

5-2012

# Does culture matter? The effects of acculturation on workplace relationships

Guowei Jian

Cleveland State University, g.jian@csuohio.edu

Follow this and additional works at: [https://engagedscholarship.csuohio.edu/clcom\\_facpub](https://engagedscholarship.csuohio.edu/clcom_facpub)

 Part of the [International and Intercultural Communication Commons](#), and the [Organizational Communication Commons](#)

**How does access to this work benefit you? Let us know!**

## *Publisher's Statement*

Guowei Jian, Does Culture Matter? An Examination of the Association: An Examination of the Association of Immigrants' Acculturation with Workplace Relationship Quality. *Management Communication Quarterly* (Volume 26, Issue 2) pp. 295-321. Copyright © 2012 by the Author. Reprinted by permission of SAGE Publications, Inc.

## Recommended Citation

Jian, G. (2012). Does culture matter? An examination of the association of immigrants' acculturation with workplace relationship quality. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 26(2), 295-321. doi:10.1177/0893318912440178

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the School of Communication at EngagedScholarship@CSU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Communication Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of EngagedScholarship@CSU. For more information, please contact [library.es@csuohio.edu](mailto:library.es@csuohio.edu).

# Ethnic and Age Differences Reduce Political Discussion

by Leo W. Jeffres, Jae-won Lee, Guowei Jian, Sukki Yoon and David J. Atkin

*A survey of U.S. households finds people involved in neighborhood communication networks are more likely to engage in political discussions, and the likelihood is greater among people with higher levels of education but lower among those with greater ethnic or age diversity.*

The proliferation of new media is heightening political polarization,<sup>1</sup> with declining newspaper circulation prompting newspaper fire-sales that attract billionaire investors like Jeff Bezos (*Washington Post*) and the Hunt brothers. The *Post's* acquisition by one of America's top retailers—which spends billions annually trying to influence tax reform, cyber security and federal contracting—could influence political issues in which it has a financial interest. These political dynamics assume critical importance in today's multimedia environment, given that America is becoming more diverse and the vibrancy of democracy is contingent on an active, well-versed electorate.

Generally, political communication research focuses on the significance of public discussion for people's opinions of political decisions, often fed by what they learn from the media and their political activity. Habermas<sup>2</sup> defines the public sphere as a social dimension in which rational and civil political discussion could lead to an informed public. He traced the growth of a public sphere in the 17th and 18th centuries—along with its eventual decline during the 20<sup>th</sup> century—noting that recent generations exhibited little interest or discussion concerning civic matters.

---

Jeffres is a professor, Lee is a professor and Jian is an associate professor. All are in the School of Communication at Cleveland State University. Yoon is an associate professor in the Department of Marketing at Bryant University. Atkin is a professor in the Department of Communication at the University of Connecticut.

---



Research identifies the importance of interpersonal communication as well as attention to both traditional and new media for people's participation in political processes. The literature suggests that one's political network<sup>3</sup> affects perceptions and behavior, and studies focusing on public opinion about public issues often measure people's political discussion networks.<sup>4</sup> Those who discuss politics frequently in volunteer groups are more politically active<sup>5</sup> and less likely to be affected by media content;<sup>6</sup> also, the diversity of one's network can affect political activity.<sup>7</sup> Beck<sup>8</sup> found that people were most likely to discuss politics with like-minded relatives and friends, but communication with coworkers provided an opportunity for dissonant messages to intrude.

Here factors that might influence the level of people's political discussion and involvement in a political discussion network are addressed. To begin, an individual's political communication network includes symbolic activity across contexts, from media use to discussions with family and friends and coworkers. Wellman and Tindall<sup>9</sup> view each individual as the center of a unique social network. First to be considered is the larger environment, the community context, its size and diversity; then, move to individual differences—social categories that include demographic factors (gender), achievement factors (education) and life cycle factors (age, marital status).

## Background

Notwithstanding the broad spectrum of mediated and interpersonal channels available to voters today, research suggests that politics plays a relatively small part of people's lives, even during times of spirited campaigns.<sup>10</sup> The existing breadth of communication patterns—including legacy and emerging media—represent a baseline of influences or opportunities for communication about civic issues that are the more bounded behavior comprising the criterion variable: one's political discussion network.

