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## A Conversation with Jane J. Mansbridge and Martha McCoy

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## A Conversation with Jane J. Mansbridge and Martha McCoy

### **Abstract**

Jane J. Mansbridge, Charles F. Adams Professor of Political Leadership and Democratic Values, and Martha McCoy, Executive Director of Everyday Democracy, discuss deliberative equity and equality in theory and practice. They identify potential tensions and trade-offs between the two values and between these values and other deliberative aims. They discuss how practitioners have attempted to promote equal and equitable deliberative processes and the challenges of measuring these concepts in deliberative settings. Their conversation provides insights into best practices for enabling marginalized groups to engage in deliberation and the persistent challenges that remain. Together, Mansbridge and McCoy outline opportunities for future theoretical and empirical progress in better understanding and ultimately building effective deliberative groups, institutions, and systems.

### **Keywords**

equality, equity, deliberation, best practices, measurement, intra-group dialogue and deliberation

## **A Conversation with Jane J. Mansbridge and Martha McCoy**

The idea of deliberative democracy has energized the worlds of political philosophy and practical civic engagement. Because deliberation is both a theoretical aspiration and an empirical reality, conversations between the scholarly community and the growing number of organizers and practitioners of deliberative events can be helpful to both groups. Indeed, the line between the two camps may be fuzzy at times. In that spirit, we bring together a prominent political theorist and keen observer of deliberation with one of the leading organizers of new deliberative opportunities and institutions. Both have thought deeply about the theoretical issues at stake and also have considerable experience with deliberation in practice. Jane J. (“Jenny”) Mansbridge is the Charles F. Adams Professor of Political Leadership and Democratic Values at Harvard’s John F. Kennedy School of Government. Author of the classic *Beyond Adversary Democracy* (1980) and numerous other important books and articles, she is also a former president of the American Political Science Association. Martha McCoy is the executive director of Everyday Democracy, which has been recognized around the country for its efforts to strengthen the ability of communities to address public problem-solving and enhance dialogue and deliberation with attention to issues of equity.

In the conversation that follows, Mansbridge and McCoy explore the ideas of equity and equality in theory and practice. They identify potential tensions and trade-offs between the two values and between these values and other deliberative aims. They discuss how practitioners have attempted to promote equal and equitable deliberative processes and the challenges of measuring these concepts in deliberative settings. Their conversation provides insights into best practices for enabling marginalized groups to engage in deliberation and the persistent challenges that remain. Together, Mansbridge and McCoy outline opportunities for future theoretical and empirical progress in better understanding and ultimately building effective deliberative groups, institutions, and systems.

### **Equity and Equality: Definitions, Tensions, and Trade-Offs**

*Abdullah, Karpowitz, and Raphael (AKR): This special issue has been devoted to exploring the differences between equality and equity. Do you see this distinction as useful to our field?*

**Jane Mansbridge:** I do. Treating people in deliberation exactly the same when the world advantages some and disadvantages others is like trying to be colorblind in a racist world. Unequal treatment that is intended to help can, however,

sometimes stigmatize the disadvantaged, so any inequalities in treatment should be themselves subject to deliberative scrutiny, particularly by members of groups that are being putatively helped.

**Martha McCoy:** I agree. Both equity and equality are principles related to fairness, but they are not the same thing. Both are important to consider when thinking about the goals, processes and institutions of deliberative democracy.

In deliberation, equality often translates as a norm in group-process design. An example is the role of the facilitator (and supporting written materials) in achieving ways for all people to participate and in making sure that no one's voice dominates those of others. However, without an adequate understanding of equity on the part of facilitators or process designers, certain people or perspectives can be unintentionally marginalized. For example, those with less popular views may feel reticent to express them; less skilled facilitators may not recognize the cues and then fail to take extra steps to encourage their expression.

