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Race, Gender, and Deliberative Democracy: Overcoming Oppression through the Theatre of the Oppressed

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The University of Southern Mississippi

RACE, GENDER, AND DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY:
OVERCOMING OPPRESSION THROUGH THE THEATRE OF THE OPPRESSED

by

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A Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate School
of The University of Southern Mississippi
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for the Degree of Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

RACE, GENDER, AND DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY: OVERCOMING OPPRESSION THROUGH THE THEATRE OF THE OPPRESSED

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A great deal of recent democratic political theory has revolved around the concept of democratic deliberation. However, this brand of theory has neither fully addressed the need for empathy between social groups in the deliberative process nor sufficiently examined the consequences of its absence. Such intergroup empathy is a necessary component of political communication that seeks to root out oppression in a liberal democracy. This project begins with a review of the basic tenets of deliberative democracy, as well as its most common challenges. Habermas' theory of systematically distorted communication is then explored, with intergroup empathy as a suggested remedy. Gendered norms of deliberation, stereotypes, and double consciousness are discussed as obstacles to the development of this empathy. Following this, the results of a lack of empathy are examined through racialized public memory, the sexual contract, and the concept of whiteness. Testimony, narrative, and rhetoric are then discussed as prior attempts to develop empathy in political communication. Finally, this project utilizes Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed to incorporate both the vital elements of deliberation and the communicative styles inherent in narrative, resulting in a more productive and comprehensive intergroup empathy.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The following anecdote recounting a Theatre of the Oppressed workshop begins the prologue to Augusto Boal's *Legislative Theatre*:

“When Thespis invented the protagonist, he invented the monologue,” said Tim, the Joker. “Prior to this, everyone sang and danced – they were on the chorus. With Thespis, the monologue came into being: one person talking on his own. When a person is speaking on their own or in the theatre, or anywhere else for that matter, we call it monologue. Does everyone understand?”

Everyone had understood this clear, simple explanation. The Joker continued the first lesson, encouraged by the response: “Then Aeschylus comes along, the first Greek tragedian, and he invents the Deuteragonist, the second actor. And when he added this second actor, he invented dialogue. So then, what is dialogue?”

Silence. Tim wanted to encourage participation from the group in this new workshop – interactivity – and he asked the question again, in greater detail: “When one person is speaking on their own, that is a monologue, they are doing a monologue. So what is a dialogue?”

More silence. The Joker resorted to visual aids: “A monologue is when one person, a single person, is talking on his or her own ...”, and he held up the index finger of his right hand. “One person only!

So dialogue is...? So what is a dialogue...? A dialogue is when...?” And this time he held up two fingers.

“I know, I know!” answered one of the patients eagerly.

“So tell us, what is dialogue?”

“It’s when there are two people talking on their own...”¹

Humorous in its confusion, this story illustrates an experience that is likely quite familiar to most people. We sometimes see two perfectly rational individuals speaking to one another, but without any understanding developing between them. In a certain regard such a scene more closely resembles two actors simultaneously performing monologues, neither aware of the other, more than a conversation. For everyday matters, such a lack

¹ Augusto Boal, *Legislative Theatre: Using Performance to Make Politics*, trans. Adrian Jackson (New York: Routledge, 1998), eBook edition, 2-3.

of understanding is fairly benign. However, for issues with strong political implications, this failure to communicate can have strong negative consequences.

In particular, this phenomenon ought to trouble political theorists within the tradition of deliberative democracy, theorists who rely on dialogue and debate between engaged citizens. There are numerous similarities between this branch of democracy and others, such as the belief in popular sovereignty and the guarantee of equality and freedom. Where deliberative democratic theorists depart from others is with the emphasis they place on the public use of reason as the means by which decisions affecting public matters ought to be reached. Although the parameters of the deliberative political society vary from author to author, which I will later discuss a bit more thoroughly, each values the public exchange of reasons and viewpoints with the goal of reaching a decision in a manner that is valid to all who participate. Vital to the legitimacy of this procedure is the guarantee that *only* reasons expressed publicly in a free and equal manner will affect the outcome of deliberation. Therefore, we must give attention to a variety of other possible influences that might taint this process, some easier to identify than others. Those who have investigated this issue already have focused largely on preferred modes of expression, informal rules of who ought to speak more or less, and an unintended silencing of minority viewpoints. While I certainly will not deny the importance of these observations – in fact I will outline them in more detail later on – I find that the literature on deliberative pitfalls is missing a crucial component.

Experiences of oppression, I argue, lead to gaps in understanding of social issues between those who oppress and those who are oppressed. These gaps, in turn, show up as flawed communication within the deliberative processes and require intergroup

empathy as a solution. I will use the examples of racial oppression and gender subordination to illustrate this idea. Ultimately, my goal is to build from prior literature to build a more complete picture of the potential shortcomings of deliberative democracy. This is not to reject deliberation altogether, but rather to fine-tune our understanding of its assets, limitations, and applications. I aim to show that there is a certain kind of knowledge that cannot be easily shared through traditional deliberation² and also to explore Augusto Boal's forum theater as a type of deliberation that can overcome this challenge.

² "Traditional deliberation" is a term that I will use to describe deliberation according to the procedures and ideals laid out by deliberative theorists such as Habermas, Cohen, and Gutmann and Thompson, although I will look to challenge this dominant conception later on in this work.

CHAPTER II

DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY AND ITS OBSTACLES

In order to effectively critique deliberative democracy and attempt to remedy its shortcomings, we must first understand its fundamentals. In this first chapter, I will outline the basic tenets of deliberative democracy, as well as some common challenges to its practice. Following this, I will offer my own expansion of these criticisms in order to work toward a more comprehensive understanding of deliberation.

What is Deliberative Democracy?

To begin, it is important to have an understanding of deliberative democracy from which this project may proceed. It may be helpful here to contrast deliberative theory with another conceptualization of democracy. Aggregative democracy, the label given to a variety of non-deliberative democratic theories, consists of a system in which citizens express preferences, usually through voting, which are then held as the primary material that officials ought to use in their decision-making processes.³ Such a process can be quite attractive for a variety of reasons: First, this form of democracy may provide representation of citizen interests in exchange for very little effort. Citizens must stay at least minimally informed of things such as candidate positions and proposed policies; however, stating one's preferences and interests requires little effort and expressing these can be achieved with a simple punch of a ballot or pull of a lever. Second, aggregative procedures refrain from attaching value judgments to policy preferences. Although individuals may provide their own judgments, this is not an inherent part of any aggregative democratic system. Finally, aggregative democracy has the advantage of

³ The following summary of aggregative democracy is highly informed by Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson, *Why Deliberative Democracy?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 13-21.

producing clear, determinate outcomes. Whether by a direct referendum or via representation in a legislature, an exact aggregation of preferences has only one possible formulation.

Although aggregative democracy clearly has its attractive points and was the dominant democratic conception for most of the modern era, a large number of democratic theorists remain skeptical of its value. While aggregative theories have their merits, they do not require justification or defense of preferences. It may be helpful to think of this formulation of democracy as similar to a marketplace; the demand for certain policies and political outcomes dictates the behavior of elected officials, who behave in the manner most likely to please the greatest number of their constituents. Such a conception of democracy is unproblematic for some; however, many critics contend that the logic that governs a capitalist marketplace is unsuitable for implementation in the resolution of public disputes, even within a liberal capitalist society. While certain preferences may translate easily into economic calculations, others such as the health and well-being of the citizenry may not.

In response to such concerns and in contrast to aggregative democracy, theories of deliberative democracy require a bit more of those who participate in the democratic process. Instead of simply aggregating our preferences, deliberative democracy seeks to establish a conversation involving these competing ideas, preferences, and values. Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson helpfully provide a definition of deliberative democracy, giving that name to “a form of government in which free and equal citizens (and their representatives), justify decisions in a process in which they give one another reasons that are mutually acceptable and generally accessible, with the aim of reaching conclusions

that are binding in the present on all citizens but open to challenge in the future.”⁴ By looking at the various pieces of this definition, we can more fully understand what deliberative democracy entails, the arguments in its favor, and its advantages over aggregative democracy. First, and perhaps in greatest contrast to an aggregative model, we see that proper political deliberation relies on reasons or arguments that all rational citizens could accept. Gutmann and Thompson note that this aspect of deliberative democracy has its roots in the traditional democratic notion that citizens of a democracy ought to be treated as autonomous subjects, not simply objects to be ruled. Requiring mutually acceptable reasons not only promotes justifiable decisions but also encourages mutual respect between citizens.⁵ Moreover, reasons acceptable to all are more likely to lead to policy outcomes oriented toward the common good; while aggregative theories have no such requirement, most deliberative theories include some focus on the common good, even though the scope varies between authors. Some theorists advocate a thin conception of the common good, arguing that there is an unavoidable amount of disagreement built into pluralist political life; the common good for these authors consists largely in fair terms of cooperation. Others, by contrast, advocate a deeper conception of the common good that requires citizens to engage each other over deep moral differences.⁶

This reason-giving requirement of deliberative democracy has not only normative value, but instrumental value as well. As many authors have noted,⁷ no individual citizen

⁴ Gutmann and Thompson, *Why Deliberative Democracy?*, 7.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 3-4.

⁶ For a short discussion of these differences, see Gutmann and Thompson, *Why Deliberative Democracy?*, 26-29.

⁷ See, for example, Seyla Benhabib, “Toward a Deliberative Model of Democratic Legitimacy,” in Seyla Benhabib, ed., *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political* (Princeton: Princeton

can have access to all of the knowledge needed to make an informed decision on any given topic, least of all in a complex, diverse society such as the contemporary United States. Therefore, it is vital not only to express opinions or preferences but also to convey *why* we hold them, in that this information is required for a deliberative body to come to a properly informed decision.

Second, in addition to mutually acceptable reasons, deliberation must also exhibit the qualities of publicity and accessibility, and there are a number of justifications for this requirement. Perhaps most importantly, as argued by James Bohman, deliberation that is public is likely to have superior epistemic quality; arguments that are subjected to the whole range of opposing lines of thought will inevitably be stronger and more defensible. However, this notion of publicity requires not only that deliberation be made available to the public at large, but that reasons are communicated in ways that are understandable by the general population.⁸ Overly technical or culturally-specific communication undermines the legitimacy that is the goal of publicity, regardless of the content of that communication.

Thirdly, while it may seem obvious, it is nonetheless important to note that deliberative democracy is meant to be a form of government. Effective deliberation has value in a variety of settings, including civic organizations and other non-public entities. However, while this type of deliberation may be part of a greater public conversation that is included in a deliberative democratic theory, the principles behind deliberative democracy call for more than this – namely, that there be some binding decisions

University Press, 1996), 71; and Robert Talisse, *Democracy and Moral Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 125.

⁸ James Bohman, *Public Deliberation: Pluralism, Complexity, and Democracy* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), 26-27.

associated with deliberation. Just as importantly, the connections between deliberation and governmental action ought to be readily apparent; the more easily citizens are able to see these connections, the greater the legitimacy of the governing structure.⁹ Decisions made through deliberation are not, however, permanent or immune to challenge. Another central tenet of deliberative democracy is that past decisions are open to reinvestigation and further discussion. As Seyla Benhabib notes, deliberative theory allows for a “second, metalevel of discourse” in which the deliberative conditions that produce an outcome may be examined;¹⁰ this deliberation about past deliberation allows us to reexamine decisions at which we have previously arrived through the lens of new information, ideas, and perspectives. A decision of a deliberative body is simply held to be valid and legitimate until the process by which it was reached can be effectively criticized.

Finally, the claim that those participating in a deliberative democracy ought to be free and equal should be wholly uncontroversial and is not unique to deliberative models. Liberty and equality have been the cornerstones of democratic theory from its beginnings, so one would expect that deliberation would be required to adhere to those principles. Democratic outcomes are largely evaluated on their degree of legitimacy; inherent in the ideals of democracy is the notion that the policies and actions of the government ought to represent the will of the public at large. Joshua Cohen states that “free and reasoned agreement among equals” is the only avenue to democratic legitimacy, and argues that a proper deliberative framework “captures this principle.”¹¹

⁹ Joshua Cohen, “Deliberation and Democratic Legitimacy,” in Derek Matravers and Jonathan Pike, eds., *Debates in Contemporary Political Philosophy: An Anthology* (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2002), 346.

¹⁰ Benhabib, “Toward a Deliberative Model of Democratic Legitimacy,” 72.

¹¹ Cohen, “Deliberation and Democratic Legitimacy,” 347.

In a continuation of Cohen's thought, Benhabib argues that deliberation between free and equal citizens is the only means by which democratic institutions may claim to represent the interests of all citizens, which is the basis for legitimacy itself.¹²

However, while an ideal deliberative setting clearly ought to be characterized by freedom and equality, the extent to which deliberation actually occurs under these circumstances is contestable, and the ways in which these rights are denied ought to be under constant investigation. Formal guarantees of free and equal status (whether constitutionally guaranteed or included in deliberative guidelines) do not necessarily carry over into practice, particularly in a pluralistic society characterized by various forms of structural inequality. This aspect of deliberative theory will be the focus of my project.

Exclusion in Deliberation

Perhaps an analogy will be useful in beginning our discussion of the obstacles to free and equal deliberation. In his examination of English thought regarding the French Revolution, Don Herzog introduces the scene of an 18th century English coffeehouse. Observers of the day noted that, unlike the other scenarios in which individuals occupying varying roles within the social hierarchy came into contact with one another, the coffeehouse was a place in which one's social status seemed relatively meaningless. Members of Parliament, artisans, and shopkeepers all gathered in such establishments free from the ordinary customs, salutations, and social rules of engagement required in

¹² Benhabib, "Toward a Deliberative Model of Democratic Legitimacy," 69.

other settings.¹³ Herzog summarizes coffeehouse discussion, which he explains one 18th century writer has called a masquerade, in this way:

[Y]es, you can figure out who is the noble lord, who the hapless artisan. But you must blind yourself to that fact, because it's irrelevant in this context. The M.P. must not presume on his status, say by trying to bully his interlocutors into meek submission ... Not that the players always obey the rules, any more than they do in any other game.¹⁴

What we have, then, is a setting of (often political) discussion and debate that is understood by its participants to operate under a presumption of equal standing, regardless of status outside of its boundaries. How closely this understanding matches reality, however, remains to be seen.

Later in his work, Herzog provides a discussion of condescension. Contrary to the modern connotation, within the context of the 18th and 19th centuries “condescension was a virtue, the act of a great man who graciously lowers himself to deal with inferiors on a footing of equality.”¹⁵ We might question, however, whether an individual who occupies a distinctly superior position within society can every truly place himself or herself on equal footing with another. And indeed, in reference to an act of condescension in an Elizabeth Inchbald’s *Simple Story*, Herzog claims that “[t]he condescending man leaves behind his august status – but not entirely. The equality he creates remains partial, tentative, something like the as-if masquerade of [the aforementioned] coffeehouse.”¹⁶ By equating the man from Inchbald’s story who cannot quite abandon his superiority with the upper class individuals from the coffeehouse, Herzog advances the argument that even the setting which was (at least implicitly)

¹³ Don Herzog, *Poisoning the Minds of the Lower Orders* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 140-141.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 141-142.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 206.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 209.

understood to be a haven of egalitarian discussion and debate could not completely be purged of unequal social relations.

If we understand the coffeehouse to be analogous to a setting of political deliberation, we can see how it would be difficult to attain the conditions needed to ensure that deliberation would be free from oppressive social relationships. In the same way that the political discussion taking place within the coffeehouse is plagued by the social hierarchy that exists outside its walls, it seems unlikely that the formal rules by which political deliberation is supposed to operate can negate the oppressive relationships that exist in the other spheres of public and private life. Drawing a parallel between the more prestigious members of British society and the dominant racial or gender group in a democracy on the one hand, and between the “lower” classes and a subordinated racial or gender group on the other, will allow us to see clearly that there are likely to be power relationships that do not disappear in the face of formal or informal rules of equality.

How is it then that political deliberation might fall short of the ideals of deliberative theory? All liberal political societies are characterized by a variety of inequalities (economic, educational, social, etc.), but there are certain areas – such as political participation and the ability to have one’s voice heard in the political process – that liberal thinkers tend to believe should be outside the bounds of these inequalities. Deliberative democratic theorists all accept this notion, arguing that each citizen has the right (and often, even the obligation) to participate in political deliberation in one form or another; however, authors tend to disagree on what is required of the deliberative setting and process to ensure equal access and influence. Early deliberative theorists often emphasized proper deliberative procedure: for such thinkers, proper rules and format for

deliberation ought to ensure equality within the process. Joshua Cohen, for example, includes in his ideal deliberative procedure the requirement that the distribution of resources and power in society have no bearing on the deliberative process. Each participant has the right to raise topics, offer reasons, and vote if a consensus cannot be reached.¹⁷ However, Cohen offers no explanation as to how we might ensure that each participant's point of view is given equal consideration by others, or why members of the dominant social group will not be able to more easily influence members of a deliberative body with the reasons they give. While formal deliberative rules may guarantee the opportunity to speak, they cannot negate the effects of social and psychological conditioning.