Wyatt and his colleagues found that political discussion is most likely to occur in work and family contexts.<sup>11</sup> The order of influences is problematic in one-shot studies because, while people's personal attributes and characteristics influence where they choose to live, the choice of job and importance of relationships often trump environmental preferences. Huckfeldt and Sprague<sup>12</sup> note that people may choose their friends and have some control over their conversations, but these relationships are bounded by the environment. Size and diversity of the community have been identified as particularly important in the communication literature.<sup>13</sup>

Over more than three decades, Tichenor<sup>14</sup> and his colleagues tested the pluralistic model, which says that size leads to diversity and these factors have consequences for how the media operate. Recent evidence shows that overall community diversity is inversely related to individual involvement in a political discussion network.<sup>15</sup> For instance, Jeffres, Atkin and Neuendorf<sup>16</sup> found evidence of an opinion spiral effect, one in which white subjects were less likely

---

to express their true feelings on affirmative action to a non-white pollster.

Although structural-level variables can lead to some inadvertent exposure to politically diverse views,<sup>17</sup> people prefer to discuss politics with others who are like themselves.<sup>18</sup> This dynamic follows the logic of Noelle-Neumann's<sup>19</sup> Spiral of Silence model, which suggests that people are reticent to express themselves when they sense that they're in the minority within a given communication climate. Based on the assumption that perceived opposition can have a chilling effect on one's willingness to express oneself and that larger communities are more diverse, it was postulated that:

**H1:**

Community diversity will be inversely related to political discussion.

**H2:**

Population size will be inversely related to political discussion.

Once people are located in an environment, they face a communication climate—one based on respondent perception about public issues in their community—that may be more or less conducive to people's participation in civic dialogues. This may occur in variegated contexts—work, public areas, neighborhood—as well as in more formal public settings such as public meetings. People's perception of the local climate for communication and their involvement in that communication system should affect their comfort in voicing complaints in the public sphere.

It's useful to inquire whether the built environment is structured to encourage such political discussion by offering "third places" where political and, of course, other discussion can take place. "Third places," as defined by Oldenburg and Brissett,<sup>20</sup> are the "great, good places"<sup>21</sup> that foster community and communication among people outside of home and work, the first and second places of daily life. Third places are the coffee shops and bars, barbershops and beauty salons, bowling alleys and recreation centers, senior centers and other public places where people meet, congregate and communicate.

Third places may thus take many forms and, while observers and scholars have written many essays on their form and their importance, research has yet to ascertain the public's perception of such spaces and whether their availability increases the prospects for stronger communication networks where people discuss politics and other civic matters. Oldenburg identifies essential characteristics of third places that he believes engender the unique communication experiences and sociological benefits associated with them.<sup>22</sup>

As with the general political dynamics reviewed above, one's willingness to engage in political discussion in these and other contexts is influenced by social locators.

Based on the literature, perceived communication climate, existing communication patterns and the perceived availability of third places should all

---



help to determine the size, frequency and diversity of one's political discussion network. Each of these relationships will be sequenced in the order stated for an overall test of the significance of relationships controlling for prior factors. More formally:

**H3:**

Perceived comfort with the communication climate will be positively related to political discussion.

**H4:**

Level of communication activity (e.g., newspaper readership) will be positively related to political discussion.

**H5:**

The perceived availability of "third places" will be positively related to political discussion.

Finally, one's willingness to engage in political discussion in these and other contexts is influenced by social locators. Wyatt and his colleagues link political communication patterns to such demographic predictors as education.<sup>23</sup> Drawing from work underscoring the importance of social status in determining political activity by Tichenor and associates,<sup>24</sup> one can posit that:

**H6:**

Educational attainment will be positively related to political discussion.

And finally, while scholars have long noted that men are more active in various aspects of political activity, that gender gap began to narrow in the 1980s.<sup>25</sup> This dynamic may stem from the fact that men are socialized to be more politically active.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, Putnam<sup>27</sup> maintains that citizens born before 1945 were socialized to be more active in various community groups over time. Having accreted more such social capital, one would expect that older people would have larger, more active and diverse political discussion networks.<sup>28</sup> Based on these socio-cultural dynamics, it is hypothesized that:

**H7:**

Male gender will be positively related to political discussion.