Equity—particularly racial equity—is widely discussed as a precondition and necessary goal of community change, social justice, and authentic democracy. Until recent years, it has not been widely discussed in the deliberative democracy field. That has been changing as a growing number of deliberative processes are connecting to political power and institutions. There is no consensus within the field on the essential place of equity, but an important conversation is happening.

Equality and equity are linked. Historically, law (including the U.S. Constitution itself) has violated the ideal of equality, and subsequent public policies and practices have continued for generations. This legalized promotion of inequality has led to accumulated advantages and disadvantages, and thus to the need to focus on equity as an important consideration for any kind of deliberative process aimed at social change.

For example, the laws that created residential segregation have been compounded by policies regarding the financing of public schools. These and other practices have led to systemic and persistent inequalities of opportunity and outcome in education. A community that is using deliberative processes to address issues of so-called “achievement gaps” in the schools would need to provide ways to build people's awareness of this history, provide a way for all kinds of people to share their experiences and views, and provide ways for students, parents, teachers, school leaders and other community members to work together on the solutions coming out of the deliberation.

*AKR: Given the tensions you've identified, how can public deliberation reconcile the potential conflicts between equity and equality?*

**JM:** Many of our ideals come in conflict with one another—equality and liberty, equality and response to need, liberty and community. There is no perfect formula for reconciling these conflicts. John Rawls might suggest adopting whatever reconciliation among ideals you would choose if you were designing an institution knowing that you might well end up in the most disadvantaged position. I would suggest keeping that idea from Rawls in mind while experimenting with different forms of reconciliation, to see which advantages and disadvantages of the different forms emerge from experimentation, and why. In the deliberation over the process and the results of such experiments, those who are most disadvantaged by existing deliberative institutions and societal arrangements should have a protected, sometimes a privileged, voice.

**MM:** One way we have seen of reconciling these goals is to focus on the issue of inequality itself as a subject of the deliberative dialogue. That focus can happen when community leaders recognize that large disparities in opportunity and quality of life affect everyone in the community, not just those who have been disadvantaged.

For close to a decade, Everyday Democracy has been working in an initiative called Communities Creating Racial Equity, supporting and learning with community coalitions organizing deliberation focused explicitly on racial equity. The makeup of the coalitions varies by city or town, but all are racially/ethnically diverse groups made up of public officials, city agency staff, nonprofit staff, and formal and informal leaders from school, faith, and neighborhood groups. All the coalitions have been creating widespread deliberation and problem-solving to close racialized gaps of opportunity and outcome.

Even going back to our earlier work with communities on racism in the 1990s, public officials who started the deliberative efforts named persistent inequality as their primary motivation for calling for dialogue and deliberation on race. Kathy Cramer documented these and other efforts extensively in *Talking about Race* (2007).

Some creative work that deliberative organizers are doing in this regard is in learning how to create and disseminate messages that appeal to and draw from all parts of the community, even those who may initially think that a conversation about racism or equity isn't for them. Effective strategies vary with the political culture of a region and the history of the particular community. In any case, the

messenger is as important as the message. An organizing coalition that models how to work across differences and does personal recruitment of participants is fundamental to reconciling equal treatment with equity.

Another way of reconciling equal treatment with considerations of equity is to use a lens of both equity and inclusion, no matter the topic of deliberation. A lens of inclusion helps to make sure that everyone's voice and participation is being sought. A lens of equity helps to surface the underlying communication and power practices that are prevalent in the dominant culture but often largely invisible to those who are privileged in terms of race, gender, income and education level.

When people in a community have the chance to work together over time, build relationships, dispel common stereotypes (both intragroup and intergroup) and deepen their understanding of inequities, they are more likely to be able to combine inclusion with equity. From what we have observed in all sizes and compositions of communities across the U.S., this way of working has to be co-created and cannot be imposed by any one group or sector.

I like Jenny's application of Rawls' formula here; it is consistent with some of the most promising practices we have seen. A fruitful area of research for our field would be to explore what kinds of recognition of differences are more likely to lead to what kinds of inclusion and equity. This question could apply to deliberative organizing, to the deliberation itself and to the changes that result, at least in part, from the deliberative process.