The idea that some members of society will inevitably have greater sway over others in deliberation predates any of the authors I have discussed so far. As he lays the groundwork for a justifiable political society, Rousseau specifically eschews intersubjective deliberation, favoring instead private consideration of political matters. The goal of this personal deliberation is to discover the general will, which directs society toward the common good. According to Rousseau:

If, when a sufficiently informed populace deliberates, the citizens were to have no communication among themselves, the general will would always result from the large number of small differences and the deliberation would always be good. But when intrigues and partial associations come into being at the expense of the large association, the will of each of these associations becomes general in relation to its members and particular in relation to the state. It can be said, then, that there are no longer as many voters as there are men, but merely as many as there are associations. The differences become less numerous and yield a result that is less general. Finally, when one of these associations is so large that it dominates all the others, the result is no longer a sum of minor differences, but a

¹⁷ Cohen, "Deliberation and Democratic Legitimacy," 347-348.

single difference. Then there is no longer a general will, and the opinion that dominates is merely a private opinion.¹⁸

Rousseau's suspicion of public deliberation, then, stems from his concerns regarding the influences that some citizens may have over others; as the populace discusses issues among itself and factions begin to develop, inevitably certain factions representing partial interests will dominate others. The result of this process is not a society guided by the general will/common good, but rather a society directed by the interests of the dominant faction(s).

While this private deliberation may serve its intended purpose in the ideal society Rousseau designs, it is unlikely to fit well within a contemporary liberal democracy. One reason why Rousseau is able to suggest this style of politics is that he severely limits the types of differences that can exist between his citizens. Near-total economic equality and a requirement of belief in a "civil religion"¹⁹ are among the features of this polity that lead to a highly homogenous population; by contrast, inequalities and differences of all sorts in contemporary democracies – particularly the United States – require communication about political issues in order to make informed and inclusive decisions. Considering the principle of tolerance of difference that is held in high regard in (most of) these polities, Rousseau's restrictive conditions that allow for private deliberation to be effective are likely to be unattractive. While this leads some to declare that a participatory deliberative democracy is an unattainable utopia, many others are unwilling to concede this point.²⁰ The challenge, then, is how to allow for public deliberation while

¹⁸ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Basic Political Writings*, trans. Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), 156.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 226.

²⁰ Bohman, *Public Deliberation*, 71-72.

at the same time protecting against the unjust influence of partial interests that drives Rousseau's skepticism.

To their credit, deliberative theorists have not left this problem unaddressed. Bohman, for example, acknowledges the inadequacy of any deliberative theory that relies on ideal procedures "without reference to the social conditions in which such procedures operate."²¹ As mentioned above, inequalities that exist in society are expected to remain outside of the process of political deliberation. Bohman recognizes here that one must take into account specific information about the society in which the deliberation takes place in order to achieve such a goal. For this author, a sort of litmus test for deliberative equality is whether or not a citizen or group of citizens is able to initiate public discourse about an issue of concern. Without this ability, compliance with political outcomes is based not upon democratic legitimacy but rather on non-public reasons; many individuals or groups who are excluded from the process of raising topics for deliberation simply cannot afford non-compliance, or face consequences if they choose it.²² Consider the homeless population of a large city, for example. This group as a whole is likely to be unable to initiate public discussion of their conditions, but these individuals face detention if they choose not to comply with laws concerning panhandling or loitering.

However, many authors (including Bohman himself) have recognized that even if an issue of concern to a socially, economically, or politically disadvantaged group makes it onto the agenda for deliberation, there is a multitude of means through which inequality can manifest itself during the deliberative process itself. This challenge has led Iris Marion Young to distinguish between external and internal exclusion. External

²¹ Bohman, *Public Deliberation*, 31.

²² *Ibid.*, 113-114.

exclusion, she writes, includes the ways in which individuals or groups are left out of the deliberative process altogether. This type of exclusion characterizes the experiences of those who do not have the ability to initiate discourse that I describe above. Internal exclusion, by contrast, applies to those who are formally included in political deliberation but find their claims taken less seriously, their modes of expression deemed inadequate, or their experiences discounted.²³

So how does this internal exclusion take place? To begin with, some have argued that the norms of expression in traditional deliberative democracy such as calm, straightforward argumentation, possess certain cultural biases; for example, Young notes that the “articulateness” which is so highly valued in deliberation characterized by reason-giving privileges a certain kind of educated citizen, who is more likely to come from some groups than others, and more likely to be concerned with certain types of issues.²⁴ To the same effect, traditional deliberation that privileges dispassionate speech disadvantages and excludes those individuals who might favor more emotional expression. For this reason, Young criticizes what she deems a false dichotomy between reason and emotion, favoring deliberation that allows for both simultaneously.²⁵ The reintegration of reason and emotion will be important to the later stages of my project where I discuss the powerful effects of emotion not only to include a wider variety of expressive styles, but also to help bridge gaps in experience, empathy, and understanding.

Internal exclusion may also arise as an unintended consequence of the goal of seeking a common good, which is a component of many deliberative theories, and this

²³ Iris Marion Young, *Inclusion and Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 53-55.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 38-39. Young defines articulateness here as “spoken expression that follows the structure of well-formed written speech.”

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 39-40.

has led to considerable disagreement regarding the extent to which we ought to privilege unity in deliberation. Lynn Sanders, for example, has stated that “demanding honor of a higher value than oneself [i.e., the common good] can also work to discredit social movements forged around the particular interests of oppressed groups.”²⁶ Young echoes this notion, arguing that too strong an emphasis on the common good can often result in pressure on oppressed or disadvantaged groups to suspend their demands for justice.²⁷ Although deliberation is meant to be guided by notions of the common good, it is hard to see how the common good is achieved when deliberation fails to meet the needs of an entire social group. As Jane Mansbridge explains, when we rule out claims of self-interest it becomes difficult for participants to truly understand the proceedings, and “the less powerful may not find ways to discover that the prevailing sense of ‘we’ does not adequately include them.”²⁸

While addressing the forms of internal exclusion described above is undoubtedly vital to the legitimacy of democratic procedures, threats to this legitimacy may remain even if participants respect all styles of communication, do not suppress minority concerns in pursuit of the common good, and all have the same opportunities to speak. Because deliberative theory so highly values not only equal opportunity of participation but also the assurance that all perspectives will be given due consideration, gaps in understanding between participants that prevent or impede such consideration undermine the possibility of the deliberative process adequately addressing all issues and concerns. More specifically, I argue that experiences of oppression and domination (both explicit

²⁶ Lynn Sanders, “Against Deliberation,” *Political Theory* 25 (1997), 362.

²⁷ Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*, 43.

²⁸ Jane Mansbridge, “Feminism and Democracy,” in Anne Phillips, ed., *Feminism and Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 146.

and covert) result in divergent fundamental understandings of political and social issues related to the experiences of those oppressed groups. One way that I will argue this happens is through Jürgen Habermas' notion of systematically distorted communication.²⁹ Through the theory developed by Habermas, the comments on this theory offered by James Bohman, and my own extension and modification of Bohman's ideas, I will describe the process by which divergent understandings possessed by dominated and dominating groups prevent the achievement of deliberative goals.

Distorted Communication

Even before deliberative democracy became so prominent in the field of political theory over the last few decades, Jürgen Habermas was already considering the ways in which political communication might fail in the process of genuine and free will formation. According to Habermas, mere miscommunication is something that we can remedy through normal communication by identifying the point at which our understanding breaks down, determining what it is that we do not know, and working to fill in the gaps. However, potentially more problematic are the situations in which “[p]seudo-communication produces a system of reciprocal misunderstandings which, due to the false assumption of consensus, are not recognized as such.”³⁰ This specific type of misunderstanding, according to Habermas, occurs when “at least one of the participants is deceiving *himself* or *herself* regarding the fact that he or she is behaving strategically, while he or she has only apparently adopted an attitude toward reaching understanding.”³¹ While Habermas' conception of successful communication involves

²⁹ Jürgen Habermas, “On Systematically Distorted Communication,” *Inquiry* 13 (1970): 205-218.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 206.

³¹ Jürgen Habermas, “A Reply to My Critics,” in John B. Thompson and David Held, eds., *Habermas: Critical Debates* (London: MacMillan Press, 1982), 264.

two parties seeking understanding, in systematically distorted communication one or more of these individuals believes themselves to be seeking understanding, while they are actually motivated by egocentric calculations.³² Only a neutral observer can recognize that, despite the communicating parties' belief that they understand one another, they are in fact miscommunicating. However, because we are all inevitably situated within the same larger communicative processes, one's status as a participant precludes his or her presence as a neutral observer.³³ In other words, according to Habermas, any hidden reciprocal misunderstandings active in public communication – disguised as complete understanding and consensus – will be difficult to identify due to our situation within those misunderstandings.

As Bohman explains, although distortions in communication might seem to always be the product of manipulative behavior, this is not always the case. This condition would seem to imply that distorted communication requires malicious intent in order to take effect, a notion which Bohman rightly rejects. As he explains:

[Conscious power-seeking] need not be present in cases in which power is maintained through unequal capacities.” Additionally, given “structural restrictions in communication” ... reasons can produce agreement that would not be accepted under the conditions of publicity [discussed above]. In this way, distorted communication can still make possible the consensus necessary for further cooperation and participation, without coercion and fraud.³⁴

Here, Bohman taps into the idea that distorted communication can aide in the maintenance of the status quo and power relationships in the public sphere not only in ways that are results of purposeful power-seeking, but are also unintentional and unknown to those who participate in the communication. Consensus that may

³² Ibid.

³³ Habermas, “On Systematically Distorted Communication,” 205-206.

³⁴ Bohman, *Public Deliberation*, 119.

disadvantage certain citizens is maintained, without either the dominated or subordinated group truly being aware of the underlying processes.³⁵

So far, I have laid out the arguments coming from Habermas and Bohman which seem to identify a potential problem for democratic deliberation: if there is a consensus in society on any given idea that happens to disadvantage a certain group, or violates the condition of freedom or equality, it would seem difficult to identify and rectify this problem through deliberation. If consensus seems to exist, paradigms and the status quo go unchallenged; if the distortion in communication leads to injustice in the public realm, but nobody is able to see it, the issue is unlikely to make its way to the agenda for deliberation.

Here is where I depart from Habermas, and possibly Bohman. It seems unclear to whom and under what conditions Bohman believes these distortions become apparent. Regardless, it seems illogical to assume that a societal consensus on any given issue which disadvantages a certain group (or groups) of citizens would remain stable for very long. Instead, consider the likelihood that the disadvantaged group will, over time, identify the ways in which agreements are reached through this process. As Young argues, communication may be distorted through “rhetoric that presents as universal a perspective on experience or society derived from a specific social position,” but activists will eventually begin to challenge such “hegemonic discourses”³⁶ as the strategic action of dominant groups becomes apparent to subordinated ones. Support for a similar

³⁵ A similar argument can be found in the writing of Louis Althusser. He argues that there are a number of “ideological state apparatuses” – education, news media, family, etc. – that reproduce the dominant ideology and the relations to which this ideology gives rise. Therefore, upon arrival to a deliberative setting, each citizen has been conditioned to think about the world in which he or she lives in a certain way, including beliefs about race and gender.

³⁶ Iris Marion Young, “Activist Challenges to Deliberative Democracy,” *Political Theory* 29 (2001): 686-687.

argument can be found in Antonio Gramsci's discussion of the role of intellectuals.

Among the requisites for challenging the dominant ideology and promoting a new conception of the world, he argues, is the development of the development and elaboration of the intellectual activity that exists in the members of a certain group.³⁷

While Gramsci's ultimate goal is a Marxist state, we do not need to share his desired ends to understand that, over time, a non-dominant group can develop a discourse that reflects their experiences and challenges the status quo.

To put this more concretely in terms of my current project, an ideological consensus may arise between an oppressed group and their oppressors. However, it is unlikely that, regarding issues related to experiences of oppression, this consensus will hold for an unlimited period of time. Instead, through their direct experiences of how dominant understandings of societal structures disadvantage them, the subordinate group will identify and begin to attempt to communicate to others the ways in which their oppression is perpetuated.

This realization, however, leads to a different problem for deliberation. Instead of, as Habermas proposes, a false consensus based on miscommunication, there can be a fundamental gap in the understandings possessed by various groups. While the experiences of the subordinated group lead to a greater understanding of how a prior consensus – as well as the way the associated ideas are framed and communicated in public discourse – creates disadvantages in violation of democratic norms, this understanding is not available to the dominant groups, no matter how good their intentions might be. As a result, the dominant group in society is unable to see the effects

³⁷ Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 9-10.

of their self-interested strategic action. This knowledge barrier is particularly problematic for democratic deliberation because such deliberation hinges on a starting place on which all participants can agree. As Bohman states, deliberation is “a process that must begin with a shared definition of the problem.”³⁸ Critically, the ability to see how a consensus functions to disadvantage certain citizens comes from the oppressive experiences faced by these subjected groups. Therefore, this understanding is not accessible to those who are not disadvantaged through the dominant ideology, creating a fundamental misunderstanding with regard to the implications of a prior ideological consensus.

To better understand this communicative impasse, I would like to take a detour through the work of Paulo Freire. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire pushes for the development of “critical consciousness,” a heightened awareness in an oppressed group of the social and political conditions that lead to the oppression faced by that particular group.³⁹ Such consciousness is what then allows these individuals to realize how the structure of society disadvantages them, assert their interests, and begin to challenge the oppressive system.⁴⁰ However, this critical consciousness is dependent upon the experience of being oppressed to begin with, and is unlikely to arise without such an experience. Freire argues that “[f]or someone to achieve critical consciousness of his status as an oppressed man requires recognition of his reality as an oppressive reality.”⁴¹

With this in mind, it becomes a bit clearer why the understanding that results from oppression cannot be fully communicated through deliberative reason-exchange. While

³⁸ Bohman, *Public Deliberation*, 55.

³⁹ Paulo Friere, *Education for Critical Consciousness* (New York: Continuum, 2005), 39.

⁴⁰ Paulo Friere, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York: Continuum International Publishing, Inc., 2000).

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 174 f.n.

participants may provide information to one another and give some perspective on the experiences they have had, no amount of dialogue can be a proper substitute for a burgeoning awareness of the oppressive conditions under which one lives. This is not to say that it is impossible to be empathetic without firsthand experience; rather, I argue that deliberation that emphasizes calm discourse and discourages emotional exchange is unlikely to foster this empathy, which I discuss below.

Of course, Freire views a specific education as necessary for the full development of critical consciousness, and I believe he is correct on this point.⁴² I would, however, like to suggest that as this consciousness arises through education or other means, in order to effect change we must – if we are committed to democratic principles and procedures – have opportunities for the knowledge realized through this consciousness to be communicated to the general public. Despite its promise for expanding democracy in other ways, deliberation as conceived by Cohen, Gutmann, and others is ill-suited to this type of task. This is certainly not to say that well-intentioned individuals from non-subordinated groups cannot be persuaded by logic and argumentation that social change is necessary; exposure to new facts and ideas can often pave the way to a change in political outlooks. However, we must maintain a distinction between advocacy for change and true understanding – between sympathy and empathy. While sympathy to the plights of others is admirable and often necessary for change, systemic and lasting change requires an empathy not cultivated by argumentation. As Young points out, in order to “make judgements with pragmatic consequences, political publics must not only believe and accept claims and arguments, but also care about and commit their will to the

⁴² Freire provides a detailed description of this education in *Education for Critical Consciousness*.

outcomes.”⁴³ Of course, having empathy toward a group does not bind one to any particular policy position. “What empathy promotes is not necessarily agreement,” argues Michael Morrell, “but understanding the impacts a decision will have on others.”⁴⁴ Because a certain understanding of oppression must be accessed at least in part through the experiences of that oppression, the empathy necessary to understand those experiences is a necessary component of political communication that seeks to promote social justice.

To understand why traditional deliberation is not well-suited to engendering empathy, it is important to see the roots that deliberative theory has in the Enlightenment. In his essay on enlightenment itself, Kant asserts that in order for a public to enlighten itself, each individual must be allowed to use one’s own reason and not rely on the reason of another.⁴⁵ This, in turn, requires that one retains the “freedom to make *public use* of one’s reason in all matters.”⁴⁶ Importantly, to retain the autonomy that Kant sees as requisite to enlightenment, the Kantian tradition maintains that we must not allow rhetorical techniques in our deliberation. John O’Neill traces this belief back to Plato’s assertion that rhetoric works not toward learning, but toward conviction. Because rhetoric relies on illusion instead of reason, its use violates the requirement of an autonomous reliance on one’s own reason and is therefore unsuitable for deliberation. This anti-rhetorical stance has been adopted by neo-Kantians such as Habermas and Rawls, which explains why deliberative theory has regularly rejected appeals to

⁴³ Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*, 69-70.