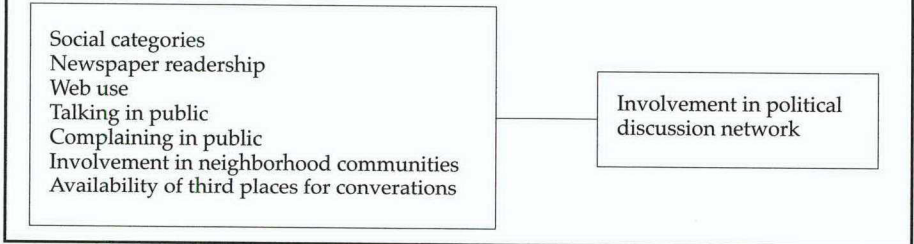
**H8:**

Age will be positively related to political discussion

The direction of influence with some social locators is difficult to establish over time. In fact, the few studies addressing marital status reveal contradictory influences on political discussion.<sup>29</sup> This prompts the following:

---

**Figure 1**  
**Summary of Relationships**



**RQ1:**

How is marital status related to political discussion?

## **Method**

A national telephone survey was conducted using a probability sample of U.S. households that yielded 477 respondents.<sup>30</sup> The survey, introduced as the Civic Project, had a cooperation rate of 27 percent, comparable to that achieved by companion surveys of similar length (20 minutes). Interviews were conducted by students and employed interviewers supervised by faculty in the school's research center and include the following measures.

### ***Social Categories***

Individual differences were measured using standard items for age (recorded in seven categories coded 1 to 7, youngest to oldest: 18-20, 3.2 percent; 21-30, 11.3 percent; 31-40, 14.3 percent; 41-50, 23.1 percent; 51-60, 19.4 percent; 61-70, 13.2 percent; 71 or older 15.5 percent;  $M = 4.4$ ,  $SD = 1.7$ ), gender (1=male, 47 percent; 2=female, 53 percent;  $M=4.7$ ,  $SD=2.2$ ), level of education ( $M = 4.1$ ,  $SD = 1.3$ ; scale from 1 = less than high school to 6 = post graduate degree), ethnic/culture/race (12.9 percent African American; 75.2 percent Caucasian; 3.5 percent Hispanic; 1.4 percent Asian; .7 percent American Indian; 2.3 percent mixed; 4 percent other) and marital status (57.1 percent married, 11.6 percent divorced; 10.2 percent widowed; .9 percent separated; 20.2 percent never been married).

### ***Community/Environmental Characteristics***

Respondents were asked for the zip code in which they lived. This was matched with census data for the community population and the county population. Then the zip code in which they lived was matched with occupational, ethnic, age, education, income and marital data to create measures of diversity. Population breakdowns were recorded by zip code for age, ethnicity, occupation, household income and marital status using the Census categories, e.g., the



percentage Caucasian, African American, Asian, Hispanic, American Indian, other ethnicity and mixed. Using Blau's formula for variance across categories, diversity measures were computed for each variable.<sup>31</sup>

### ***Political Discussion Network***

The criterion variable was measured using five items that capture the size, frequency and diversity of one's political discussion network, using items employed by many other scholars.<sup>32</sup>

The three constituent variables—size of political discussion network, frequency of discussing politics and diversity of discussion partners—will be examined separately as well as a whole. Frequency was measured with three items. For two items respondents were asked to use a 0-10 scale to tell how much they agreed with the following two statements, 0 meaning they completely disagreed, 5 being neutral and 10 meaning they completely agreed: "I generally discuss political candidates and issues with neighbors at election time" (M = 4.1, SD = 3.4); "I generally discuss political candidates and issues with family and friends at election time" (M = 6.6, SD = 3.3) A third item asked respondents, "How many days in the past week did you engage in political discussion with friends and family...never (0), once (1), a couple times (2), almost every day (3), or several times a day (4)?" (M = 1.6,

SD = 1.3). The responses to these three items were standardized and summed up for a scale ( $\alpha = .68$ ); the three items are strongly related, with correlations ranging from .36 to .49). Diversity of political discussion was measured with an item that asked, "How often do you discuss politics with people whose political views are different from yours--almost never (1), seldom (2), sometimes (3), or frequently (4)?" (M = 2.3, SD = 1.1). Size of one's political discussion network was measured with an item that asked, "About how many people do you discuss politics with on a regular basis...none (0), one (1), two or three (2), five to ten (3), or more than that (4)?" (coded so 0=none, 1=one; 2=two or three; 3=five to ten; 4=more than that) (M = 1.7, SD = 1.2). The five items were

*Political discussion is greater in communities with more educational but less ethnic or age diversity. So while ethnic and age diversity in a community increase the probability one will encounter people who don't share those characteristics, they don't lead to more political discussion.*

standardized and summed up for an overall scale tapping involvement in a political discussion network ( $X = .71$ ).