An example of bringing consideration of difference into the early stages of organizing happened in several pueblo and neighborhood communities across the Albuquerque, N.M., region as they used deliberative dialogue to address the issue of early childhood development. The frame and the discussion materials in this "Strong Starts for Children" initiative helped participants think about their vision for all children. At the same time, because inequities in early childhood opportunities and outcomes are closely linked to racial and ethnic inequities, the frame and conversation prompts helped participants learn about inequities and consider their origin and possible solutions. Navajo communities adapted the materials further to make the considerations more applicable to their own circumstances.

The deliberation led to greater awareness and understanding of early childhood development and of the inequities connected with opportunities and outcomes. It also led to new collaborations to address the inequities at the community level and

to recommendations for state-level policy that contributed to a new state law, the Early Childhood Care and Education Act. It called for a state advisory council to improve the state's early childhood system and called for the council to create changes that came from priorities set in the dialogues and related participatory processes ([participedia.net/en/cases/strong-starts-children-albuquerque-new-mexico-usa](http://participedia.net/en/cases/strong-starts-children-albuquerque-new-mexico-usa)).

The community dialogues that are part of the National Dialogue on Mental Health offer another example of these strategies. The issue is framed and communicated with explicit attention to providing ways for people affected by mental health challenges to feel welcome in the deliberation and validated in sharing their concerns. At the same time, the messaging is designed to bring in people who may never have experienced serious mental health challenges themselves, so that they can understand why it is critical for the community to address the issue. There is a particular emphasis on recruiting young people into the deliberation, since most mental health challenges begin before the age of 24. The line of questioning gives participants a chance to explore the connection of their age and ethnicity to their experience of mental health and access to services. Everyone in the deliberation, no matter what their experiences or background, has a voice in considering and deliberating about how their community can more effectively address mental health challenges. (See the website for Creating Community Solutions, part of the National Dialogue on Mental Health, for resources and stories: [www.creatingcommunitysolutions.org](http://www.creatingcommunitysolutions.org)).

*AKR: Do you see trade-offs between pursuing equality or equity, and between pursuing equality/equity and other goals of deliberative politics?*

**JM:** Absolutely. I mentioned earlier how measures to produce equity could, if not designed deliberately by members of the group being “helped,” create potential stigmatization. In addition, one goal of deliberation is often to figure out what to do collectively. Many participants, including, at times, the most disadvantaged, may see the choice of what action to take as the main goal of a deliberation and anything else as a waste of time. The most disadvantaged may even have the greatest stake in the group's using its time wisely and coming to a good decision. (David Estlund and Hélène Landemore would call the benefits of coming to a good decision the “epistemic,” knowledge-based, benefits of deliberation.) To use Rawls's thought experiment again, a potentially highly disadvantaged person might be happy to give up exact equality in speaking time in order to achieve a more effective deliberation that promised results that would help that person or his or her group. (Rawls argued that the least advantaged

might be willing to give up absolute equality in material benefits if some inequality would in the end produce more benefit for the disadvantaged.)

In a similar vein, many people who go to a meeting don't feel they need to speak for themselves if others speak for them better than they could themselves and the meeting moves along efficiently. For this reason, Jack Knight and James Johnson (1997) argued, I think persuasively, that a better ideal for deliberation than equal power (or equal numbers of words spoken) is the equal opportunity to exercise influence. In a recent paper (2010), I listed the ways that deliberative ideals have evolved from what several of us now see as the "first-generation" classic standards, enunciated by Jürgen Habermas, Joshua Cohen and others, to "second-generation" standards that I think are a bit better thought-through. The "first-generation" standard of equal influence has evolved into the "second-generation" standard of the equal opportunity to exercise influence.