⁴⁴ Michael Morrell, *Empathy and Democracy: Feeling, Thinking, and Deliberation* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2010), 173.

⁴⁵ Immanuel Kant, “An Answer to the Question, What is Enlightenment?,” in *Practical Philosophy*, translated by Mary J. Gregor (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 17-18.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 18.

emotion.⁴⁷ However, it is precisely through alternative communicative methods such as rhetoric that we may engage each other's emotions to create empathy. In this way, deliberation seems unable to bridge the gap in understanding that results from experiences of oppression. I will revisit the connections between emotion, empathy, and gaps in understanding in Chapter IV.

To summarize, distorted communication consists of the creation of an ideological consensus that disadvantages a particular social group. At some point, such a consensus breaks down as members of the oppressed group develop and articulate an awareness of how that consensus maintains their subjugation. However, because the consensus has represented the truth to the dominant group, which does not have access to the experiences of the oppressed counterpart, it is difficult for this group to understand an opposing perspective. An understanding of this kind requires empathy, which traditional deliberation is not well-suited to generating.

I should take care to make clear that the criticisms of deliberation that I offer in this project are neither meant to suggest that political deliberation cannot have positive results nor to question the motives of those who participate. My goals instead are to better understand how oppressive relations may be reproduced even in the absence of hostility and over prejudice, and to help expand the conception of deliberation in order to address this problem. I will revisit this latter point in the final chapter; here, I would like to address the former.

We should not assume that deliberators coming from traditionally powerful social groups have malicious or oppressive intentions toward those generally considered to be

⁴⁷ John O'Neill, "The Rhetoric of Deliberation: Some Problems in Kantian Theories of Deliberative Democracy," *Res Publica* 8 (2002): 253-254.

less powerful or subordinate in the power structure; as discussed above, Bohman has convincingly argued that intentions of power-seeking need are not necessary for the distortion of communication. I also take it as a given that those who are willing to deliberate with citizens from whom they are somehow different are committed (to some substantial extent) to deliberative ideals – including, but not limited to, free exchange of reasons, equal opportunity of participation, and justice for all social groups. Of course, a substantial number of citizens of democratic polities exist who do not conform to these standards. Commitment to democratic ideas is by no means guaranteed, and some writers have spent a considerable amount of time thinking about the possibilities of instilling democratic values and competence through education.⁴⁸ These types of questions are undoubtedly important, and clearly no democracy or deliberative setting can live up to its principles without a body of citizens that is committed to those principles. However, a different and potentially more difficult question to answer is of how oppressive relationships reproduce themselves in deliberation *despite* commitments to deliberative ideals and positive intentions of fair and just procedures. Again, this does *not* require any specific commitments to certain policy stances or political viewpoints, but only a commitment to not actively suppressing the reasons and viewpoints of other participants.

Indeed, we can see examples of deliberation where citizens who have no obvious prejudices or malicious intentions against a group nevertheless make biased judgments. Tali Mendelberg and John Oleske provide an example of this in their study of town hall

⁴⁸ See, for example, Amy Gutmann, *Democratic Education* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); Norman Nie, Jane Junn, and Kenneth Stehlik-Barry, *Education and Democratic Citizenship in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); and Ronald Dworkin, *Is Democracy Possible Here?: Principles for a New Political Debate*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

meetings regarding the creation of racially integrated school districts in New Jersey. While the black citizens of the area explicitly called for racial justice in the form of integrating these districts, many of the white citizens rejected these calls, mistakenly viewing the issue as non-racial. While these individuals centered their discussion around the common good, they failed to see the racialized nature of the collective.⁴⁹ I will revisit these observations in greater detail in the next chapter. It is helpful here, though, to view this account alongside the findings of Samuel Sommers and Phoebe Ellsworth, who examine the influence of race on the decision-making of jurors.⁵⁰ In a perhaps counter-intuitive finding, Sommers and Ellsworth show that jurors make more racially-biased decisions when these jurors have not been in some way primed to think about race during their deliberations.⁵¹

I see, then, two possible ways to reconcile these findings with the descriptions of the town hall meetings given by Mendelberg and Oleske. One possibility is that the white citizens participating in the town hall meetings are not committed or indifferent to racial egalitarianism. While this is certainly a possibility for some, a more likely explanation is that many of the white citizens are unaware that race is in fact a very real factor in their situation, unaware of the racialized public order that the black citizens are able to see. We can extrapolate from the findings of Sommers and Ellsworth to infer that if the whites involved in these town meetings were aware of the role played by race in the dispute, they would be likely (although not guaranteed) to process reasons and arguments differently, and therefore make different judgments about what would be a just course of

⁴⁹ Tali Mendelberg and John Oleske, "Race and Public Deliberation," *Political Communication* 17 (2000).

⁵⁰ Jury deliberation is often seen as a good environment to test ideas about deliberation. For example, see Sanders, "Against Deliberation," 363-369.

⁵¹ Samuel R. Sommers and Phoebe C. Ellsworth, "White Juror Bias: An Investigation of Prejudice Against Black Defendants in the American Courtroom," *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law* 7 (2001): 212.

action. The question, then, is of how to begin to close this type of gap in understanding during deliberation, a challenge to which I will return in the final chapter.

It might not be immediately clear thus far why a gap in understanding will necessarily disadvantage the oppressed social group and never the dominant group. Indeed, it might seem as though, armed with a greater knowledge and understanding of the social structure resulting from their experiences, an oppressed group would actually be more effective in deliberative settings as a better-informed group of individuals. However, this argument overlooks the fact that a gap in understanding will inevitably favor the status quo. If the reasons and perspectives provided by a historically subjugated group are not perceived as valid due to this type of communicative barrier, they cannot help a public to address the societal conditions that continue to disadvantage certain groups. I borrow here from Bohman, who writes that when we fail to consider reasons provided by all, “deliberation adopts the perspective of the dominant group rather than shifting among the richer set of perspectives of all those concerned. Other mechanisms of deliberative uptake similarly become limited, as when a norm is interpreted through the particular application favored by a powerful group.”⁵² As the status quo inevitably favors the historically dominant social group and its understanding of social and political problems (if this group even recognizes that a problem exists), gaps in understanding will limit the ability of an oppressed group to address its needs through the deliberative process.

One might stop me here, however, and assert that we need not look outside of the confines of the deliberative structure to address divergent understandings that result from oppressive experiences. Indeed, one could argue, public deliberation is exactly the

⁵² Bohman, *Public Deliberation*, 116.

setting in which we can exchange the information and insights that eventually lead to more informed and reasonable political outcomes. If we all understood the reasons and possessed the information held by every other citizen, we would not need to deliberate in the first place. While this is true in many regards and public deliberation offers a unique setting in which citizens may exchange reasons and information to expand the public consciousness, I contend that there are certain types of knowledge that cannot be easily communicated through logic, reason, or unimpassioned speech, but are in fact created through experiences of oppression.

It is also important to recognize that public deliberation which does not adequately take into account the beliefs and viewpoints of a subordinated group is not only detrimental to the well-being of that particular group, but to the public as a whole. It is through communication across contrasting perspectives that allows “each participant to understand more of what the society means or what the possible consequences of a policy will be by each situating his or her own experience and interest in a wider context of understanding something in other social locations.”⁵³ As Katherine Cramer Walsh explains, Hannah Arendt considered interaction among members of the public as “the practice by which people create ‘the public.’”⁵⁴ It is through a collective process of deliberation and civic engagement, not a simple aggregation of interests and values, that we give meaning and substance to public life. Walsh provides an explanation of Arendt’s claim:

Imagine for a moment an object. People, being the unique individuals that we are, each have a particular perspective of this object. To Arendt, individuals’ unique perspectives function like lights to collectively illuminate the objects of

⁵³ Young, “Communication and the Other,” 127.

⁵⁴ Katherine Cramer Walsh, *Talking About Race: Community Dialogues and the Politics of Difference* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 16.

our attention. If the object we are focusing on is a sphere, for example, in private our individual lights allow us to see *part* of this sphere. But in a public realm, something transformative happens: multiple people, all shining their individual lights on this object, reveal a depth and richness to it that is not visible to an individual viewing it alone.⁵⁵

If we understand the creation of the public consciousness to take place in the manner described above, it should be clear that the exclusion of minority viewpoints and experiences is likely to leave a hole in that consciousness, whether this exclusion is formal or a result of power structures and oppressive relationships that work their way into the process of political deliberation. This statement is especially true if the object in question is a public understanding of the effects of race, gender, or social domination of any other kind. When the experiences, reasons, and arguments of a subordinated group are excluded from the deliberative process as a result of a gap in experiences and understandings of society's structure, the public at large deprives itself of the fullest possible self-awareness, an awareness without which it cannot fully account for the rights of any of its citizens.

Furthermore, the perspectives of subordinated groups can contribute something in particular that those of the dominant groups cannot. In his early work entitled *The Souls of Black Folk*, W. E. B. Du Bois writes:

After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teutonic and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world, – a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world.⁵⁶

Using this passage as evidence, Robert Gooding-Williams explains that the experiences that are coupled with existing as an African American, in Du Bois' view, allow one to see

⁵⁵ Walsh, *Talking About Race*, 16.

⁵⁶ W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 2003), 9.

something that those in the dominant group cannot. Such an individual sees the world through the perspective of his or her own group but also through the lens of the dominant racial group. This duality provides the ability of the African American to experience the world from the point of view of a different social group.⁵⁷ As a result, second sight provides something invaluable, namely “the capacity to convey ... the partiality of all perspectives.”⁵⁸ Although Du Bois and Gooding-Williams write about the experiences of African Americans in the United States, we can comfortably assume that this second sight would manifest in some form for any subordinated social group. Therefore, when these perspectives are not given full consideration in deliberation, a valuable resource for bridging gaps in perspectives is lost.

In order to demonstrate more concretely how the concepts I have described above manifest themselves in society, I will discuss in the following chapters how deliberative norms and divergent understandings of political and social issues can prevent the realization of deliberative ideals. So far, I have demonstrated the need for empathy in political communication to bridge gaps in understanding. My second chapter will examine the challenges that perceptions of deliberative participants pose to empathy in deliberation. In the third chapter, I will look at the ways in which the dominant understandings of race and gender also impede the development of empathy. My fourth and final chapter will review and supplement some familiar challenges to the rejection of emotion in political deliberation, arguing that such a separation of reason and emotion is not only exclusive, but illogical to begin with. To expand our understanding of what

⁵⁷ Robert Gooding-Williams, *In the Shadow of Du Bois: Afro-Modern Political Thought in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 78.

⁵⁸ Lawrie Balfour, *Democracy's Reconstruction: Thinking Politically with W. E. B. Du Bois* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 7.

proper deliberation may entail, I will utilize a rarely-tapped resource in political theory, Augusto Boal's innovative methods of political theater. Viewed as a synthesis of deliberation and other innovative forms of communication, his ideas will help to construct a more inclusive deliberative theory – one that is better suited to fostering empathy across social groups.

CHAPTER III

PERCEPTIONS, STEREOTYPES, AND DELIBERATIVE NORMS

In the previous chapter, I briefly described ways in which deliberation may fail to meet its theoretical ideals due to a lack of empathy for oppressed social groups. In the following two chapters, I will expand upon these concepts and apply them more concretely to problems faced by specific groups. In a piece detailing a number of pitfalls in deliberation, Lynn Sanders notes the differentials in power and influence between dominant and subordinated racial and gender groups in deliberative contexts.⁵⁹ She writes that the level of abstraction reached by many deliberative theorists construes deliberative citizens as raceless, classless, and genderless, taking the time to show that these variances in personal characteristics actually have strong real-world implications regarding who has what kind of influence in the process of deliberation.⁶⁰ In the following pages, I will focus on and expand upon Sanders' observations about the effects of how deliberative participants perceive each other and themselves. In addition to reviewing the well-known issues raised by feminist critiques, I will apply the concepts of stereotypes and double consciousness to challenge deliberative assumptions. Through examining these theories, I will show that the field of deliberative democratic theory has much to resolve with regard to personal perceptions for deliberation to be appropriately empathetic.

Gendered Norms of Participation

A substantial amount of attention has already been devoted to the internal exclusion of women in deliberation. Here I review the most prominent of concerns raised

⁵⁹ Sanders, "Against Deliberation."

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 353; 362-369.

in previous writing. Some are unique to the experience of women in a liberal democracy, while others can be applied to oppressed groups more broadly. It is important for one to see the vast array of challenges facing women in deliberative settings, not limiting oneself to one particular aspect, in order to fully understand how exclusive deliberation can be. Additionally, such an understanding “help[s] us to grasp other forms of domination, such as those based on wealth, that can also affect the deliberative process.”⁶¹ More importantly for this project, these norms prevent the recognition and respect of non-dominant viewpoints that is necessary to foster empathy in deliberation.

To begin, feminine speech itself is often considered to be less welcome in political deliberation. This is not to say that women are expressly prohibited or discouraged from participating in such an environment; rather, many argue that the norms of deliberation favor what is thought of as more *masculine* speech. As discussed in the previous chapter, deliberation that so highly values political decision-making via rational argumentation and a logical progression of ideas similarly devalues speech that is emotional. Just as with racial minorities, women are often perceived to express themselves in more the latter style than the former. Whereas men tend to be more controlled in their speech, argues Young, women are taken less seriously in deliberation as their “expressions of anger, hurt, and passionate concern discount the claims and reasons they accompany.”⁶²

Although once accepted at face value, some have begun to question whether women are truly more emotional in their deliberative expression than men. One particular study that would seem to undermine this critique, performed by Andrea

⁶¹ Mansbridge, “Feminism and Democracy,” 143.

⁶² Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*, 124. See also Sanders, “Against Deliberation.”

Hickerson and John Gastil, examines the experience of emotion in jury deliberations. Contrary to the assumptions of much prior research, the authors conclude that a substantial majority of both men and women in their study found emotion to be an important part of their experiences as jurors, with only a marginal difference between the two sexes.⁶³ If emotion is integral to deliberation for both men and women, then perhaps the norm of calm and rational expression does not disadvantage women in the way some have argued. However, the fact that both sexes experience emotion during deliberation (which should not come as a surprise) says nothing about how emotional expression is interpreted by others. One's own understanding of one's expression matters far less to the outcomes of deliberation than does the way in which others perceive it.

For this reason, research on the influence of emotional expression is pertinent to the discussion of the status of women in deliberation. Jessica Salerno explores this very topic, using computer-mediated mock jury trials where each participant is faced with one holdout juror holding the opposite verdict preference. Participants were faced with both male and female holdout jurors, who expressed their opinions either with or without emotion. While a holdout male juror who expressed anger lowered a participant's confidence in their opinion, the same expression from a female holdout juror resulted in *higher* confidence in one's prior opinion. In other words, the expression of a certain emotion by a man caused participants to rethink their positions, while the same emotional expression by a woman left one more sure of their position than before.⁶⁴ These findings

⁶³ Andrea Hickerson and John Gastil, "Assessing the Difference Critique: Gender, Emotion, and the Jury Experience," *Communication Theory* 18 (2008): 294-297. Although jury deliberation is but one type of deliberative setting, similar effects would be found in other settings as well.

⁶⁴ Jessica M. Salerno, "One Angry Woman: Emotion Expression and Minority Influence in a Jury Deliberation Context" (PhD diss., University of Illinois at Chicago, 2012), 38-62, accessed January 7, 2014, <https://dspace-prod-lib.cc.uic.edu/handle/10027/9602>.

suggest a potentially different form of exclusion. Prior challenges to deliberative democracy have claimed that women are internally excluded because the norms of deliberation favor predominantly male speaking styles. However, Salerno's study suggests not that women are particularly more emotional in deliberative settings, but rather that feminine emotion has a different effect on fellow participants than masculine emotion, at least when such emotion is expressed by one of the minority opinion. Salerno suggests that this phenomenon results from the fact that anger, as opposed to fear, is seen as a primarily masculine emotion; deliberative participants unconsciously "penalize" women who express non-stereotypical emotions.⁶⁵ Though I do not mean to doubt this conclusion, I would like to offer an additional interpretation. It seems as though when a male in the minority opinion expresses anger, his emotion is experienced by others as an additional facet or support of his rational argument. A woman's anger, on the other hand, appears to stand as a substitute for her reason, rendering her argument less convincing and less acceptable as part of reasoned public deliberation. Whatever the mechanism, the fact remains that women may find themselves disadvantaged in deliberation when their emotionality is perceived as irrational. While prior empirical research showing that both men and women use emotion in deliberation has sought to discredit critiques based around emotionality, Salerno's research shows that demonstrating the presence of emotion in the communication of both sexes is not sufficient to do away with such criticism. Because this seems especially true for a female minority, those seeking to address difficult gender issues through deliberation will likely find it difficult to be taken seriously.