### ***Perceived Communication Climate***

Several items were used to obtain respondents' perceptions of the climate for communication about public issues in their community. Two asked respondents to use the same 0-10 scale to tell how much they agreed with the following two statements, one reflecting the individual's comfort in expressing themselves in formal public settings and the second reflecting their perception of the receptiveness with which such comments would be received by officials (with 0 meaning they completely disagreed, 5 was neutral and 10 meant they completely agreed): "I'd feel comfortable voicing a complaint at a public meeting in my community" ( $M = 6.3$ ,  $SD = 3.4$ ; std. error = .16); "Public officials in my community seem receptive to views of residents" ( $M = 5.9$ ,  $SD = 2.9$ ; std. error = .14). Three other items tapped an individual's comfort in talking about things with people across context: "How comfortable are you striking up a conversation with a stranger on the street, very comfortable, somewhat comfortable, somewhat uncomfortable, or very uncomfortable? (coded so 4=very comfortable, 3=somewhat comfortable; 2=somewhat uncomfortable; 1=very uncomfortable) ( $M = 3.1$ ,  $SD = 1.0$ ; std. error = .04). This was followed by, "How about talking about politics, religion or other personal matters with your neighbors?" ( $M = 2.6$ ,  $SD = 1.1$ ; std. error = .05) and "How about talking about such personal things with people at work?" ( $M = 2.7$ ,  $SD = 1.1$ ; std. error = .06). While three items combine topics—politics and religion—the intent is to give key examples of personal matters that often create conflict or disagreements; for example, the class line in many families is that two topics are not discussed at the dinner table, politics and religion.

### ***Existing Communication Pattern***

First, an individual's involvement in a neighborhood communication network was measured using six items. Using the same 0-10 scale (ranging from completely disagree to completely agree), respondents told how much they agreed or disagreed with each of the following statements: "I often talk with neighbors on the street or while I'm in my yard" ( $M = 6.4$ ,  $SD = 3.2$ ); "I spend more time talking with my neighbors than most people do" ( $M = 4.4$ ,  $SD = 3.2$ ); "Outside my house or walking down the street, I often greet people passing by even if they are not neighbors that I recognize" ( $M = 7.4$ ,  $SD = 3.0$ ); "I often hear about community problems by word-of-mouth in my neighborhood" ( $M = 5.5$ ,  $SD = 3.2$ ) Two additional items focused on mass communication in their community. Using the same 0-10 scale, respondents agreed or disagreed with this statement: "I learn about community activities and problems from the community newspaper" ( $M = 6.1$ ,  $SD = 3.4$ ) Respondents then were asked if there was a community or neighborhood newspaper that covers the place where they live and how often they read it (coded so 5=all the time; 4=most

---



of the time; 3=sometimes; 2=seldom; 1=almost never; 0=Is no paper) ( $M = 3.2$ ,  $SD = 1.8$ ). Responses were standardized and summed up for a Neighborhood Communication scale ( $X = .74$ ).

Traditional items ascertained how many days in the past week respondents had read a newspaper ( $M = 3.8$ ,  $SD = 2.8$ ; scale = no. days read paper last week), how often they watch television news ( $M = 4.3$ ,  $SD = 1.8$ ; on scale where 0 = never to 6 = several times a day), how often they go on the Internet at home or work ( $M = 3.0$ ,  $SD = 2.0$ ; scale where 0 = never to 6 = several times per day) and how often they visit media websites ( $M = 1.8$ ,  $SD = 1.6$ ; scale where 0 = never to 6 = several times per day).