Like the other standards, equal opportunity to exercise influence is also a "regulative," or aspirational, ideal; it can rarely, if ever, be reached in practice, but it sets a goal at which to aim. Genuine equal opportunity would involve all of the participants experiencing equal costs for their participation, and those costs are rarely, if ever, fully equal. Our job is to make those costs as small as possible in any situation and to make the benefits of participation high enough that it makes sense to members of disadvantaged groups to participate. If some who might benefit from participation (including the benefit of self-respect or respect from others) experience higher costs to participating but not higher benefits, they do not have a genuinely equal opportunity to participate.

**MM:** There can be trade-offs, because there are potential costs associated with each.

Equal treatment may seem fairer on its face, but the result can be to support ongoing inequity of voice and influence. To give a simple example, if facilitators expect everyone to have an equal willingness to speak up and thus treat everyone the same way, the group may well miss the voices of those who would have participated if they had received additional encouragement. At a systems level, the assumption of sameness can skew the deliberation in favor of the relatively advantaged and support for the status quo.

When Jenny speaks of the importance of equal opportunity to exercise influence, that resonates with what we have seen. To go back to the New Mexico example, we saw that young, low-income parents wanted to use their voice to make a difference for their children. Many participated, even at considerable cost to



themselves in terms of time; so the use of their own literal voice was important. But I would also say that many of them participated because they knew that service providers were in the room, and that they could count on the service providers to carry the meaning of their voice and participation into the political arena.

Focusing on equity in deliberation has associated costs as well—but different kinds. Sometimes a focus on inequity can draw larger numbers of participants from disadvantaged groups, while those from relatively advantaged groups may not think that the process applies to them.

To some, focusing on equity seems more like the presumption of a specific solution (“We need more equity.”) than an invitation to explore the nature of the problem (“How did we get to this place of inequitable outcomes?”) and possible solutions (“What can we do?”). Some who are part of groups that have received unfair advantages may experience a focus on equity as blame or as an invalidation of what they or others have accomplished. Even some who are part of groups that have been disadvantaged may take blame onto themselves.

Sociological studies have demonstrated that people from more advantaged groups are more likely to overlook systemic elements outside of themselves that have contributed to their opportunities or their successes. That is exacerbated by the dominant culture’s narrative of success based primarily on individual effort. People of color are more likely to understand that there are systemic factors beyond themselves that influence the kinds of opportunities they have had (Casenave, 2016). A recent Pew study noted that efforts to deal with systemic poverty often fail to gain traction because people who have not experienced multi-generational poverty in their families are less likely to see or understand the range of factors that lead to poverty (Pew Research Center, 2015).

Empathy is essential to achieving greater understanding of inequality. Both practitioners and researchers point to the importance of connection, relationship-building and storytelling as sources of empathy that enable one to enter another’s experience. The development of relationships and empathy across difference leads to a deeper understanding of inequities and a great commitment to address them. It also helps in reconceiving the potential trade-offs between inclusion and equity (Warren, 2010; Morrell, 2009).

Empathy is critical not just in the deliberation itself but in the organizing of a deliberative process. A good example of organizing to intentionally build connection and empathy occurred in Portsmouth, N.H., where ongoing division

over school redistricting fell along income and neighborhood lines across the city. As part of the deliberative design, parents from various neighborhoods met in each other's schools and neighborhoods. That opportunity became an integral part of the deliberation, as parents began to relate to each other in different ways; those from wealthier neighborhoods began to see the needs of low-income neighborhoods in a different light. This led to breaking a long-term logjam in the community and to consensus on creating a school-redistricting plan that would meet everyone's needs. It changed the "us vs. them" mentality that so readily accompanies residential segregation (Goldman, 2004). Similar dynamics have been described within some participatory budgeting processes.

If commitment to equity is not threaded through a deliberative process, people in the dominant culture are more likely to skip over the consideration of inequality and key parts of solutions will be missed. If commitment to inclusion is not threaded through the process, it is unlikely that a large and diverse group of people will commit to supporting and/or implementing community change. With equity *and* equality (or what John Powell has called "targeted universalism") it is possible to balance the trade-offs. In the process, people are likely to find that assumptions about the kinds of trade-offs they will face often derive from mistaken zero-sum beliefs about community and public life. Lani Guinier (1998) emphasizes this in her writing on deliberative democracy.