⁶⁵ Salerno, "One Angry Woman," 59-60.

Women may also find themselves disadvantaged through the roles that they are given or select for themselves in a deliberative setting. For example, Sanders notes that men are far more likely to be selected as jury forepersons than are women, even after controlling for gender proportions in jury pools. This is not, she explains, a direct result of being male, but rather due to certain “male” behaviors that convey a sense of leadership, such as speaking first.⁶⁶ Of course, not all forms of deliberation involve such a clearly defined leader; deliberation may often be more informal, without a designated primary speaker or organizer. This lack of official authority does not mean that a trend of male-dominated leadership will not affect these types of deliberation, however; leadership does not need to have a formal title to be effective. Even in deliberation that is less structured or where all have an equal chance to influence the proceedings, those who assume informal leadership positions and are regarded by other participants as such are likely to have greater influence in the process. If such individuals are significantly more likely to be men than women, it is likely that certain women’s issues and viewpoints will be swept aside due to unequal representation.

While the objections I have raised so far are primarily concerned with how women who wish to speak during deliberation are silenced, feminist theorists have also discussed the ways in which women are discouraged from speaking in the first place. The instatement of formal deliberative rules that provide each participant with equal opportunities to speak is an important first step, but this provision does little to encourage actual participation. There are a number of forces at play that can potentially result in women feeling that their participation is unwelcome or out-of-place. For example, Jane Mansbridge notes that shyness is a quality observed more often in women than in men.

⁶⁶ Sanders, “Against Deliberation,” 364.

Although men certainly exhibit shy behavior at times, “the equivalent percentage of shy women is increased by learning silence as appropriate to their gender.”⁶⁷ Being raised in a society that, in general, teaches women that male speech should take precedence over female speech can have no other effect but to discourage deliberative participation. Of course, I would not suggest that all women are passive listeners, speaking only when spoken to. Rather, the traditions and cultural institutions from which women learn their expected behavior contribute to a set of factors that undermine the equal participation and influence idealized by deliberative theory.

As a social group, women also have a unique relationship with the deliberative goal of accessing and promoting the common good. The wants and goals of women often come second to those of their male counterparts, which brings into question the universality of the common good. Mansbridge recounts her own experience with this tradition:

Many women like myself – white middle class citizens of the United States, born in the 1930s and 1940s – were taught not to have too strongly defined wants. Boys wondered, as early as “soldier, sailor, Indian chief,” which kinds of work they were suited for. Girls like myself wondered, instead, what kind of man they would marry. ... Training to be chosen rather than to choose includes not allowing one’s wants to become too definite. Keeping one’s wants indefinite makes it even harder than usual for one’s intellect to learn the signs the self emits of wanting one thing rather than another.⁶⁸

The implications this societal norm has for deliberation are substantial. If deliberation is supposed to seek the common good, then it is important that all segments of society have their interests represented in the process. Otherwise, a deliberative body lacks the capability to adequately synthesize the needs of all citizens into policy oriented toward the common good. The preferences of one group must at times inevitably be

⁶⁷ Mansbridge, “Feminism and Democracy,” 152.

⁶⁸ Mansbridge, “Feminism and Democracy,” 152.

subordinated to the needs or wants of another group in order to reach policy decisions; however, it is highly problematic if this subordination occurs prior to deliberation through cultural conditioning, or if one particular group is consistently advantaged or disadvantaged in this manner. If women are taught that their preferences come second to those of men and are discouraged from forming strong wants and becoming conscious of their own needs, in order to be truly included in the common good they must have a better chance to develop an understanding of these preferences. Deliberation that values argumentation and competition, as opposed to exploration and helping participants to development their own ideas, is unlikely to serve this purpose. Again, this is not to say that all women passively submit to the public preferences of their male counterparts, or that there is no such thing as an ambitious and assertive woman. Rather, I simply wish to point out that a culture that encourages passivity among women is a challenge for deliberation that must be met with careful attention.

Finally, linguists and communications scholars have devoted a considerable amount of attention to the way in which language itself is gendered and therefore disadvantages women in discourse and deliberation.⁶⁹ Nora Räthzel explains that one goal of discourse analysis is “to illuminate the specific mechanisms through which dominance/subordination – elements which structure society as a whole – are produced in daily life.”⁷⁰ If language is not neutral, but rather part of the construction of gendered societal norms and expectations, then deliberation that relies on argumentation alone is unlikely to be an effective means for subordinated gender groups to address their needs.

⁶⁹ Although this objection is at best weakly connected to how deliberative participants perceive each other and themselves, it is nonetheless an important consideration that is appropriate to consider alongside other gendered norms.

⁷⁰ Nora Räthzel, “Gender and Racism in Discourse,” in Ruth Wodak, ed., *Gender and Discourse* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1997), 57.

According to one theory, men control language, thereby creating meaning in a process from which women have been systematically excluded. The words we use have been encoded with a male perspective, which is often at odds with the silenced feminine standpoint.⁷¹ Examples of this include words such as *mankind* and *manmade*. Such gendered language construction clearly disadvantages women in deliberation, as the words the participants use to discuss social and political issues carry with them a masculine view of the world.

However, this theory of language is by no means the only interpretation; while some see dominance through language, others merely see difference.⁷² Deborah Tannen, for example, asserts that men and women often have very different goals they wish to accomplish through the use of language. While males learn to use language to assert power and negotiate hierarchy, females instead learn to use language to create bonds and establish solidarity.⁷³ Such a difference certainly seems less oppressive than the dominance theory described above. However, any validity we may assign to Tannen's ideas is also troublesome. In deliberation that favors straightforward argumentation and cool reason, it is often the strongest and most persuasive argument that wins. Therefore, if masculine language is more oriented toward asserting power while feminine dialogue aims at building solidarity, it seems likely that the arguments advanced by men have a competitive advantage. Moreover, those individuals who are particularly concerned about fostering social ties may refrain from arguing their points of view as strongly, preferring consensus over conflict. We see, then, that whether language is structured in

⁷¹ Deborah Cameron, *Feminism and Linguistic Theory* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1985), 108-113.

⁷² Deborah Cameron, "Theoretical Debates in Feminist Linguistics," in *Gender and Discourse*, ed. Ruth Wodak (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1997), 27.

⁷³ Deborah Tannen, *Gender and Discourse* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 19-52.

dominance, or rather serves different purposes for men and women, that gender matters a great deal in deliberation. There is certainly a great deal more to be said about gender and deliberation from a linguistic perspective. This introduction to the topic should, however, at least show that the way we use words has a considerable effect on our political deliberation.

Stereotype and Expectations

In addition to norms of deliberation that favor certain groups, the perceptions that these individuals have of one another also have considerable potential to undermine empathy in democratic deliberation. Previously, I mentioned Sanders' warning against conceptualizing citizens as raceless, classless, and genderless. Often following from Rawls' original position, deliberative theorists tend to discuss arguments separately from the individuals who give them. While it is certainly true that the personal characteristics of speakers can neither enhance nor diminish the rationality of their arguments, this fact says nothing about how individuals are perceived by their fellow citizens, which in turn dictates how their arguments are interpreted. There does not exist a single person who does not possess some degree of preconceptions, stereotypes, or expectations of others based upon their physical and socially-defined features. Unlike the perfectly rational entities of the original position, human beings who are situated within a particular place in society cannot totally separate the content of an argument from the identity of the person who gives it. Of course, working to become aware of and dispel such notions goes a long way toward a more inclusive and just public discourse. However, due to the difficulty of ridding ourselves completely of these beliefs (however irrational they may be), how deliberative participants receive various arguments will be colored by the

preconceptions they have of the individuals who offer them, in a way that does not depend on the actual content of the speech. Such a reaction based on one's social group, for example, is yet another way in which voices of oppressed groups can be silenced in public discourse.

The public debate over welfare is a helpful illustration of the ways in which stereotypes about race, gender, and class prevent true deliberative equality. Ange-Marie Hancock demonstrates this point effectively with her discussion of a hearing in the United States House of Representatives regarding the proposed 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act. During this hearing, a particular Congressman reads about the experiences of Bertha Bridges, a single mother welfare recipient. Hancock writes:

When citizens like Bertha Bridges are thrust into the public sphere for political purposes, the potential for “reasonable” democratic consideration of policy options is bleak. Reading the first excerpt from the *Congressional Record* triggers a comparison of Bridges to stereotypes about welfare recipients. This act of cognition occurs so quickly that before we read her own words (as quoted by a journalist), we have given her an identity that acts from that point forward as an interpretive filter. Whether her words reinforce or contest the identity assigned by the reader, any political claim she may make later in the article is still considered in the context of that identity.⁷⁴

The fact that Bridges did not actually testify about her experiences before Congress should not deter us from considering the problem that Hancock describes here; had Bridges said her words aloud in the chamber, the effect would be the same. There is an identity associated with the stereotypical welfare recipient, a lens through which arguments about social programs are considered. This process occurs both

⁷⁴ Ange-Marie Hancock, *The Politics of Disgust: The Public Identity of the Welfare Queen* (New York: New York University Press, 2004), 2.

unintentionally and often unconsciously; as Hancock notes, the stereotypes that come to mind affect our judgments from the beginning of the process.

Undoubtedly, stereotypes exist for all groups, not just marginalized or subordinated ones. The preconceived notions that people hold about the Congressman who used Bridges as an example are likely to be just as strong as their beliefs about the mother herself. The difference, however, is that dominant social groups generally have better opportunities to define their public identity than do oppressed populations. The identity of the stereotypical single mother who collects welfare is, in large part, “shaped by political elites, academicians, and the media.”⁷⁵ When such an individual arrives at a deliberative setting, as soon as she begins to speak her words are heard through a filter that others have constructed – an identity that has been built by those who have “higher” social standing. Her dominant counterparts, of course, have their own socially-defined identities as well. However, because dominant groups possess greater resources and are generally overrepresented in political office, academia, and high-profile media positions, they are better able to define their own identities. In other words, the perspectives of the dominant groups are, at least in part, transmitted through the social identities they participate in creating. By contrast, oppressed or subordinated groups have their social identities shaped to a much greater extent by the discourse other groups have about them. As a consequence, the social identities of these groups do not convey their own perspectives, but are rather additional instruments to reinforcing the understandings of the dominant groups. Without the ability to communicate their experiences free from the influence of stereotypes, subordinated groups will have difficulty finding empathy in deliberation.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

Although human psychology simply does not allow us to rid ourselves of all stereotypes, this is not to say that our political processes must proceed according to these preconceptions. As Hancock writes, a truly inclusive public discourse “requires the abandonment of preconceived notions of other citizens and the accurate interpretation of individuals’ varying experiences.”⁷⁶ This is not to say that just political processes must take place only at the individual level; rather, in order to effectively include voices from outside the dominant perspective, we must be able to accept communication from an individual as herself, not as part of a group about which we have predetermined ideas. I will offer a way to accomplish this goal in my concluding chapter.

Double Consciousness

Of course, perceptions of deliberative participants do not only affect women; I turn now to the phenomenon known as “double consciousness” and the effects that it may have on racial minorities in the deliberative process. In Chapter I, I described the phenomenon Du Bois identifies as second sight, which I argued is a valuable resource for bridging gaps in understanding. However, this ability can have harmful consequences for those who possess it under certain circumstances. I repeat here the quote from Chapter I, along with the text that follows:

After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teutonic and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world, – a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, – an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled

⁷⁶ Ibid., 148.

strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength keeps it from being torn asunder.⁷⁷

This passage provides a good deal of insight into the psychological effects that racism and racial hierarchy – formal or informal – can have on members of a racial minority group in a society such as the United States. Interpreting this passage, Gooding-Williams argues that:

[E]xercising the power of second sight need not lead to a false self-consciousness – that is, to an untrue, self-misrepresenting, self-consciousness – although it will lead to false self-consciousness in contemporary America (“in this American world”) ... precisely because the perspective of the white world in contemporary America happens to be defined by the racially prejudiced disclosure of Negro life.⁷⁸

Although second sight is not inherently harmful, second sight involving a perspective based on prejudice is likely to give members of the outside group a distorted, negative self-image. In this way, the beliefs that a dominant group has about a subordinated one may prevent the latter group from having sufficient empathy toward its own experiences.

So how exactly do the effects of double consciousness play out in the process of political deliberation? Recall from earlier that a set of formal rules for deliberation aimed at equality, fairness, and non-domination does not guarantee these ideals in practice; the influences, hierarchies and power structures of the other spheres of life cannot be sequestered from deliberative practices as though citizens entered into deliberation with blank slates. One particular way in which this issue may appear is with regard to frequency of participation. A central tenet of deliberative theory is that all who wish to participate should have an equal opportunity to do so. However, deliberative theorists often seem to make the mistake of assuming that permission to speak is the only

⁷⁷ W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 9.

⁷⁸ Gooding-Williams, *In the Shadow of Du Bois*, 79.

determining factor of an individual's participation. In reality, there is a host of other social and psychological factors that are involved, including, I argue, double consciousness.

As noted by Iris Marion Young in her discussion of the shortcomings of deliberative theory, "the social power that can prevent people from being equal speakers derives not only from economic dependence or political domination but also from an internalized sense of the right one has to speak or not to speak, and from the devaluation of some people's style of speech and the elevation of others."⁷⁹ The racialized feedback that an individual receives through the loop of double consciousness is likely to lead that individual to believe that, despite formal deliberative rules allowing (or even encouraging) equal participation, her or his input is not welcome, not worth providing, or out-of-line. Along with this effect comes the possibility that valid viewpoints and perspectives that would not be raised by the dominant racial group in a deliberative setting will never surface and receive their due attention. Even if racial minorities do participate, the attention their ideas receive is often dependent upon how often they speak;⁸⁰ therefore, if double consciousness causes these individuals even to believe that they ought to listen more than speak, the deliberative process fails to meet its goal of the consideration of all viewpoints. As far as this racialized sense of right to participation exists, it negatively affects not just the racial minorities who experience it but also the political society as a whole. As Lawrie Balfour observes, Du Bois believed that, through the process of double consciousness, subjugated racial minorities are uniquely fit to

⁷⁹ Young, "Communication and the Other," 122.

⁸⁰ Sanders, "Against Deliberation," 365.

address this type of issue, as they are best able to “observe the distance between the American ideals ... and American practices of systematic racial degradation.”⁸¹

Suppose, however, that the effects of double consciousness do not prevent racial minorities from participating as often as their white counterparts. This supposition still would not mean that double consciousness has no effect upon this deliberative creation of public consciousness. Recall that double consciousness has the effect of skewing one’s perception of oneself, being filtered through the eyes of the dominant racial group. If we continue Walsh’s analogy from Chapter I, such false self-consciousness is likely to skew not only the perspectives that racial minorities have regarding their own identities, but also on the part of the sphere visible to these individuals. Therefore, as the public consciousness as a whole is shaped in part by these skewed, doubly-conscious perspectives, the public as a whole is subject to the effects of double consciousness via the incomplete view that it has of Walsh’s sphere.

Double consciousness can also interact with perceptions of communication styles in political settings. Theorists who have examined the shortcomings of political deliberation have argued that the centrality of reason and logical progression of argumentation to the process is anything but culturally neutral, and that the contributions of certain groups are denigrated due to their more emotional expressions.⁸² However, as I have argued above, it is unlikely that certain social groups are in fact greatly more emotional than others; rather, these groups are simply *perceived* to be more emotional, and therefore irrational in their communication. Formal argumentation is seen as the only acceptable means of communication within a deliberative setting. As other modes of

⁸¹ Lawrie Balfour, “‘A Most Disagreeable Mirror’: Race Consciousness as Double Consciousness,” *Political Theory* 26 (1998): 349.

⁸² See, for example, Young, “Communication and the Other,” 122-125.

communication are deemed illegitimate, the groups who are perceived as too emotional and not rational – often racial minorities and women – receive the message that their contributions and experiences do not meet the requirements for inclusion in deliberation. As a result, this message contributes through double consciousness to a false self-consciousness that discourages full deliberative participation.