### ***Availability of Third Places for Conversations***

Respondents received open-ended probes to identify third places where residents would likely engage in communication: "What are the opportunities for communication in public places in your neighborhood, for example, places where people might chat informally or where friends and neighbors might go for a conversation?" Follow up probes ("any others?") continued until there were no more answers. There are diverse ways to combine the categories to reflect dimensions Oldenburg<sup>33</sup> says characterize third places. Coders tallied mentions of coffee shops, bars/pubs and restaurants/cafes into a category representing these dimensions (neutral ground, open to all strata, conversation is the main activity, they're accessible except for some monetary barrier and the atmosphere is comfortable); such venues are probably one of the most popular forms of leisure-time activity in which people engage today and require no coordination with others, for the most part ( $M = .30$ ,  $SD = .56$ ). A second category has many of the same ingredients but focuses on organized social activity—combining clubs/organizations, community centers/meetings and senior centers ( $M = .23$ ,  $SD = .45$ ; this is the category most relevant for Putnam's<sup>34</sup> emphasis on organizational involvement; this was labeled "Organized Activity." A third category stresses the neighborhood—outside in the neighborhood, in neighbor's homes, or at neighborhood parties ( $M = .19$ ,  $SD = .43$ ).

## **Findings**

### ***Political discussion was posited to be inversely related to community diversity (H1) and population (H2).***

Community age diversity was negatively related to the global measure of involvement in political discussion ( $r = -.12$ ,  $p < .04$ ) and network size ( $r = -.14$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Also, community education diversity was positively correlated with discussion frequency ( $r = .11$ ,  $p < .05$ ) but not the global measure, network size or diversity. This leaves H1 with partial support. There was no such relationship with population, leaving H2 without support.

### ***H3 posited that one's comfort with the communication climate would affect people's***

---

***political discussion, and results indicate positive correlations between perceptions one would feel comfortable voicing complaints at a public meeting and involvement in the political discussion network ( $r = .38, p < .001$ ) as well as frequency ( $r = .37, p < .001$ ), size ( $r = .28, p < .001$ ) and diversity ( $r = .31, p < .001$ ).***

Also, perception that public officials are receptive to citizen views is correlated with the global measure of involvement in a political discussion network ( $r = .14, p < .005$ ) and frequency ( $r = .16, p < .001$ ) but not size or diversity. Feeling comfortable striking up a conversation with strangers on the street is correlated with the global measure ( $r = .28, p < .001$ ), frequency ( $r = .26, p < .001$ ), size ( $r = .23, p < .001$ ) and diversity ( $r = .19, p < .001$ ). Feeling comfortable talking about politics, religion or other personal matters with neighbors was positively correlated with the global measure of involvement in the political discussion network ( $r = .49, p < .001$ ), frequency ( $r = .46, p < .001$ ), size ( $r = .41, p < .001$ ) and diversity ( $r = .35, p < .001$ ). Feeling comfortable talking about such matters with coworkers is correlated with the global measure ( $r = .23, p < .001$ ), frequency ( $r = .19, p < .001$ ), size ( $r = .22, p < .001$ ) and diversity ( $r = .18, p < .001$ ). H3 is thus supported, as the communication climate stretching across contexts is a positive factor for the size, frequency and diversity of one's political discussion network.

***H4 said that people's existing level of communication activity would affect their political discussion.***

Again, findings reveal positive relationships between the involvement in the neighborhood communication network and the global measure of involvement in a political communication network ( $r = .31, p < .001$ ), frequency ( $r = .33, p < .001$ ), size ( $r = .19, p < .001$ ) and diversity ( $r = .17, p < .001$ ). Hours one listened to the radio yesterday was correlated with the global measure ( $r = .12, p < .02$ ), frequency ( $r = .13, p < .01$ ) and size ( $r = .10, p < .05$ ) but not diversity. The number of days one read a newspaper the previous week was related to all four measures: global measure of involvement ( $r = .26, p < .001$ ), frequency ( $r = .26, p < .001$ ), size ( $r = .20, p < .001$ ) and diversity ( $r = .15, p < .001$ ). How often one went on the Internet at home or at work is correlated with the global measure ( $r = .23, p < .001$ ), discussion frequency ( $r = .19, p < .001$ ), size ( $r = .22, p < .001$ ) and diversity ( $r = .19, p < .001$ ). The frequency with which one visits media websites also was correlated with all four measures: global involvement in political discussion network ( $r = .24, p < .001$ ), frequency ( $r = .19, p < .001$ ), size ( $r = .22, p < .001$ ) and diversity ( $r = .19, p < .001$ ). Clearly, existing communication patterns set the table for political discussions, providing support for H4.