### **Equality and Equity in Practice**

*AKR: What have we learned from practice and empirical research about how to promote equal and equitable deliberative processes or institutions, and what do we still need to learn? Specifically, how have practitioners successfully addressed background inequalities and resulting inequities that people can face in deliberation, including disparities of political power and privilege and experience, etc.?)*

**MM:** In our work with communities, we have seen two fundamental ways.

First, practitioners that have done this successfully have taken the time to build relationships and trust within their organizing coalition and work with each to deepen a working knowledge of equitable practice. This enables them to build those elements into the deliberative processes that participants will experience.

Since 2008, a multiracial coalition in Wagner, South Dakota, has been bringing the Native American and European-American communities together to address issues of racial equity. The coalition and the larger community are considering the

historical origins of the inequities they face and how they are manifesting in current-day practices. They have been working with the Center for Courage and Renewal to build “Circles of Trust” into their deliberative efforts. They are working to understand and respect each other’s cultural norms, and to model that as they continue to expand the circle of those who are involved in dialogue and deliberation. They build that understanding into their facilitator training and into their action-planning. ([www.everyday-democracy.org/stories/path-unified-community](http://www.everyday-democracy.org/stories/path-unified-community))

Second, effective practitioners make sure that the deliberation will lead explicitly to action and change and lay out a path for that to happen from the beginning of their organizing. We saw from research in our early work with communities on racism that without a clear commitment to changing the conditions that people were deliberating about, the conversations didn’t feel meaningful to those who were most affected. For many people of color, there was a sense of “Why participate unless it will make a difference in the larger society?” This came out clearly in focus groups we conducted in our early work on racism and then again in a large-scale external study of 25 communities that were addressing racism through deliberation (Roberts & Kay, Inc., 2000).

The work in Wagner, South Dakota, is a prime example of both relationship-building for equitable practice and a commitment to action and change. Archon Fung (2015) has cited the Strong Starts work in New Mexico as a deliberative effort that has led to relationship-building and also to action, police input and justice outcomes. Our field needs more empirical research into the kinds of practices that are most likely to lead to equitable, inclusive and measurable change.

**JM:** I can think of a range of practices: practitioners have consciously instituted some of these, and some have evolved through practice.

In my study of New England town meetings in the 1970s, I noticed that one group of working-class citizens, recognizing their own diffidence and difficulties in speaking in public but wanting to voice their perspective at the meeting, met together the night before, discussed who would speak and what they would say, reinforced one another in the belief that they were right, and even sat together the next day at the meeting, using their informal solidarity and their mutual convictions to counter the disadvantages they would otherwise have faced in trying to address the meeting individually (Mansbridge, 1980, p. 62-3).

More institutionally, in the early second wave of the women's movement in the United States, the New York Radical Feminists invented a "disc system," in which each person in a meeting was given 12 (or in some accounts 20) discs, having to spend one each time she spoke. Robin Morgan reported humorously at the time, "The first time this system was tried, the apocryphal story goes, no one had any discs left after fifteen minutes. The second meeting was slow almost to silence because everyone was hoarding her discs" (1970, p. xxvii; reported in Mansbridge, 1980, p. 241; Poletta, 2002, p. 168; Phillips, 1991, p. 122).

Similarly, in the German Green Party, men and women alternate speaking in party meetings ([www.avoiceformen.com/feminism/feminist-governance-feminism/germanys-quota-politicians/](http://www.avoiceformen.com/feminism/feminist-governance-feminism/germanys-quota-politicians/)). Because both the disc system and the alternate-voice system can interfere with the free flow of communication and thus with the epistemic benefits of deliberation, they are best used as consciousness-raising devices for a limited period of time.