In summary, the concept of race itself taints the process of political deliberation through the false self-consciousness possessed by racial minorities that double consciousness brings about. By instilling a notion that one has less right to participate, a belief that one's input is not as desired or legitimate as that of the dominant racial group, or by creating a skewed perspective of oneself that is utilized in the creation of "the public," double consciousness inhibits the incorporation of racial minorities into a model of deliberation that lives up to the ideal proposed by deliberative theorists. Perhaps most importantly within the context of this project, we ought to remember Du Bois' claim that the second sight associated with double consciousness is available only to those who have experienced the necessary hardships. Such a perspective cannot necessarily be easily explained or rationally conveyed. This communicative gap across experiences exposes an important shortcoming of the deliberative process, one that impedes the development of intergroup empathy. In the next section, I will explore more concretely the challenge this type of divergence poses for deliberative theory.

CHAPTER IV

DISTORTED COMMUNICATION AND GAPS IN UNDERSTANDING

So far I have addressed the internal exclusion that results from stereotypes and expectations that those who participate in deliberation have about each other as well as themselves. Those obstacles to the emergence of empathy are both substantial and pervasive, and must be attended to accordingly. There are other challenges to deliberative democracy, however, that arguably run deeper and are more difficult to identify. Instead of interpersonal perceptions, these obstacles function through the divergent understandings that dominant and subordinated groups have about the sociopolitical order. This gap in understanding is where the distorted communication that I discussed in the first chapter presents a challenge that cannot be addressed through traditional deliberation that relies only on argumentation and reason-giving. Through the concepts of public memory, Carole Pateman's theory of the sexual contract,⁸³ and whiteness, I explore in the following sections a small collection of examples of how deliberation can fail in the absence of empathy. I also demonstrate that we must address fundamental differences in our understandings of political issues outside of such a strict conception of deliberation.

Public Memory and Political Deliberation

One topic that has shown up in a great deal of critical race theory literature, at least with regard to the United States, is public memory or public consciousness. Although conceptions and terminology differ slightly from author to author, the basic premise is this: there is a gap between the conception of the political order understood by the dominant racial group and that of subordinated racial groups as a result of, among

⁸³ Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988).

other things, misinformation and dissonant memories of past events and the continuing legacies of these events. These public memories may result from unintentional ignorance and/or intentional forgetting and suppression. Within the context of the United States, this often plays out in reference to slavery or Jim Crow laws. For example, Thomas McCarthy notes that, in contradiction to the actual history of their country, most Americans believe that slavery was a distinctly Southern phenomenon, having little or no part in the history of the rest of the country or the United States as a whole.⁸⁴ Additionally, he writes that whites in the United States fail to recognize that racial bias and racist practices have been an integral part of the country's history, not a deviation from the norm.⁸⁵ Such a crucial misunderstanding helps to obscure the continuing legacy of racist practices, which is wholly visible to subordinated racial groups, from the view of the dominant group. With regard to a slightly different but certainly related phenomenon, Juliet Hooker argues that a public memory that only recognizes certain aspects of the past

has the peculiar effect not of obscuring past collective wrongs per se but of memorializing them in such a way that individuals and political communities are absolved of responsibility for such wrongs. As a result, members of dominant groups do not develop conceptions of political obligation toward those among their fellow citizens who have suffered as a consequence.⁸⁶

It might not be clear at first why the issue of public memory should be an obstacle to proper political deliberation. In fact, one might assert that deliberation is exactly the setting in which the public memories of the dominant and subordinated racial groups might converge, through formal measures guaranteeing equality, non-domination, and so forth. In other words, we might see deliberation as the means to reconcile divergent

⁸⁴ Thomas McCarthy, *Race, Empire, and the Idea of Human Development* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 112. Similarly, although formal discrimination existed in the North, most of our public discussion centers on southern discrimination.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 114. For a more detailed formulation of this argument, see also Charles Mills, *The Racial Contract* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999).

⁸⁶ Juliet Hooker, *Race and the Politics of Solidarity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 111.

understandings of how our beliefs about race structure our political systems. However, dissonant conceptions of the public order in fact preclude the type of communication and shared meaning that are necessary for deliberation that achieves such a goal.

A case study of a particular instance of political deliberation will be helpful in demonstrating this problem. In 2000, Mendelberg and Oleske published a study of a pair of 1995 town hall meetings in New Jersey, which at the time of the article's publication had the fourth largest degree of segregation in public schools in the United States. These meetings were held to address a variety of prospective plans of "regionalization," or the creation of a racially integrated regional school district.⁸⁷ In these particular meetings, the localities in question were Englewood, whose Dwight Morrow High School was predominantly black and Hispanic, and the surrounding towns of Leonia, Tenafly, and Englewood Heights, which all were home to white majorities. In 1965 Englewood Cliffs, which had been too small to support its own high school at the time, signed a contract to send its students to Dwight Morrow in Englewood. However, starting in 1977, Englewood Cliffs and the other majority-white towns in the area put forth efforts to bypass such contracts and sever relationships with Englewood, despite the state board of education's statement that students could obtain a good education at Dwight Morrow. It was in response to these efforts that the state proposed its plans of regionalization.⁸⁸

The first of the two meetings was held in Leonia and was attended almost exclusively by whites from Leonia and other predominantly white towns. Those who spoke at that meeting were exclusively white. Only one speaker was in favor of regionalization, and the audience included fewer than ten blacks. The second meeting,

⁸⁷ Mendelberg and Oleske, "Race and Public Deliberation," 174.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

held in Englewood proper, was significantly more racially diverse. There were whites who spoke both in favor of and against regionalization, as well as blacks and Hispanics who all spoke in favor of the plans. Particularly striking about this meeting is the fact that all of the whites who spoke against regionalization were from Leonia or Tenafly. While the Leonia (or “segregated”) meeting was characterized by consensus around the issue, the Englewood (or “integrated”) meeting seemed to exacerbate pre-existing tensions between the citizens of Englewood and the surrounding towns.⁸⁹ While there are numerous points in this study from which we can examine the difficulties of political deliberation, what I would like to focus on here is the lack of obligation felt by the citizens of Leonia toward their counterparts living in Englewood.

The citizens at the Leonia meeting expressed the fact that they felt no solidarity with, and therefore obligation toward, the residents of Englewood. A prevalent opinion expressed at the meeting in Leonia was that they were afraid of having the preferences of “outsiders” forced upon their community. While the identity of these outsiders was rarely clarified, it was clear that nobody was referring to white students from outside of Leonia, as many such students were actively recruited by the Leonia school system.⁹⁰ Language such as this clearly demonstrates that there was no political solidarity present between the cities of Leonia and Englewood.⁹¹ Additionally, noting the relationships between Leonia and the other overwhelmingly white towns in the area shows us that what solidarity did exist was largely structured along racial lines.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 175-185.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 180-181.

⁹¹ Juliet Hooker defines political solidarity as “the citizenly capacity to act in ways characterized by public-spiritedness or reciprocity” and “the ability of individuals to engage in relations of trust and obligation with fellow members of a political community whom they may see as inherently ‘other’ in some fundamental way.” Hooker, *Race and the Politics of Solidarity*, 21.

Indeed, this racialized solidarity should not be surprising; Juliet Hooker argues that racialized solidarity in fact is and has been the norm in the United States. Most importantly, such racialized solidarity affects the obligations that members of the dominant racial group feel toward minorities.⁹² Many of the speakers made statements along the lines of “I will not allow the quality of my child’s education to be sacrificed to solve someone else’s problem.”⁹³ Such repeated references to the level of education in the city of Englewood as a problem that does not concern, or even affect, the citizens of nearby towns demonstrates that the feelings of obligation between the citizens of towns such as Leonia, Tenafly, and Englewood Heights do not extend to those living in Englewood. Remembering that the populations of the public schools between Englewood and the surrounding towns are heavily stratified by race, we can see that the political and social obligations felt by these citizens are divided along racial lines as well.

Another type of statement made by white speakers at the meeting in Englewood illuminates the role that public memory plays in this racialized solidarity. Similarly to the statements referring to “outsiders” mentioned above, many of the white speakers asserted that “Englewood alone was to blame for its problems, so Englewood should solve its problems on its own.”⁹⁴ Such an assertion implicitly claims that the educational circumstances and opportunities available to the black students in Englewood are solely the result of the practices and decisions of the black community; this demonstrates a lack of understanding of the enduring legacy of not only slavery, but also the discriminatory housing practices and other initiatives of state and local governments that resulted in the concentration of impoverished black Americans in the nation’s cities. To assert that the

⁹² Hooker, *Race and the Politics of Solidarity*, 40-54.

⁹³ Mendelberg and Oleske, “Race and Public Deliberation,” 179.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 182.

(black) citizens of Englewood are solely to blame for the poor performance of Dwight Morrow high school amounts to simple victim-blaming that fails to recognize the true causes of poverty and poor education.⁹⁵

We can clearly see, then, that a (white) public memory in these New Jersey localities that fails to acknowledge the continuing effects of past racist practices results in a lack of political solidarity between the smaller (white) towns and the larger (black) Englewood, in turn precluding feelings of mutual obligation between the groups in question. This phenomenon is problematic for the deliberative process in at least two ways: First, as explained by Walter Baber, in order for deliberation to be effective, both intragroup and intergroup solidarity must exist. This necessity stems from the trust that members of another group will act justly that comes along with political solidarity.⁹⁶ When the intergroup solidarity is absent, however, we see that the ensuing absence of trust prevents a consensus between two groups such as the residents of Englewood and their white neighbors. For example, the black citizens of Englewood “repeatedly indicated their skepticism toward the possibility of compromise” based upon “what they perceived to be the other side’s group-interested, exclusive, and racist arguments.”⁹⁷ While many of the arguments advanced by non-Englewood residents against the proposed schemes of integration undoubtedly exhibited these characteristics, the lack of trust involved with the deliberative process undermined any chance to address the issues at hand.

⁹⁵ McCarthy, *Race, Empire, and the Idea of Human Development*, 120-125.

⁹⁶ Walter F. Baber, “Ecology and democratic governance: toward a deliberative model of environmental politics,” *The Social Science Journal* 41 (2004): 338.

⁹⁷ Mendelberg and Oleske, “Race and Public Deliberation,” 185.

Secondly, divergent public memories operating within the black and white communities of the Englewood area contributed to the preclusion of a shared notion of the common good. Clearly, toward which groups one feels a sense of duty and obligation will shape one's view of what and who should count as part of the common good. Therefore, a racialized political solidarity will work to exempt racial minorities from inclusion in the common good. In the *segregated* meeting held in Leonia, white cities advanced lines of reasoning that were often viewed as arguments for the common good, and these arguments were well-received by the members of the white community. For example, few speakers referenced their own children, instead maintaining focus on the overall well-being of the community.⁹⁸ However, these same arguments were received quite differently at the *integrated* meeting in Englewood; what were previously seen as arguments for the common good were interpreted as racist, divisive, and oriented toward the well-being of a specific (white) group.⁹⁹ Because “what citizens choose to remember about the past and the mode of that remembrance determines the kinds of relations of political obligation they establish with one another in the present,”¹⁰⁰ the public memory that shapes the political conceptions of the white citizens of the areas surrounding Englewood limits their ideas about who ought to count in the calculation of the common good. We can see how this plays out by observing that the segregated white meeting in Leonia was characterized by a consensus regarding the common good, while the integrated Englewood meeting was characterized by hostile disagreement regarding that same concept.

⁹⁸ Mendelberg and Oleske, “Race and Public Deliberation,” 181-182.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 182-185.

¹⁰⁰ Hooker, *Race and the Politics of Solidarity*, 106.

I have shown that a public memory that fails to account for the reality of the continuing harm of racist practices has fatal implications for political deliberation involving diverse racial groups, especially when one of these groups has historically dominated another. Clearly, in order for multiracial deliberative democracy to be effective in a society whose history has involved such domination there must be a reconceptualization of the political order and recognition of past injustices. However, it appears that traditional deliberation fails to bridge the gap between the divergent conceptualizations of this political order. Later on I will explore other methods for potentially closing this divide; for now, I simply wish to demonstrate the challenge posed to deliberative theory by the concept of racialized public memory. Because those situated outside the oppressed racial group lack the understanding of a racialized political order, a traditional model of deliberative democracy lacks the necessary tools to effectively create empathy to address issues involving race. I will return again to the work of Mendelberg and Oleske in a later section addressing the phenomenon of whiteness.

The Sexual Contract and Deliberation

Similarly to most of the other challenges I examine in this project, divergent understandings of the public order can affect many different subordinated groups. Divisions in understanding of the sociopolitical order are not only structured along racial lines, but along gender lines as well. Here, through the work of Carole Pateman's theory of the sexual contract,¹⁰¹ I will explore one way in which this challenge may present itself.

Drawing on and critiquing traditional social contract theory, Pateman explores the consequences of the exclusion of women from the original social contract paired with

¹⁰¹ Pateman, *The Sexual Contract*.

their inclusion in the resulting social order. She explains that social contract theory is, in part, based on a simultaneous denial and assumption about a woman's ability to enter into a contract. While women are – in the work of Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau, for example – deemed unfit for inclusion in agreements regarding the political order, they are characterized as capable of entering into a contract of marriage.¹⁰² Though denied full political rights in the formation of the state, women are seen as fully able to enter into agreement with a husband that surrenders their autonomy in exchange for economic benefits.

This sexual contract is likely to undermine the process of deliberation. Because the claims made in deliberation are often oriented toward notions of justice and fairness, various understandings of societal agreements are vital to the process. Claims about the traditional social contract between the people and their government, for example, are unlikely to be controversial. The validity of claims regarding the sexual contract as theorized by Pateman, however, could easily be evaluated differently by those who have experienced the effects of this contract in different ways. The male citizens who have benefited from the sexual contract are unlikely to see how this contract has and continues to structure our society, wages, and gender relations.

The discussion over welfare reform will help to illustrate this issue.¹⁰³ Let us set aside for now the problem that those who are in most need of welfare – e.g., single mothers – are the least likely to have the resources to devote to deliberative participation. Instead, I wish to focus on societal understandings of gender roles. A vital aspect of the marriage contract is the division of labor between men and women. While husbands

¹⁰² Ibid., 54.

¹⁰³ The debate around welfare, of course, can also shed light on the racial barriers to effective deliberation.

have traditionally worked outside the home to earn the wages necessary to support a family, other tasks such as child care have fallen to their wives. This division of labor is, in fact, a presupposition of the entire capitalist wage system.¹⁰⁴ An important implication of this contract is that the individuals needing government assistance are disproportionately women. Unfortunately, the welfare system does not adequately reflect this reality. As Nancy Fraser explains, “[e]xisting welfare states are premised on assumptions about gender that are increasingly out of phase with many people’s lives and self-understandings.”¹⁰⁵ While the gender order of early capitalism was centered on the male head of the household earning a family wage that was sufficient to support his family, the economic roles played by women have changed dramatically. With the entrance of women into the workplace and an increasing rate of single-mother households, this antiquated description no longer characterizes the conditions of our society. However, the welfare state is still in many ways “built on assumptions of male-headed families” and is “no longer suited to providing [economic] protection.”¹⁰⁶

This reality raises the question of how to appropriately restructure welfare systems – not simply specific proposals, but also the principles upon which a new system ought to be based. Rejecting both conservative and neoliberal welfare reform proposals, Fraser asserts that an appropriate welfare structure for a postindustrial world must be premised on gender equity. Among her conditions for true gender equity is what she refers to as equality of respect. While tasks historically performed by women have not been understood as comparable to the “bread-winning” work performed by their male

¹⁰⁴ Pateman, *The Sexual Contract*, 131.

¹⁰⁵ Nancy Fraser, “Gender Equity and the Welfare State: A Postindustrial Thought Experiment,” in Seyla Benhabib, ed., *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 218.

¹⁰⁶ Fraser, “Gender Equity and the Welfare State,” 219.

counterparts, Fraser calls for the recognition of the work such as child care that falls predominantly to women to perform. At the same time, Fraser emphasizes the importance of avoiding any androcentric welfare reforms. Gender equity, she argues, requires not only the recognition of women's contributions and the full recognition of their personhood, but also the assurance that their equal standing is not premised on the adoption of masculinist norms and institutions. Such a condition will not necessarily result from bringing more women into the workforce or allocating funds to single working mothers. This type of reform instead requires the revaluation of traits and practices, as well as a change in the way both men and women understand gender, work, and citizenship.¹⁰⁷

This is where the true difficulty for deliberative democracy enters the picture. If a just reformulation of the welfare state depends upon a fundamentally different understanding of what it means to work – to be an active and full participant in the maintenance and development of our society – then traditional deliberation is an inadequate tool for the project. Argumentation is sure to be an acceptable means of communicating the statistics regarding welfare and their implications, the history of welfare laws, and even the need for some sort of systemic reformulation. Deliberative participants are likely to find it difficult, however, to fundamentally alter other participants' understanding of what it means to work. As I have shown in the previous section, this type of communication has difficulty fostering empathy and is therefore not well-suited to challenging and reshaping understandings of the political and social order. The possibility of implementing welfare reform that ensures gender equity depends in part on challenging a particular conception of what it means to work. This conception derives

¹⁰⁷ Fraser, "Gender Equity and the Welfare State," 224-225.

from a distinctly masculine perspective and dominates our political discourse. Therefore, such a project must be based upon an alternate perspective that can convey the reality of the many ways in which one can work and provide necessary contributions to the family and society without earning wages. The town meetings recounted by Mendelberg and Oleske, however, demonstrate the difficulty of challenging a dominant understanding through deliberation alone. The experiences of those who have found the sexual contract to work against them – primarily but not exclusively women – must be taken into consideration, but the perspective that arises from such experiences is not easily conveyed.