***H5 returns to the notion of the built or constructed environment as a facilitator of political discussion.***

A negative correlation was uncovered between people's claims that their community provided no third places where people might go to chat informally or where friends and neighbors might go for a conversation and all four measures of political discussion: global involvement in a political discussion

---



network ( $r = -.20, p < .001$ ), frequency ( $r = -.17, p < .001$ ), size ( $r = -.19, p < .001$ ) and diversity ( $r = -.10, p < .05$ ). Put another way, these links between the availability of third places and discussion provide support for H5.

***Similarly, H6 posited that education would positively influence political discussion.***

Findings suggest that education is positively related to all four variables: involvement in political discussion network ( $r = .25, p < .001$ ), frequency ( $r = .22, p < .001$ ), size ( $r = .23, p < .001$ ) and diversity ( $r = .22, p < .001$ ). This provides support for the hypothesis. Male gender is likewise correlated with the global measure of involvement in political discussion network ( $r = .25, p < .001$ ) as well as the constituent parts, frequency ( $r = .17, p < .001$ ), size ( $r = .25, p < .001$ ) and diversity ( $r = .18, p < .001$ ). This provides support for H7. Age is positively correlated with frequency ( $r = .11, p < .05$ ) but not the global measure, size or diversity. This leaves H8 with only weak support. As for RQ1, no relationship was found between marital status and political discussion.

The relative importance of the variables was examined using forward stepwise regression, with all of the five blocks of predictors eligible for entry: social categories; community / environmental; perceived communication climate; existing communication pattern; availability of third places for conversations.

Regressions were conducted for the global measure of involvement in a political discussion network, as well as its three constituent components—frequency of discussing politics, size of political discussion network and diversity of political discussion network. A similar pattern emerges across the four regressions, with comfort talking about personal matters with neighbors ( $\beta = .41$ ) and discussing complaints at public meetings ( $\beta = .24$ ) appearing as the most important predictors of the global measure of involvement in a political discussion network. Following these predictors in terms of importance are: frequency of visiting media websites ( $\beta = .11$ ) and involvement in a neighborhood communication network ( $\beta = .16$ ). The social category most important is gender (being male;  $\beta = -.19$ ).

The availability of “third places” for conversations ( $\beta = .12$ ) appears as one of the last significant predictors for the global measure of involvement. Reading the newspaper more frequently ( $\beta = .12$ ) appears to impact the size of one’s political discussion network but not size or diversity, while education ( $\beta = .10$ ) and the availability of organizational opportunities for conversation ( $\beta = .09$ ) only enhance the diversity of one’s political discussion network. While the relative significance of predictors shifts when new ones are entered, the coefficients don’t change dramatically.

## Discussion

On balance, study findings suggest that the social categories of respondents and community characteristics affect our political discussion networks and these dynamics mirror those found in past work.<sup>35</sup> Thus, the more educated,

males and older people have larger, more active and diverse political discussion networks. Political discussion is greater in communities with more educational but less ethnic or age diversity. So while ethnic and age diversity in a community increase the probability one will encounter people who don't share those characteristics, they don't lead to more political discussion.

But what is particularly striking about the results is the cumulative impact of more stable and routine communication phenomena on citizens' political discussion networks. With social categories and community diversity controlled, the frequency with which one discusses political issues, the size of the discussion circle and the likelihood one will actually engage people with different political views is enhanced if people feel comfortable speaking out in public meetings and feel comfortable talking about such personal matters with neighbors. One's political network is enhanced if further they're involved in a stronger neighborhood communication network and use both traditional media—reading daily newspapers more often—as well as the Internet (visiting media websites) more frequently. Yet the influence of the Internet is only modest here, which confirms Papacharissi's<sup>36</sup> contention that online media provide a public forum, but not a public sphere. And, finally, the community itself has an impact if it is seen as providing places for such conversations to occur.

Growing diversity should lead people to encounter those unlike themselves, but the fact there's a negative relationship with the size, frequency and diversity of one's political discussion network suggests that people avoid what they see as potential conflict. This finding is consistent with past work in that domain, as well as related contexts involving the Spiral of Silence.<sup>37</sup> Communities and their leaders should thus strive for the development of civil communication norms that are advertised, promoted and celebrated in the face of diversity, because the next block shows that political discussion is enhanced when people feel comfortable talking about such political or civil matters in public settings.