Another institutional process involves what Nicole Doerr (2012) calls "political translation." In the European Social Forum, a group of people who began as literal translators quickly developed a practice of augmenting their literal translations with advocacy for the deliberative equality of those who did not speak the dominant language. They intervened in meetings to point out that these members were not being listened to and to ensure that their perspectives were being taken seriously. Arguably as a result of this process, which by its nature gave weight to more diverse perspectives, the more linguistically heterogeneous Social Forum groups were less likely to fall apart subsequently than the groups that used only one language.

The specific practices employed in Deliberative Polls seem also to produce relatively equal influence, although not equal speaking time, between deliberatively advantaged and disadvantaged members. When Alice Siu (2009) studied the videotapes of five Deliberative Polls, she found that although more-educated participants spoke more than the less-educated ones, the opinions of the more-privileged members were not more likely than the opinions of the less-privileged members to affect the changes of opinion in the group. Marlène Gerber, André Bächtiger, and colleagues (2014) found the same thing studying the "Europolis" Deliberative Poll in Europe. Experiments have not yet disaggregated the features that might be causing this effect, but they undoubtedly include the facilitator in the small groups paying particular attention to bringing out minority views. Other causes might include the provision of balanced materials and experts to all, as well as a feature of the Deliberative Polls that involves the small groups acting communally early on to come up with questions

to ask the experts. This combination of features may also be responsible for the fact that Deliberative Polls do not polarize, as many small groups do.

*AKR: What does research and practice tell us about how to achieve equality or equity?*

**JM:** Inclusive recruiting is key. Spreading the word about a deliberative forum in communities whose members would otherwise be unlikely to attend, and spreading that word through trusted community members, in the right places, in the right language, and with the right signals of inclusion, can make a great difference in participation. As Martha mentioned earlier, it's important to make participation worth the participants' time. The ancient Athenians paid citizens to attend the assemblies and serve on juries precisely to offset the disadvantages that the poor would otherwise have experienced in having to give up time from work. The design of important deliberations should also pay people to attend, either for a single assembly, as Ackerman and Fishkin (2005) suggest for their Deliberation Day, or for a more long-term commitment, as in Ethan Leib's (2004) assemblies of citizens drawn by lot. If paying people is too expensive, you can attract members of groups that would otherwise have less than proportional attendance by providing nice hotels, good meals, free transportation, and other perks. In traditional New England town meetings, families often brought brown bean casseroles and other dishes to the hot lunch served between the morning and afternoon sessions of the meeting. The free food and sociality cut the costs and increased the benefits for some who would otherwise not have attended.

**MM:** Large-scale, multiple-year evaluations of community deliberation for problem-solving offer lessons for those who wish to incorporate principles of inclusion and equity. I agree that inclusive organizing is key. That includes and leads to more inclusive and equitable issue selection and framing, facilitator recruitment and training, the development of written materials, the design of small- and large-group meetings, the recruitment of participants, public accountability, action-planning and action implementation (see, e.g., Fung & Fagotto, 2009; Morehouse, 2010).

There is no one process design that provides "the answer" to these questions. There is important work to be done in documentation and assessment of the kinds of practices that work in what kinds of conditions, the kinds of outcomes they achieve, and the trade-offs practitioners are likely to face.

## Measurement and Assessment

*AKR: If equality and equity are important goals, we also need to know how to assess whether or not we have achieved those goals. Have we in the field measured equality and equity appropriately or do we need to improve our measures?*

**MM:** After last year's mass killing in Charleston, South Carolina, once again there were calls for a "dialogue on race." The late NPQ editorial columnist Rick Cohen (2015) wrote in support of community-wide dialogue aimed at creating racial justice, but also noted that most dialogue practitioners cannot readily point to evidence about the kind of dialogue that can make a measurable difference for individuals, institutions, and communities. Measuring the individual and collective impact of inclusive, equitable deliberation is one of the most important tasks we are facing in our field.