This issue also serves as a powerful illustration of the dangers of internal exclusion. Along with discouraging certain styles of communication and assuming informal leadership positions, members of dominant social groups may also unwittingly exclude the perspectives or proposals of other groups. In other words, quantitatively equal participation is not necessarily sufficient for true equality in deliberation. This measurement is often employed to test for deliberative equality; empirical researchers tend to use methods such as examining the number or proportion of total speech acts or per social group.¹⁰⁸ While it has certain merits, this type of measurement fails to take into consideration the responsiveness of a deliberative body as a whole to speech acts that challenge dominant understandings. Granted, this is a considerably more difficult empirical task. The fact remains, though, that no amount of participation by a subordinated group within the paradigm set by the understanding of a dominant group will effectively convey certain needs. More concretely, deliberation regarding welfare

¹⁰⁸ See, for example, Christopher F. Karpowitz, Tali Mendelberg, and Lee Shaker, “Gender Inequality in Deliberative Participation,” *American Political Science Review* 106 (2012): 533-547.

reforms that fails to challenge a masculinist understanding of work will not effectively address the needs of single mothers, no matter how many of them have a chance to speak.

Whiteness

In a previous section, I discussed the problems posed by the double consciousness of racial minorities. In order to fully understand the difficulty of bridging experiential gaps in political understanding, I believe it will be useful to discuss the consciousness of the dominant (white) group separately here.¹⁰⁹ One of the greatest obstacles to political deliberation that approaches the ideals of deliberative theory is the fact that the dominant racial group often does not recognize the racialized nature of the political order, which I discussed earlier. American whites often fail to realize that the society in which they live continues to be characterized by racially-determined lines of inclusion and exclusion.¹¹⁰ The failure to recognize this fact precludes the empathy and shared meaning that is necessary for political deliberation to achieve its goals.

We can see how this problem manifests by revisiting the town hall meetings held in Leonia and Englewood. At the segregated meeting held in Leonia, the speakers based their arguments against the proposed plans of integration on ostensibly non-racial premises about issues such as *outsiders*, *quality of education*, and *neighborhood schools*. Within the context of a meeting that included only white speakers from outside of Englewood, these arguments were accepted by all as neutral and oriented toward the common good, both necessary requirements for good deliberation. However, the same routes of argumentation were rejected as thinly-veiled racism at the integrated meeting that took place in Englewood. In a perfect summary of this sentiment, the final speaker at

¹⁰⁹ In this section, I draw mainly from literature within the critical race theory tradition. The concepts, however, are directly applicable to men and other privileged groups.

¹¹⁰ Hooker, *Race and the Politics of Solidarity*, 50-52.

that meeting stated that the white opponents of state-led integration were nothing but “a loud mob led by fear and ignorance rather than reason and common sense.”¹¹¹

Mendelberg and Oleske argue that the interpretation of the arguments by the black citizens of Englewood was accurate, and I certainly do not intend to disagree with them. What is important to emphasize is that, to the white citizens of the surrounding towns, their arguments were fair and sound – not based upon race at all, but instead upon promoting the public good of their society. We can clearly see here the effects of systematically distorted communication. As they have not experienced the ways in which these type of arguments negatively affect groups other than their own, the white citizens do not understand that their claims to fairness and justice in fact carried unfair and unjust consequences. Because of their inability to recognize the whiteness that characterized their arguments and the racialized structure of society at large, these individuals failed to see how intrinsically linked to race their arguments about topics such as freedom from outside influence actually were. In other words, the language used by the white speakers had two completely different meanings to the different racial groups, preventing any effective deliberation from taking place. As Mendelberg and Oleske note, because “the positive effects of deliberation rest on the ability of the opposing sides to communicate about their disagreement,” “[w]hen the meaning of speech is contested, deliberation is unlikely to be reasoned or consensual.”¹¹² This barrier of the meaning behind the language used in deliberation will remain in multiracial deliberative settings, I argue, until white citizens are able and willing to fully recognize their whiteness.

¹¹¹ Mendelberg and Oleske, “Race and Public Deliberation,” 185.

¹¹² Ibid., 186.

Some argue that the contested meaning of language and disputed validity of arguments can be addressed through the deliberative process itself. For example, Seyla Benhabib argues that her model of deliberative democracy allows for such challenges against “misuses and abuses” of argumentation and language “to be challenged at a second, metalevel of discourse.”¹¹³ While this is certainly desirable as an ideal of deliberation, scenarios such as the meeting in Englewood reveal the futility of such meta-deliberation under certain circumstances. Divergent beliefs held by the black and white citizens of the area about how their political society is structured proved to be an insurmountable obstacle; the anger expressed along with the African American citizens’ expression of not accepting the legitimacy of the arguments of their white counterparts impeded this process, and the failure of the white citizens to recognize their whiteness prevented them from seeing how their argumentation violated the conditions for proper, successful deliberation. This violation resulted not from any malicious intent on the part of the participants, but rather from the way in which the divergent perspectives of the groups involved prevented a shared meaning of the definition of the problem at hand.

This is also a helpful illustration of how negative or overtly exclusive intentions are not necessary for deliberation to fall short of its ideals. In Chapter I, I stated that one purpose of this project is to explore the ways in which certain perspectives are marginalized in deliberation even in the presence of inclusive intentions. It is not difficult to see how overt racism would undermine the deliberative process. However, the effects of blind privilege may undermine deliberation even without such attitudes. While the white citizens of Leonia, Tenafly, and Englewood Heights were certainly not staunch advocates of radical racial justice, they did not appear to be white supremacists

¹¹³ Seyla Benhabib, “Toward a Deliberative Model of Democratic Legitimacy,” 72.

either. Rather, these citizens were simply concerned with the common good of what they perceived to be their community, and the satisfaction of obligations to those whom they believed obligations were owed.

Although both occur in the absence of malicious intentions, the effects of privilege function in a manner distinct from stereotypes. Whereas stereotypes undermine deliberation by coloring one's perception of an argument through the characteristics of the speaker, the privilege associated with whiteness undermines deliberation by creating a barrier to seeing how the social order is actually structured along lines that conform to those same characteristics. Instead of stereotypes distorting perceptions of others' arguments, this phenomenon thwarts deliberation through gaps in understanding created by different experiences belonging to different racial groups. In the former scenario, those within the dominant group question the validity of an argument based on a certain set of preconceptions about an individual, while in the latter the same argument is contested due to a bias that is the result of a position of privilege. It is because of both of these effects that I argue that the contestation of the validity of arguments, at least when it comes to issues such as racialized solidarity, must take place outside of the strict bounds of deliberation; within these confines, it is difficult to foster the deliberation necessary to overcome these challenges. In the final chapter of this project I will suggest that a less rigid conceptualization of deliberative democracy may help us to overcome the obstacles presented here.

CHAPTER V

REASON, EMOTION, AND THE THEATRE OF THE OPPRESSED

In the previous chapters, I have discussed a number of ways in which marginalized social groups may find themselves excluded in various ways from full membership in a deliberative body. Such exclusion, I have argued, may manifest despite the good intentions of deliberative participants and results in part from the difficulty of communicating experiences of oppression through deliberation. This communication depends on empathy, which traditional deliberation has difficulty creating. However, these problems are largely dependent on a traditional conception of deliberation that discourages displays of emotion as a means of communication. One avenue toward resolving this dilemma – the one that I shall explore here – is to put into question the opposition between reason and emotion that characterizes traditional deliberation. If emotion is given a proper place in deliberation, perhaps such exclusion can be tempered, if not avoided altogether. In this final chapter, I will review a series of arguments for blurring the line between reason and emotion, outline prior work that highlights the potential for emotional expression to make political communication more inclusive, and argue that we ought to consider Boal's forum theater as a form of political discussion that both meets the ideals of deliberative democracy and effectively uses emotion to give voice to marginalized groups.

Deliberation and Emotion

In Chapter I, I briefly presented the traditional deliberative opposition to the use of emotional communication such as rhetoric. This opposition has its roots in a Kantian focus on the autonomy of the subject and sees emotion as a force directly opposed to

reason. Contrary to reason, this opposition states, rhetoric and emotion detract from public knowledge and instead use illusion to persuade the public to adopt opinions and beliefs that they would not adopt when presented only with sound arguments. In this section of my project, I will not only challenge the notion that emotion is incompatible with deliberation, but also the sharp distinction between reason and emotion that we often take for granted.

This aspect of my project is by no means unique; several theorists have already confronted the notion that emotion should be left out of our political discussions. Some argue that forms of political communication that allow for greater emotional expression can create a more inclusive public dialogue. This is particularly true with regard to marginalized or silenced groups, such as the examples that I discussed in the previous two chapters. “Where we lack shared understandings in crucial respects,” writes Iris Marion Young, “sometimes forms of communication other than argument can speak across our differences to promote understanding.”¹¹⁴ If traditional deliberation cannot produce the empathy that is necessary to overcome gaps in understanding between subordinated and dominant groups, perhaps communication that incorporates emotion can perform this task instead.

It is largely in the connection between emotion and our political environment that this communicative value resides. Drawing on the work of Arlie Hochschild, Kathy Ferguson explains that our emotions do not stand in opposition to our reason, because both provide us with a certain type of information – “they are both ways in which we

¹¹⁴ Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*, 72.

know the world.”¹¹⁵ While reason provides us with facts and understandings of how the world around us works, emotions allow us to reflect on and evaluate this information. The prejudice against emotion, Ferguson argues, is more a reflection of masculine fears of losing control than of a universal characteristic of reason.¹¹⁶ In reality, our passions can tell us just as much as our capacity for reason. Because deliberative theory has traditionally favored reason over emotion, however, my goal in this section is to challenge this attitude in order to justify the use of theater as deliberation.

Most importantly, emotion is also crucial for developing empathy, a characteristic of communication that crosses perspectives that I discussed in the first chapter. In their critique of bounded rationality in the workplace, Dennis Mumby and Linda Putnam argue that emotion serves not only as a means to information, but also as a way of creating a more cohesive community. Because emotions are “embedded in intersubjectivity ... [a]s individuals share emotional experiences, their initial sense of anonymity gives way to feelings of community through the development of mutual affection, cohesion, and coherence of purpose.”¹¹⁷ Through emotion, interlocutors can see each other not only as reason-givers, but as fellow components of an interconnected social web. Admittedly, we should be skeptical of the idea that the degree of closeness and cohesion we might find in a work environment can be easily replicated in society as a whole. Nonetheless, we should not deny the utility of emotion in creating bonds between citizens.

¹¹⁵ Kathy E. Ferguson, *The Feminist Case Against Bureaucracy* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984), 199.

¹¹⁶ Ibid. We might apply this idea to dominant groups in general, not just to the domination of women by men.

¹¹⁷ Dennis K. Mumby and Linda L. Putnam, “The Politics of Emotion: A Feminist Reading of Bounded Rationality,” *The Academy of Management Review* 17 (1992): 478.

It is, of course, important to recognize that appeals to emotion in political communication can be harmful as well as beneficial to the democratic process. Claims that rely on fear, prejudice, or anger obviously violate the norms not only of deliberation but of most other democratic theory as well. However, emotion need not serve this purpose. A deliberative participant may just as easily use calm and collected argumentation motivated by fear or prejudice to advance their aims. A deliberative theorist would likely argue here that such a maneuver violates the norms of deliberation, in that such a speaker relies not on reasons acceptable to all, but deceit instead. This assertion is absolutely true, and supports my overall claim. Just as one may use argumentation for either deliberative or non-deliberative purposes, so also one may utilize emotion in this way. Appeals to emotion that are meant to mislead other participants should not be evaluated equally to attempts to convey information that is not easily conveyed through other means. Various forms of communication may be used productively or counter-productively; it is the intention behind the method that makes the true difference.

In addition to the theoretical arguments I have outlined so far, there is a considerable amount of scientific evidence to support the inclusion of emotion in political dialogue. A thorough review of this literature would certainly be out of place here; however, it is important to recognize the main thrust of this research. Perhaps the most influential writer on this topic is Antonio Damasio. In his work on the role of emotion on human behavior and decision-making, he lays out what he refers to as the *somatic marker hypothesis*. Damasio explains that in the “high reason” view of decision-making – the one favored by those such as Kant and Descartes – we use nothing but logical inferences

and considered alternatives to arrive at a rational decision.¹¹⁸ However, Damasio argues, if this were the only pathway to a decision then one would at best take a long time to reach a decision, and at worst would never be able to make an informed decision at all. It is not an easy task, he explains, to hold in one's head all of the logical turns and situational comparisons necessary to make a decision through this type of reason alone.¹¹⁹

Fortunately, Damasio writes that we also have access to another means of making decisions. In order to help us keep track of all of the information we must process in a complex decision-making process the autonomic nervous system in the human body uses feelings to produce somatic markers, or physical changes, such as an uncomfortable feeling in one's stomach. These markers aid our limited cognitive capacity by drawing clear boundaries in the brain between acceptable and unacceptable outcomes, so that the conscious brain need not constantly hold every piece of information or possible permutation of argumentation. Damasio summarizes this process neatly:

In short, *somatic markers are a special instance of feelings generated from secondary emotions*. Those emotions and feelings *have been connected, by learning, to predicted future outcomes of certain scenarios*. When a negative somatic marker is juxtaposed to a particular future outcome the combination functions as an alarm bell. When a positive somatic marker is juxtaposed instead, it becomes a beacon of incentive.¹²⁰

Damasio also takes care to explain that emotional somatic markers are not usually sufficient on their own for proper decision making. There is still a valuable role for deductive reasoning and logic to play in the process. "Somatic markers," he writes, "do not deliberate for us. They assist the deliberation by highlighting some options (either

¹¹⁸ Antonio Damasio, *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (New York: Avon, 1994), 171.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 172.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 174.

dangerous or favorable) and eliminating them rapidly from subsequent consideration.”¹²¹
In other words, the involuntary emotional processes that occur in the brain are but one component of the total decision-making process.

I believe there are two related but distinct points to pull from Damasio’s research. First, Damasio makes clear that our emotionality is a valuable resource for making informed decisions. However, this resource is not equally available to all persons for all issues. The somatic markers that indicate a negative outcome in reasoning or deliberation are necessarily based upon prior life experiences. As a result, the deep emotional effects of oppression felt by certain social groups will lead to instinctive responses during deliberation that may seem out of touch or unreasonable to those who do not have these same markers in place. This process is likely to lead to a further denigration of the emotionality these groups are perceived by the dominant group to embody, and to reinforce their outsider statuses when the inclusion of emotion is disparaged.

Second, Damasio’s research clearly demonstrates that our emotions are an inescapable reality for deliberation. Aside from any claims regarding the desirability of emotion as part of the deliberative process, we must recognize that our emotional responses to different ideas and proposals are not an option that we may choose not to exercise. As our neurological system is designed to use emotions to help us process information, attempts to separate emotionality from deliberation are destined to fail. Additionally, for those whose somatic markers help them to navigate the deliberative process, receiving the message that this resource is not a valid tool is likely to discourage full participation and further reinforce their status as second-class participants. In this

¹²¹ Ibid., 174.

way, the question becomes not so much whether we ought to include emotion in our deliberation, but whether we wish to resist it or utilize and embrace it.

I would like to make one final note on the importance of actively including emotion in the deliberative process before proceeding. As I have mentioned above, the privileging of reason over emotion has been criticized as the denigration of the feminine in comparison to the masculine. Such opposition is said to perpetuate a gendered value system. However, although the theorists who advocate a positive role for emotion in political communication tend to write from within a broadly feminist tradition, it is important to note that the implications of their ideas are not limited to women or gender politics. The acceptance of emotion in deliberative democracy is important for the inclusion of racial minorities and other marginalized groups as well. The denigration of emotion is not simply a rejection of femininity (although this is often a strong component); it is a rejection of otherness and the perspectives of those who fall outside the boundaries of the dominant social groups. To denounce emotional expression in public deliberation is to disadvantage those groups whose cultures and habits whose emotionality is seen as opposed to the use of reason.

