliberation with the help of new sources and forms of status that are available to them. For example, in my previous research (Holdo, 2016a), I have demonstrated that representatives of marginalized communities use deliberation in participatory budgeting as a platform for appropriating the identity of the civic citizen to gain public recognition and to gain the status of legitimate participants in political deliberation. Along similar lines, David M. Ryfe (2007, p. 27) suggests, based on his research, that researchers should examine whether people may engage in deliberation as a social practice in which sources of status—forms of capital, in Bourdieu’s sense—that determine people’s chances of being heard and seen elsewhere are not as effective, but are challenged by alternative views about social status. Ryfe (2007, p. 23) asks, “Might forms of capital—social, cultural, and otherwise—develop to lend the practice a degree of autonomy from the political field?” If so, then status differences may not be unambiguously bad for deliberation, but may even serve to advance previously marginalized positions. Archon Fung (2009) explores one important aspect of creating such autonomy for citizen deliberation. In school councils and police beat meetings, Fung found that public authorities facilitated deliberation by simultaneously providing resources to support participants and occasionally intervening to check that all participants were given a chance to contribute, allowing them the

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<sup>6</sup> In Bourdieu’s (1996) work, these authors find a different perspective that complements Habermas’s (1989) conceptualization of the public sphere, modeled on the bourgeois public sphere in early modern Europe, as serving to enable enlightened deliberation. While Habermas acknowledges that the historical development of European public spheres also served to distinguish the emerging male bourgeoisie from allegedly less reason-oriented groups (primarily the old aristocracy, but also proletarian groups and, as later accounts would add, women; see Fraser, 1990), this aspect of deliberation is more central in Bourdieu’s historical analysis of the constitution of the intellectual field of art and literature in 19<sup>th</sup>-century France (Bourdieu, 1996; see also Holdo, 2015). The great achievement of intellectuals such as Flaubert and Manet was their successful construction of spaces in which actors could be rewarded for their appreciation of art “for art’s sake” and not on the terms that governed social practices in other spheres, such as the fields where prestige was decided on the basis of commercial success and accumulation of money (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 48). In contrast to Habermas, however, Bourdieu never comes close to arguing that the field of art neutralized social status differences internally. On the contrary, the pursuit of status was, in his reading, what drove writers and artists to insist on and invest in markers of prestige in that social field. While Bourdieu’s own analyses focused on the creation of fields and new forms of symbolic capital for artists (1996), journalists (1998) and scientists (1975), theorists that have drawn on his work have used these conceptual tools to explain marginalized groups’ struggle for recognition (Calhoun, 2010; Holdo, 2016a).

space needed to develop forms of interaction that serve their purposes. I found, similarly, that those taking part in participatory budgeting meetings would often consciously seek to distinguish themselves and their forum from other forms of political exchanges, in order, as Ryfe and Fung, would suggest, to generate a special status for citizen deliberation (Holdo, 2016a). They not only claimed that participatory budgeting was different, but also aimed to hold other participants and facilitators from the municipality accountable to norms and rules that they regarded as essential to this form of deliberation, norms of equal treatment, respect for minorities, and acting in the interest of their communities, for example. Gianpaolo Baiocchi (2003) and Rebecca Abers (1998) found similar patterns in participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre. Citizens made use of civic deliberation as a social practice that distinguished them from self-interested, corrupt, or useless forms of political action. Thus, in these cases, citizens aimed for a special status and made status differences work to their advantage.

These findings, too, can be reconstructed as a general mechanism: By creating fields that are distinguishable—and distinguish the members of the fields—with reference to civic commitment and norms of sincerity, deliberation shifts the terms of political struggle in a direction that make citizens more equal, regardless of differences in economic privileges or other dominant forms of social prestige. While deliberation does not decrease the influence of status differences, it may sometimes make democratically relevant sources of status more important at the expense of sources of status that ought to be politically irrelevant in a democratic society.

This mechanism of social distinction could be at work in many contexts where participants are able to seize the opportunities offered by deliberative processes. A condition seems to be that participants recognize the potential of forums for deliberation to help develop new forms of distinctions, rather than reproducing old markers of prestige and status. If participants see this potential, they may expect appreciation and elevated status in return for their participation.

### **Conclusion**

My aim in this article has been to contribute further to a move away from overgeneralizing debates about power and deliberation to address critical questions for deliberation in practice. The problem of power relations is not conceptual, but political. How can deliberation be used to empower citizens, if interests, ideology, and status differences are always part of the conditions that shape deliberative interactions?

To answer this question, researchers need to focus on mechanisms of power, the conditions that generate them, and the consequences they have for inclusion and uptake of different perspectives. Such mechanisms may turn deliberation into a mode of domination, where political elites use it as an instrument to impose a particular, self-serving understanding of common interests, to impose an ideologically motivated agenda, or to bring sources of status that ought to be irrelevant in a democracy to bear on political decision-making. However, each of these aspects of power relations may also serve a more positive role and enable citizens to participate on equal terms.

I have specified three such mechanisms to demonstrate that this approach to deliberative research has much potential to contribute to discussions of how to use deliberation to empower citizens. First, political elites often use deliberation for the purpose of legitimization, but to do this, they need to offer something in return to participants. Deliberation thereby helps question and renegotiate the legitimacy of authorities. Second, ideological biases may not only constrain deliberation: by introducing political concepts, they may also enable contestation. Third,

citizens may use status differences to promote certain norms of citizenship that favor mutual respect and recognition. Whether these mechanisms occur only in exceptional cases, or are more than theoretical debates admit, should be investigated in further empirical research. The aim of such research should, in any case, be to specify the conditions that make these and other favorable mechanisms more likely to appear and cancel out mechanisms of domination.

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