Our field is better at measuring the amount and quality of participation and the impact of deliberation on individual attitudinal and behavior change than in assessing and measuring the impact of deliberation on institutional and policy change. Improving our measures is essential if we are to shift from good "deliberative experiments" to the transformation of democratic practice through sound deliberative practice.

In the Communities Creating Racial Equity initiative that I mentioned earlier, we have focused on measuring the short- and long-term changes resulting from a variety of deliberative practices. In the beginning of the initiative, community coalitions created "road maps" to the kinds of changes in democratic process and measurable outcomes on the issue area that they wanted to see in one, five and 10 years. For example, they would aim for a more diverse teacher pool in their public schools or their police department as a result of increased community conversation and collective action. These road maps offer assessment and learning tools for the communities themselves and also for our field as a whole.

There is much more to be done across our field in theory-building and evaluation; we have just made an organizational commitment to documentation, evaluation, and learning as a major strategy for expanding inclusive, equitable deliberative practice.

**JM:** I agree that there is much more to be done. The current standard measures are numbers of words spoken, numbers of seconds of speech, and the numbers of speaking turns. When possible, it is useful to add some measure of the content of

the speech. Frank Bryan (2004) has demonstrated a consistent tendency for women to speak less in Vermont town meetings, no matter what the size of the meeting. In the small Vermont town meeting that I studied, the women not only spoke less than the men, they also limited themselves primarily to matters of information. The men produced almost all of the major statements of opinion and initiated all of the controversial exchanges (Mansbridge, 1980, p. 106). Even in the small New Left workplace that I studied, where the members were highly committed to equality, the women spoke less often than the men. But there I had no measure of the content of the speech.

In addition to measuring content, it would also be useful to have measures of mutual respect, such as those that Jürg Steiner, André Bächtiger, Marcus Spörndli and Marco Steenbergen (2004) developed for studying legislatures, and also measures of influence such as those that Alice Siu (2009) and André Bächtiger and others (2014) developed for studying influence in Deliberative Polls.

### **Contexts for Achieving Equality and Equity**

*AKR: Which political contexts are most likely to enable groups who have been marginalized to engage fully? Which forum designs? Which facilitation styles? What is the role of factors like the need for the group to reach a binding decision?*

**JM:** This is a promising direction for future experimentation and research. I have already mentioned that “political translation” seems to have good effects. I also mentioned that a design in which the first task is to come up with questions for experts has the positive effect of enrolling all participants in a common task before they talk much explicitly about their disagreements. That particular common task may further level the deliberative field slightly among participants because one does not have to know a great deal about a policy to express confusion or ask a question.

The factor of needing to reach a binding decision has not been well studied, to my knowledge. Having to make a decision that would then bind the group in the future might well bring out greater dissension, bitterness, and attempts to dominate than a discussion that did not culminate in a binding decision that affected the participants’ lives. The dissension, bitterness, and attempts to dominate would probably increase with the importance of the decision and the directness with which the result would influence the lives of the decision-makers. In the small New England town I studied, where the meeting made many decisions that affected everyone directly, a number of people refused to attend town meeting because they disliked the “fights” (Mansbridge, 1980, p. 65). In his

study of Chicago neighborhood meetings, however, Archon Fung (2004) points out that “hot,” or disputed, binding decisions bring out the lower-income and lower-education people who will be affected. These conflicting dynamics may balance out differently in different contexts.

**MM:** All of the elements you name are essential to attaining full engagement of those who have been marginalized. Of all the elements, the political context of the deliberation is the most foundational and the most difficult to work on; the political context has many more variables that are less under the control of deliberative organizers.

In fact, one of the reasons your work (in *Beyond Adversary Democracy*, Mansbridge, 1980) was so powerful to me was that you studied deliberation taking place within the context of political accountability to the public. It was a given that the deliberation was intended for everyone. That political context is often missing from studies of deliberation, which removes one of the foundational elements.