Communicative Reforms

Previous writers have not only critiqued the denigration of emotion in deliberation – some have also offered their own ideas on how to improve communication between marginalized groups and their dominant counterparts. There are two authors that I would like to discuss in this regard. First, motivated by her belief that American democracy is not yet ready to adopt deliberation as a standard, Lynn Sanders writes that:

[a]n alternative to deliberation as a model for democratic politics has to begin by trying to rule out the problems that the critique of deliberation reveals. That is,

the alternative should avoid stated or implicit requirements that talk be only rational and moderate, or that the only perspectives worth attending to are perspectives that illuminate what is common.¹²²

In other words, Sanders seeks to find through alternate modes of communication a way to give voice to those social groups who can be silenced or whose perspectives can be omitted through traditional deliberation.

To achieve this goal, Sanders looks to a model of communication that also has considerable roots in American history. Giving testimony, she writes, “has important precedents in American politics, particularly in African American politics and churches.”¹²³ Drawing from the traditions of one of the most subjugated social groups in American history is certainly a positive step toward creating more inclusive conditions for political communication. More importantly, however, testimony puts the focus on perspectives that do not generally receive adequate attention. Instead of the traditional deliberative focus on what is common or acceptable to all, testimony gives one individual or group an opportunity to add their perspective to the public conversation. This is particularly important where different social groups have not only divergent opinions, but also fundamental differences in the ways that they conceptualize the public order.¹²⁴ Of course, the use of testimony in no way rules out the need for or the benefit from more traditional deliberation. Testimony may provide a view into the perspective of another group that is necessary for successful deliberation that follows. Testimony should not, however, be left out of the formal proceedings of a deliberative body; without a designated opportunity for any group to voice its experiences, deliberation runs the risk of excluding these people.

¹²² Sanders, “Against Deliberation,” 370.

¹²³ Ibid., 370.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 371-372.

Another prominent figure in this conversation, Iris Marion Young, advocates for much of the same type of reforms that Sanders does. However, Young expands her discussion of these reforms a bit more than Sanders, providing a detailed explanation of the three practices she believes are vital to inclusive public discourse: greeting, rhetoric, and narrative. Each of these contributes to Young's theory of communicative – as opposed to deliberative – democracy. I will discuss each of these here, as it is Young who most strongly influences my interpretation of forum theater in the following section. First, Young views a stage in political dialogue in which the participants greet and acknowledge one another as vital to the success of the rest of the process. It is in this moment in everyday dialogue, she argues, that each participant affirms her relationship with the others, while at the same time making clear her distance and her particularity. Effective political communication should be similarly based upon the norms of everyday communicative ethics; proper greeting acknowledges the equality of all speakers and helps to establish the trust necessary to engage in constructive dialogue.¹²⁵ While some have written about recognition as laudable goal of political communication, Young argues that it is in fact a condition that is necessary to establish prior to the substantive communication itself.¹²⁶

Second, Young advocates the use of rhetorical strategies in political dialogue. This point is similar to much of what I have discussed above; Young sees a great advantage to including emotional expression and other styles of communication that are not traditionally accepted in deliberative theory in order to give voice to marginalized groups. She also, however, makes an important claim regarding rhetoric and the

¹²⁵ Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*, 57-60.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 61-62.

audience toward whom it is directed. Rhetorical devices such as emotion, visual media, irony, and metaphor allow the speaker to tailor her communication to a specific audience. Gone from this picture of political dialogue are the disembodied, gender-less, and race-less participants. Instead, the speaker can attend carefully to the particular history, idioms, and assumptions of the audience in a way that she cannot through argumentation alone.¹²⁷

Importantly, rhetorical moves also help bring issues to the political agenda that might not be given proper attention otherwise. This mechanism for inclusion is yet another example of the need for emotion in political communication. Young explains that impassioned speech can be particularly important in drawing attention to claims made by minority or marginalized groups.¹²⁸ Emotional expression can lead participants to reconsider the appropriate weight of an issue or argument and develop empathy without any new premises or rationale being advanced. If we recall Bohman's argument for a baseline ability to raise topics for public discussion, we can recognize that this aspect of rhetoric is a crucial component of bringing oppressed groups and their claims into the public conversation. Finally, rhetoric assists in the move from reason to judgment. As discussed above, Damasio has demonstrated a neurological basis for the need for emotion in decision-making. Rhetoric can help to provide such a push toward making political determinations. In the process of communication, participants may be presented with multiple incompatible and yet reasonable arguments. "When it is possible to accept several claims on rational grounds," argues Young, "rhetoric provides

¹²⁷ Ibid., 65.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 66-67.

contextual and motivational grounds for choosing between rationally acceptable positions.”¹²⁹

Third, Young argues for the use of narrative alongside other forms of political communication. This practice is very similar to Sanders’ testimony that I discussed above. Also mentioned above, in situations where the perspective of the dominant group effectively excludes alternate perspectives from consideration, narrative can help to foster understanding between groups with divergent perspectives. Young provides a detailed description of how this practice can achieve such a goal. First, Young argues that a social group that suffers a wrong often lacks the language to express their experience within the prevailing discourse. Storytelling provides the means necessary to relate this kind of experience to other groups.¹³⁰ This practice allows oppressed groups to challenge the language used in the dominant discourse to describe their experiences. Second, narrative helps us to understand the experiences of individuals situated in social positions different from our own. What argumentation lacks and storytelling provides is the acceptance and encouragement of conveying emotional and social realities to other individuals or groups. Moreover, narrative provides the opportunity to challenge and correct preconceptions and biases – a process necessary for effective communication.¹³¹ Finally, storytelling enlarges our total social knowledge. “Stories not only relate the experiences of the protagonists,” Young writes, “but also present a particular interpretation of their relationships with others.”¹³² Listeners not only learn about the experiences of the speakers, they also have the opportunity to develop their understandings of their own

¹²⁹ Ibid., 70.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 72.

¹³¹ Ibid., 73-74.

¹³² Ibid., 76.

places in society and how they are perceived by other social groups. In other words, narrative helps to provide a more complete picture of Walsh's metaphorical sphere.

While Sanders and Young have argued for the inclusion of emotion, others have suggested that perhaps our political communication – even deliberation – already and inevitably relies on emotion. The validity of such an assertion might suggest that the types of reforms offered by Young and Sanders are unnecessary, as the goals that are the reasons for their implementation can be satisfied through deliberation. Cheryl Hall, for example, argues that we ought to do away with the reason/passion dichotomy altogether.¹³³ In an argument similar to Damasio's, Hall explains that passion is inherently involved in making political choices. Because “the very process of sorting through options and making judgments about how to proceed draws on the capacity for passion,” we cannot expect to separate our emotions from political processes such as deliberation.¹³⁴ Rather than understanding rhetoric and emotion as auxiliaries to argumentation, she asserts, we ought to integrate these ideas into our conceptions of reason and deliberation. According to Hall, the way in which Sanders and Young cast their arguments about testimony and narrative is not only unnecessary, but also counterproductive in that they reinforce a false dichotomy that lends itself to the denigration of emotion.¹³⁵

Like the other authors above, Hall has good reason to question the sharp lines between reason and emotion. However, I argue that she fails to recognize the danger in assuming that traditional deliberation provides an appropriate environment for emotion to

¹³³ For the purposes of this discussion, I will use passion and emotion interchangeably.

¹³⁴ Cheryl Hall, “Recognizing the Passion in Deliberation: Toward a More Democratic Theory of Deliberative Democracy,” *Hypatia* 22 (2007): 90.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 85-86.

be fully utilized. In particular, the ability of emotion to foster empathy and provide understanding across perspectives seems stifled in such a setting. Although passion inevitably enters our decision-making processes, when the norm in deliberation is to discourage the outward expression of emotion participants from marginalized groups may have a difficult time adding their voices to the public conversation.

Despite my criticism of Hall's argument, I do believe that her work has, in a certain respect, pointed deliberative theory in the right direction. By questioning the dominant conception of deliberation, Hall opens the door to a wide range of possibilities. For the remainder of this project, I will take this as an opportunity to attempt to work the benefits of rhetoric and narrative into a more expansive understanding of deliberation. While the suggestions Young and Sanders offer effectively address many of the concerns that I have raised thus far in this project, the practices they advocate lack the intersubjectivity offered by deliberation. In contrast to testimony or storytelling, the substantive exchanges that take place in deliberative settings help to foster a sense of cooperation and interconnectedness. In the following section, I will explore Boal's forum theater and simultaneous dramaturgy as methods of political communication that improve the empathetic benefits of the practices outlined by Young by retaining the higher level of interaction between participants found in deliberation.

Theatre of the Oppressed as Deliberation

There is a type of communication that has been seldom engaged by theories of deliberation and political communication, and that can improve our understanding of how deliberation ought to work. Boal's "simultaneous dramaturgy" and "forum theater," discussed in his works *Theatre of the Oppressed* and *Legislative Theatre*, offer an

alternative to strict argumentation and reason-giving that I argue fills a role that no aspect of deliberative theory has yet filled. While Boal discusses a variety of theatrical methods that may be employed by an oppressed group, I will focus on simultaneous dramaturgy and forum theater because of their engagement with both deliberative concepts and the communicative flexibility that Young and Sanders advocate.

As a native of Rio de Janeiro, Boal developed his philosophy and theatrical methods within the context of extreme poverty, widespread violence, and extensive organized crime and police corruption.¹³⁶ One can easily see the influence of these circumstances in the resulting approach that Boal takes toward politics. Faced with a sociopolitical environment that was totally unresponsive to its poorest citizens, he developed a system to give voice to those who experience constant oppression. Although one might argue that methods developed in response to such extreme circumstances are unnecessary in a more developed democracy such as the United States, this would be to ignore the similarities between the two situations. Because there are still populations within more developed democracies whose voices are shut out of the public conversation, the differences are of degree, not kind.

There are two types of theater developed by Boal that we ought to include within a broad conception of deliberation.¹³⁷ In simultaneous dramaturgy, a group that has identified a problem performs a short skit, either from a pre-prepared script or improvised according to the topic at hand. The actors proceed up until the point where the problem comes to a head. Here, the audience is asked to offer solutions to the problem, which are

¹³⁶ Boal, *Legislative Theatre*, 17-30.

¹³⁷ I offer here only a cursory description of these methods, which are themselves only a portion of Boal's body of work. For more information, see Augusto Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed*, *Legislative Theatre*, *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*, and *Rainbow of Desire: The Boal Method of Theatre and Therapy*.

played out in turn by the actors, subject to intervention and correction by the audience when they believe the actors are committing mistakes or fallacies. Each of these possible solutions is discussed theatrically – through both verbal and nonverbal elements – on stage, as well as by the audience members.¹³⁸ This form of theater begins to blur the distinction between actor and spectator. While the spectators remain separated from the actors, a line of communication is opened that does not exist in traditional theater. Moreover, Boal explains that the object interpreted by the actor changes, saying that “[t]he actor ceases to interpret the individual and starts to interpret the group.”¹³⁹ In this process the stage transforms from a medium in which the perspective of one writer is disseminated to an audience to one in which the actors interpret the collective voice of all who choose to participate.

The interactive nature of simultaneous dramaturgy is an important step in exploring new means of communication between actors and spectators. In forum theater, Boal further blurs the lines between actors and spectators. Beginning in a similar manner to simultaneous dramaturgy, the actors perform a short skit, including a problem and a solution decided on by the actors either in real time or prior to the performance. Upon conclusion of the skit, the audience members are asked whether or not they agree with the solution. When a portion of the audience inevitably disagrees, the skit is performed once again. However, in this next performance any member of the audience who wishes to participate is given the opportunity to replace one of the actors. This individual then takes on the role acted out by the previous actor, stepping into her new role as a “spect-

¹³⁸ Augusto Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed*, trans. Charles McBride, Maria-Odilia Leal McBride, and Emily Fryer (London: Pluto Press, 2008), 109.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 112.

actor.”¹⁴⁰ One is limited, though, in the changes one can make to the scene; the new actor must carry out the same activities that were being performed by her or his character, and cannot arbitrarily change the character’s circumstances.¹⁴¹ Here, we can see the complete demolition of the actor/spectator divide. The roles of the audience member, the writer, and the actor are confused to the point that one-dimensional storytelling is replaced with an exchange of ideas and perspectives through language, motion, and expression.

In both of these forms of theater, interaction between the audience or spect-actors and the original actors is facilitated by an individual whom Boal refers to as the Joker. The Joker does not add another voice to the discussion on stage. Rather, he or she ensures the conditions for dialogue between the actors and the spect-actors, working to create the reality in which those on stage will function.¹⁴² As I will discuss later on, this function is vital to Boal’s methods, as the conditions for productive deliberation do not necessarily arise on their own in such a setting.

Many groups have employed Boal’s methods in their communities, and academicians of various disciplines have started to include his ideas in their studies. However, little or no political theory has explored the potential for the Theatre of the Oppressed to address the shortcomings of traditional deliberation. In fact, the Theatre of the Oppressed has the potential to tackle many of the same problems that are addressed by Young’s communicative democracy. First, the use of interactive theater as political communication provides opportunities to use rhetoric in a way that highlights the experiences of a particular social group. Because the individuals who design the scenes

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., xxi. This is the term Boal uses for the audience member who takes a place on the stage, creating an opportunity for a truly new form of theater.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 117.

¹⁴² Ibid., 159.

have control over the material that the audience will engage after the performance, they have an opportunity to focus the attention of all involved on their particular understanding of a social problem. This focus is a necessary feature when the goal is the development of empathy in order to include a previously ignored perspective.

Simultaneous dramaturgy and forum theater not only incorporate the type of communication necessary to convey alternate perspectives, but may also improve upon this process as well. While narrative and storytelling provide an opportunity to focus on the experiences of oppressed groups, the dominant group will not necessarily respond in the way that Young and Sanders desire. As Walsh points out, there is no guarantee that audience members will recognize the validity of these alternate viewpoints; they might experience a narrative as threats to their way of life or attacks on their beliefs instead of an invitation to broaden their perspectives. These individuals may “attempt to reconcile it with dominant modes of understanding,” not accept it as part of developing a new understanding.¹⁴³ Such a reception would hardly work to reduce internal exclusion.

Boal’s methods, however, may help to overcome this obstacle. Because the audience members are encouraged to become active participants in the scenes unfolding on stage, a narrative is less likely to be experienced as an attack and more likely to be approached as a collective undertaking. This difference is not as much a result of any altered motive on the part of the audience as it is a new requirement of those who are crafting the scene to be played out on stage. When simply presenting a narrative, one need not consider too strongly the way in which their message will be received. When using the methods such as forum theater, however, Boal explains that:

¹⁴³ Walsh, *Talking About Race*, 144.

[I]t is important that the will exercised by the Protagonist – the character who will be replaced in the forum by the spect-actor – is a desire which the intervening spect-actors feel and will be ready to exert themselves to achieve since they must enter into sym-pathetic relationship with him or her (they must share the same emotions, desires, and ideas).¹⁴⁴

Instead of narrating a perspective to an audience – a method that could easily come across as accusatory when dealing with difficult issues such as race and gender – the actors must invite the spect-actors to participate in the reshaping of their own understandings. This form of interaction is certainly not necessary for the type of everyday topics that often come up for deliberation. When divergent understandings of society preclude a shared definition of the problem at hand, however, these perspectives must be presented in a way that best encourages those in the dominant group to fully consider their validity.

It is likely that I have not yet fully convinced my reader that we ought to understand simultaneous dramaturgy and forum theater as properly deliberative practices. If we remember that deliberation is premised on the exchange of reasons acceptable to all, however, then the discussion above of blurring the lines between reason and emotion ought to open the door for a broader understanding of what should count as deliberation. Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson – two theorists situated squarely within mainstream deliberative theory – in fact come close to making a case for a more expansive conception of deliberation. In a point of concurrence with their critics, they state that rhetoric and emotion are valid and important means of political communication, and that they need not always stand in opposition to each other.¹⁴⁵ While this certainly goes a long way toward a more inclusive theory of deliberation, Gutmann and Thompson

¹⁴⁴ Boal, *Legislative Theatre*, 47.

¹⁴⁵ Gutmann and Thompson, *Why Deliberative Democracy?*, 50-51.

still fail to recognize that their claim leads logically to the inclusion of other forms of communication within a concept of deliberation. They write that when alternate forms of politics “are necessary to achieve deliberative ends, deliberative theory consistently suspends its requirements for deliberation.”¹⁴⁶ However, I argue that we need not consider all other forms of communication besides reason-giving to be non-deliberative.

Similarly, Bohman writes that tactics such as irony, metaphor, and narrative are sometimes necessary when the “capacity for perspective-taking” is obstructed in deliberation.¹⁴⁷ Bohman sees these methods as non-deliberative means to restore deliberative conditions. Instead of arguing that we must suspend deliberative requirements at times, however, we ought to understand forms of communication such as simultaneous dramaturgy and forum theater to be truly deliberative in nature.