To build on your previous work and what you have said here, the most important contextual conditions have to do with what Archon Fung (2004) has called “empowered participation.” If potential participants know that they will be heard by public officials, that there is a commitment to respond to the deliberation, then they are more likely to participate in processes and stick with them, knowing that the process will provide a way for them to have an impact on the conditions of their lives.

When public officials and other public leaders (such as school administrators and police chiefs) commit to being part of the organizing, deliberation, and change processes, they lend visibility and credibility to the entire deliberative effort, making it more likely that those who have been marginalized will participate. This is especially true if the deliberative process carries actual decision-making authority or at least legitimacy, as when public officials publicly commit to enacting the policy recommendations of the community deliberations.

Deliberation processes that are most likely to fully engage the marginalized are small-group processes within the context of large-scale and diverse participation. Small groups enable greater levels of confidence and comfort in speaking up, and are not as likely to fall prey to the dominant culture of aggressive argument that can often silence those from marginalized backgrounds. We have found that dialogues and deliberation over time enable people to build trusting relationships



and empathy, though some of those effects can take place in the context of a single day (such as small-group meetings within a large community summit).

Many of the process conditions that will lead to full participation, listening, and understanding between participants are part of what the late Iris Marion Young called “communicative democracy.” Young’s (2000) groundbreaking work explored the limits of usual conceptions of deliberative democracy that held critical argument as the highest form of expression. She proposed the alternative conception of communicative democracy that would embody processes that value various cultural communication styles and forms of knowledge. In communicative democracy, norms of competitive argument are not the dominant mode; storytelling and emotional expression are valued. Some of the most effective forms of deliberation seek to create spaces that value a variety of forms of expression and create communication bridges among all kinds of people (McCoy & Scully, 2002).

*AKR: What do you think of promoting intra-group deliberation among those who have been marginalized as one stage of a larger discussion by broader cross-sections of the public?*

**JM:** Intra-group deliberation has great possibilities. I spoke earlier of the small group of working-class residents in a town I studied who met before a town meeting to discuss the issues and give each other courage to attend and speak at the meeting the next day. So, too, in the early second wave of the women’s movement in the U.S., we found all-women spaces extremely important in helping us sort out our ideas. Enclaves of the like-minded can use that protected space to come up with non-traditional, highly creative ideas. Even when the exclusion of others and even disrespect for others violate some deliberative democratic norms (I’m thinking of the anger and disrespect toward men and male prerogative that we expressed), the enclave may contribute invaluable creative and counter-hegemonic perspectives to the larger deliberative system. The Congressional Black Caucus plays this role of providing a space for intra-group deliberation, as do racial and ethnic and LGBT caucuses in associations and specialized journals in academia. Problems arise when some of the groups deliberating among themselves have many more resources than others, and also when groups deliberating together have little contact with opposing opinions.

**MM:** Intra-group dialogue and deliberation can be important in and of itself and also as an entry point to participating in a more diverse setting. For those in groups that have experienced marginalization or exclusion, it has often been critical to political empowerment. Intra-group work has been an important

element of movement-building, as in the women's movement and the civil rights movement. In our work at Everyday Democracy, we have seen the benefits of intra-group dialogue on racism, especially in surfacing experiences and points of view that may not be as readily discussed in diverse settings.

Intra-group deliberation can also be important among those from relatively advantaged groups. For example, adults may not know how they are marginalizing the voices of young people unless they have a chance to consider that together, in the relative safety of their own group setting. We have been learning about the value of white affinity groups, as settings for exploration and learning prior to meeting with people of color. This also helps address a frequent dynamic of diverse deliberation on racism, in which people of color feel that they are once again being asked to educate white people.

*AKR: Thank you for your insights and for taking the time to participate in this conversation. Any final thoughts to leave with us?*

**JM:** Just that this issue of equality/equity is an important one. As deliberative democratic theory and practice continue to evolve in tandem, it will be one of the most fruitful areas to explore.

**MM:** Yes, that's exactly right. We have so much still to learn, and the on-the-ground learning that comes from deliberative practitioners and community members will be key parts of that effort.

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