In support of this argument, I show here that the practice of forum theater satisfies each of Gutmann and Thompson’s four characteristics of deliberative democracy outlined in the first chapter. First, simultaneous dramaturgy and forum theater embody the public exchange of reason that is the cornerstone of deliberative theory. While these methods do not rely on the argumentation that has traditionally characterized deliberation, the discussion above should provide a sufficient foundation for the claim that deliberating on stage is no less rational than deliberating across a table. This type of community theater is by no means a substitute for the type of straightforward deliberation that is most often associated with the term; however, it can certainly be a valuable addition to the means by which citizens exchange information and judgments about that information.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 51.

¹⁴⁷ Bohman, *Public Deliberation*, 205.

Secondly, including forum theater in the scope of deliberation enhances the qualities of publicity and accessibility that are vital to democratic legitimacy. Simultaneous dramaturgy and forum theater, after all, are designed for implementation in public spaces, not behind closed doors. More importantly, these methods add to options available for participants to convey information and perspective. Limiting the modes of communication to those accepted by traditional deliberative theory decreases accessibility for those who are not comfortable or proficient in this type of speaking, while broadening the scope of acceptable communication allows for a greater portion of the population to participate in a way in which they feel efficacious.

Thirdly, deliberation must lead to some binding, enforceable political decisions. There are myriad ways in which simultaneous dramaturgy and forum theater might be incorporated into this process; for instance, opportunities for community groups to voice their concerns through forum theater might be formally written into the procedures of a policy-making deliberative body. In addition to using these methods as part of the public conversation, Boal both advocates and has applied them to the formal process of legislation in a process he calls legislative theater. Here, instead of depicting a mode or instance of oppression, a group of practitioners uses forum theater to introduce a proposed law, thereby extending the communicative utility of forum theater into the lawmaking process.¹⁴⁸ As a legislator in Rio de Janeiro, Boal successfully used this method to craft a number of laws. For example, the legislative body there passed a law through this method requiring raised curbs around hanging garbage bins to alert the blind to the presence of these receptacles.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ Boal, *Legislative Theatre*, 71-73.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 75-76.

This application of forum theater is undoubtedly useful for successful legislation. However, we ought to be careful to maintain a separate space for communities to foster empathy for oppressed groups. While legislative theater is an effective way to demonstrate and consider the implications of a certain policy, its focus is likely to be too narrow to allow non-oppressed individuals to fully appreciate the experiences and perspectives of subordinated groups. This understanding instead requires communication that centers on an oppressed group, not on a specific piece of legislation. In other words, legislative theater can lead to more effective and legitimate lawmaking regarding remedies to oppression, but requires the prior development of empathy through communication outside of legislation.

Finally, it should be clear by this point that broadening our conception of deliberation to include forum theater helps to create a more free and equal public dialogue. As alternative forms of communication allow a broader range of voices and issues to enter into the public discussion, they enhance the democratic legitimacy of any regime that purports to represent the needs of all of its citizens. Certainly we should not expect this or any single innovation in the way we conceive of deliberation to bring about perfect inclusion; indeed, we must give more thought to issues such as how to ensure adequate resources for all so that they may devote the necessary time to public engagement. To the extent that innovative communicative practices reduce internal exclusion and the influence of unequal social relationships, however, their adoption constitutes an improvement to political deliberation.

As I mentioned above, Boal's methods can not only help to achieve understanding across perspectives through encouraging emotional interaction; they may also help to

retain the interaction between participants that is so central to deliberation. Although the methods advocated by Young and Sanders effectively incorporate passion into the political process, they do so at the expense of the intersubjective exchanges that characterize deliberative democracy. It is because of a similar unidirectional movement that Boal suggests that traditional theater may not be an appropriate medium for the communication of an alternate, oppressed perspective. He asserts that when one simply views a dramatic scene in the role of an audience member – or, I argue here, when one passively listens to a story or narrative – the spectator ceases to be a subject. In this context, Boal defines empathy as “the emotional relationship which is established between the character and spectator and which provokes, fundamentally, a delegation of power on the part of the spectator, who becomes an object in relation to the character: whatever happens to the latter, happens vicariously to the spectator.”¹⁵⁰ While this type of empathy allows a spectator to see a social problem from the perspective of another individual, it becomes more difficult for the spectator to see her own subjective place within this scene. More specifically relevant to my overall project is that this type of theater may communicate oppressed perspectives, but fails to create an understanding of one’s place within the social problem. When this is the case, the result is “the spectator’s purging of his [sic] social sin,”¹⁵¹ instead of the spectator coming to understand his or her role in that “social sin.”

Using Boal’s method of forum theater, however, an oppressed group may foster empathy in a way that also produces greater understanding between them and other social groups. Because spect-actors retain their status as subjects, they are able to actively

¹⁵⁰ Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed*, 84.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 85.

participate in the exchange of information on stage, which in turn provides an opportunity to see their roles within the social problem. Here, Boal reclaims empathy, not as a passive submission to a narrative, but “within a new system that will incorporate it and make it perform a compatible function.”¹⁵² To place this distinction within the context of my current project, the modes of communication discussed by Young and Sanders foster empathy; however, this is a passive kind of empathy. Empathy that allows subjects to place themselves within the appropriate context and sufficiently motivates them to action must be the result of successful deliberation, not passive listening. Moreover, this subject role allows spect-actors to give feedback, present their own ideas, and challenge assumptions of those who constructed the original narrative. This difference from traditional political theater is what makes Boal’s methods truly deliberative: the opportunity for all participants to provide input, debate the actions taken on stage, and shape the course of public discussion.

Additionally, forum theater has the added advantage of forcing the spect-actors to take actions to support their positions. While traditional deliberation secures intersubjectivity, it also allows participants to take and defend a position without any experience actually implementing what follows from these positions. By contrast, when a spect-actor must physically act out a suggestion in relationships with the other actors on stage, “he [sic] often realises that things are not so easy when he himself has to practise what he suggests.”¹⁵³ Of course, interaction on stage is no substitute for the concrete experiences that follow the deliberative stage; however, this interaction during

¹⁵² Ibid., 144.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 117.

deliberation is an especially vital component when dealing with issues that affect oppressed groups – groups whose perspectives are often more difficult to adopt.

In Chapter II, I drew on Ange-Marie Hancock's assertion that we must focus on individual experiences in order to give voice to oppressed groups. When we see a person through the filter of our preconceptions of a social group – an involuntary process that human cognition makes inevitable – we distort the perspective of that speaker. The ability to focus on the experiences of an individual is undoubtedly one of the goals of testimony and narrative; by allowing an individual to recount her personal experiences without concern for the strict rules of deliberative argumentation, the audience is able to see how her experiences fit into the overall structure of society.

Forum theater, however, has a distinct advantage over narrative in this regard. In addition to allowing the spect-actors to more easily understand their role within a political or social context, the intersubjectivity of forum theater helps to actively combat the stereotypes that prevent full consideration of a non-dominant perspective. When an audience member takes the stage to interact with an actor who has just presented a particular narrative through a scene, this spect-actor is forced to use his or her interactions with that character in addition to (if not in place of) preconceptions and stereotypes to make political judgments. Or, even better, if a spect-actor takes the place of the individual about whom they have these preconceptions, this provides an opportunity to, at least for the moment, step inside that individual's shoes. As this requires adopting the social position of that character on stage, it is a useful tool for combatting the prejudices one might have about the character's social group. In this way,

the stereotypical beliefs held by the dominant group lose some of their power over the transmission of understanding across social groups.

Individual experiences ought not to be considered isolated from the greater sociopolitical context, however. We should always take care to connect these experiences back to a larger issue, to use them as sources of information to make decisions about what constitutes a fair and just political outcome. Here, one might object that such an approach erroneously assumes similarities among members of a certain social group; in other words, one might argue that it is dangerous to try to obtain information about a monolithic black or female experience based on the narrative of one person or theatrical collective. Indeed, it is both logical and necessary to reject the idea that any one voice can fully represent the needs and concerns of any social group. However, this objection unfairly characterizes the type of project in which I am engaging here. The objective is not to find the individual whose experiences most accurately represent the perspective of a particular demographic. Rather, through the inclusion of a series of personal narratives that are explored and shared by a community as a whole through Boal's methods, each individual experience can help us to piece together a collective understanding of social and political problems. As a group collectively relays a narrative on stage, it shines light on a particular facet of our society.

Potential Objections to Deliberative Theater

In this final section, I aim to address a few potential objections to the use of Boal's theatrical methods as deliberation. Objections to the theater itself are, of course, much older than forum theater. In one of his lesser-known works, *Letter to D'Alembert on the Theatre*, Rousseau lays out a number of objections to theater in general. For one,

Rousseau claims that the theater is incapable of promoting anything but the prevailing public opinion:

The stage is, in general, a painting of the human passions, the original of which is in every heart. But if the painter neglected to flatter these passions, the spectators would soon be repelled and would not want to see themselves in a light which made them despise themselves. So that, if he gives an odious coloring to some passions, it is only to those that are not general and are naturally hated. Hence the author, in this respect, only follows public sentiment.¹⁵⁴

At best, the theater will reaffirm what good morals the audience may have. At its worst, however, the theater can exacerbate the more dangerous passions inherent in our nature.

Rousseau points to the comedies of Molière as an example of this hazard: “since the very pleasure of the comic is founded on a vice of the human heart,” he argues, “it is a consequence of this principle that the more the comedy is amusing and perfect, the more its effect is disastrous for morals.”¹⁵⁵ By painting light-heartedly what Rousseau views as immoral, Molière makes his audience believe that they should follow their more destructive passions at the expense of their positive ones.

It may seem pointless at first to compare Rousseau’s views to Boal, as the two have vastly different goals; Boal seeks a revision of the social order, while Rousseau wants to maintain morality in Geneva. Additionally, Rousseau writes about theater for the purposes of entertainment, in contrast to a theater whose end is conscious political change. Showing why Rousseau’s critique has no bearing on simultaneous dramaturgy and forum theater, however, can further illuminate the democratic value of these methods. The crux of this lies in the very different ways the two types of theater reflect an image of the audience back to them. The type of theater that Rousseau rejects –

¹⁵⁴ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Politics and the Arts: Letter to M. D’Alembert on the Theatre*, trans. Allan Bloom (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1960), 18.

¹⁵⁵ Rousseau, *Letter to D’Alembert*, 34.

which, as it happens, is also rejected by Boal insofar as it is not politically useful – shows the audience an image of itself that it desires to see. By contrast, forum theater provides an image of society that reflects not the dominant views, but the oppression that is often unseen by the majority. Additionally, the spectators (or spect-actors) are then able to participate in rethinking approaches to the problem presented on stage. In this way, the theater about which Boal writes lacks the moral risks that Rousseau fears.

Interestingly, Rousseau also offers a suggestion that may improve the utility of simultaneous dramaturgy and forum theater. Instead of attending the theater for entertainment, Rousseau suggests attending events such as public festivals. Much the same way Boal urges spectators to reclaim their status as subjects, Rousseau suggests that we “let the spectators become an entertainment to themselves; make them actors themselves; do it so that each sees and loves himself [sic] in the others so that all will be better united.”¹⁵⁶ Perhaps a gathering of this kind prior to theatrical events would help to foster ties between the oppressed and the oppressors – ties that would be of real value once the deliberative process begins.

Another possible objection toward the use of Boal’s methods as a means of democratic political communication is the fact that his personal politics can easily be interpreted as anti-democratic. At times Boal seems to advocate non-democratic means to achieving better circumstances for oppressed groups. He states that “the theater is not revolutionary in itself, but it is surely a rehearsal for the revolution.”¹⁵⁷ Such language admittedly seems directly opposed to any theory of democracy. However, we ought to be able to embrace the communicative properties inherent in simultaneous dramaturgy and

¹⁵⁶ Rousseau, *Letter to D’Alembert*, 125-126.

¹⁵⁷ Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed*, 98.

forum theater without adopting Boal's political goals. Insofar as the methods outlined in *Theatre of the Oppressed* are empathy-creating and consciousness-raising activities, they can be utilized to promote a more inclusive democracy.

Failed attempts at applying Boal's methods to actual political obstacles may also fuel skepticism of the ability of these practices to effectively give voice to oppressed groups. It is possible that, despite the best intents of the participants, unequal social relationships may work their way into forum theater in the same way that they appear in traditional deliberation. Sonia Hamel provides one such example in her account of the use of forum theater to attempt to initiate a public dialogue about homelessness in Montreal. Hamel and others, including several homeless individuals, participated in a series of forum theater workshops that led up to a public event, which the community at large was invited to attend.¹⁵⁸ The scenes that this group created were largely centered on the interactions between the homeless population (the oppressed) and the city's police force (the oppressors); additionally, these scenes addressed experiences such as interactions between the homeless and non-profit organizations, drug dealing, and conflicts with local businesses. The purpose of this event was to give voice to the homeless "by focusing on *their* narratives of oppression as visible 'colonisers' of public space in the absence of a private space to call their own."¹⁵⁹ In other words, the organizers shared the goal of conveying an oppressed perspective that more conventional political communication had thus far excluded.

¹⁵⁸ Sonia Hamel, "When theatre of the oppressed becomes theatre of the oppressor," *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance* 18 (2013): 403-416. It is worth noting that Hamel uses the term "deliberative theatre" to describe the practices she describes in her article. While she does not argue for a theoretical reconceptualization of deliberation in the way that I am here, this feature nonetheless demonstrates the view that forum theater may be considered a form of legitimate public discourse.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 404.

However, despite the best intentions of those who put together this event, the dominant narratives of the event belonged not to the homeless, but to virtually all other subsections of the Montreal population. Although they were well-represented within the group putting on the play, the organizers failed to attract a single homeless spect-actor; as a result, when members of the audience invalidated the narratives presented in the scenes on stage, there was no countervailing force from the audience. Additionally, very few audience members actually chose to step on stage into the shoes of the homeless protagonists, instead opting only to engage the Joker.¹⁶⁰ In short, what was intended to be an opportunity to add a new voice to the public conversation functioned instead as a space in which non-homeless citizens reaffirmed the dominant narratives of an oppressed group without this additional perspective.

While Hamel's observations provide a useful caution against the pitfalls of deliberative theater, we should by no means conclude from the account she provides that forum theater inevitably maintains social relationships of power. We ought to instead recognize this as an illustration of the importance of providing a public space for an oppressed group to specifically provide its own narrative of its oppression. Although this forum theater event was meant to serve this exact purpose, it actually devolved largely into a space for the oppressor group to reiterate its own narrative; instead of an opportunity for the homeless to express their unique collective perspective on their situation, this event merely served as a confirmation of certain perspectives from outside of that group.

There are, then, two lessons we ought to draw from this experience. First, we ought to notice how easily this process took place. Nobody forced this transition – it

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 409.

occurred almost organically. It is worth highlighting the fact that, although we certainly cannot know the intentions of those who provided the narratives during the event, no malicious motives were required to perpetuate the oppressive relationships found in the city of Montreal. Rather, these relationships seem to maintain themselves unless deliberate and careful corrective action is taken. Second, it is vital to the deliberative success of this type of event to follow at least Boal's general prescriptions, if not his exact outline. This event was not a demonstration of the failure of Boal's methods or of the application of these methods to a theory of deliberation, but simply of the organizers of this event to create the necessary conditions for the homeless population to convey its collective perspective. A particularly undermining shortcoming of this event was the failure of the Joker to coordinate substantial spect-actor participation following the scenes. As this step is the uniquely deliberative component of forum theater, it should come as no surprise that its exclusion led also to the exclusion of the oppressed group's understanding of the issues at hand. Those seeking to use Boal's theater for a deliberative purpose can draw important lessons from mistakes such as these.

Conclusion

In this project, I hope to have contributed to a body of literature that seeks to make democratic deliberation as inclusive as possible. In Chapter I, I have reviewed prior criticisms of deliberative democracy and elaborated upon Habermas' theory of systematically distorted communication. In the second and third chapters, I have explored the ways in which deliberation is undermined by personal perceptions and gaps in understanding resulting from distorted communication.

Following Iris Marion Young, I have argued in Chapter IV that in order to remedy these issues we must consider a variety of forms of communication to promote intergroup empathy. Departing from her work, however, I assert that we need not abandon the ideals of deliberation. Rather, we ought to alter and expand our understanding of what constitutes proper deliberation. Although I have presenting numerous objections to deliberation in this piece, they are largely surmountable. Through the methods laid out by Boal, I have argued that deliberative theory can both retain its central tenets while claiming the benefits of the reforms offered by Sanders and Young. There are undoubtedly improvements to be made upon the suggestions that I have made; however, I am glad to have been able to at least bring Boal into the conversation of democratic political theory, as his ideas have great potential to improve inclusion within our own society.

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