The continuing importance of neighborhoods as they impact communities is underlined by the variance explained in the regression. Those who are involved in strong neighborhood communication networks also are more involved in political discussions. This doesn't mean that work and family networks aren't important, but one shouldn't ignore neighborhoods as units of analysis and venues for programs and actions. Generally, the discussion over what built or communication environment factors might enhance Habermas'<sup>38</sup> vision of a robust public sphere needs to be grounded in a wider consideration of these issues.

Although third places provide necessary conditions for creating a public sphere, they do not automatically lead to its emergence. Environmental factors of such third places remain rather secondary as determinants of political behaviors in relation to primary family or workplace influences. Putnam, Habermas and others see newspapers and other traditional media stifling this collective collaboration in favor of one where one-way channels inform public opinion—with little opportunity for feedback—and reducing the need for interpersonal interaction. The fact that Internet use predicts political discussion

---



activity—at least modestly—suggests that it can play a role as a virtual sphere of public debate, one that benefits from the convergence of mass and interpersonal modalities.<sup>39</sup> Still, if emerging physical and virtual third places only lead to isolated discussions and special interest forums, then Habermas' vision of shared public discourse may continue to elude.

Lastly, city planners and neighborhood leaders need to support the development of third places for conversations in their communities. What's optimal for the community will depend on the pattern of residents, their ethnic mix, generational preferences and economic resources. Since the present study scope is limited to a domestic snapshot, more research is needed on what types of third places increase the likelihood that people from diverse backgrounds will encounter and engage each other in political conversations. The common ground of parks and community centers themselves require more "micro strategies" as architects and planners learn the connection between communication, public involvement and the built or constructed environment. Furthermore, while this research captures a national picture of urban areas in the United States, with its diverse culture, similar studies might profitably address other countries and other cultures.

#### Notes

1. Eric Bucy, Walter Gantz and Z. Wang, "The 24 Hour News Cycle," in *Communication Technology and Social Change*, eds. Carolyn Lin and David Atkin (New York: LEA, 2007), 146-176.
  2. Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Boston: M.I.T. Press, 1989).
  3. David Lazer, "Networks in Political Science: Back to the Future," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 44, no. 1 (January 2011): 61-68. Lazer defines a network, in a political context, as "...the causes and consequences of connections among a system's elements."
  4. Dietram A. Scheufele, Matthew C. Nisbet and Dominique Brossard, "Pathways to Political Participation? Religion, Communication Contexts and Mass Media," *International Journal of Public Opinion Research* 15, no. 3 (September 2003): 300-324.
  5. Dietram A. Scheufele, Matthew C. Nisbet, Dominique Brossard and Eric C. Nisbet, "Social Structure and Citizenship: Examining the Impacts of Social Setting, Network Heterogeneity and Informational Variables on Political Participation," *Political Communication* 21, no. 3 (July-September 2004): 315-338.
  6. Lawrence Erbring, Edward N. Goldenberg and A. H. Miller, "Front Page News and Real-World Clues: A New Look at Agenda-Setting by the Media," *American Journal of Political Science* 24, no. 1 (February 1980): 16-49.
  7. Nojin Kwak, Ann E. Williams, Xiaoru Wang and Hoon Lee, "Talking Politics and Engaging Politics: An Examination of the Interactive Relationships between Structural Features of Political Talk and Discussion Engagement," *Communication Research* 32, no. 1 (February 2005): 87-111; Vincent Price, Joseph N. Cappella and Lilach Nir, "Does Disagreement Contribute to More Deliberative Opinion?" *Political Communication* 19, no. 1 (January 2002): 95-112.
  8. Paul A. Beck, "Voters' Intermediation Environments in the 1988 Presidential Contest," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 55, no. 3 (fall 1991): 371-394. See also Scheufele et al., "Social Structure and Citizenship," Diana Mutz and Paul S. Martin, "Facilitating Communication across Lines of Political Difference," *The American Political Science Review* 95, no. 1 (March 2001): 97-114.
  9. Barry Wellman and Dave Tindall, "How Telephone Networks Connect Social Networks," in *Progress in Communication Sciences*, vol. 12, eds. William D. Richards, Jr. and George A. Barnett (Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1993), 63-93.
-

10. Diana Mutz, *Hearing the Other Side: Deliberative Versus Participatory Democracy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

11. Robert O. Wyatt, Elihu Katz and Joohan Kim, "Bridging the Spheres: Political and Personal Conversation in Public and Private Spaces," *Journal of Communication* 50, no. 1 (February 2000): 71-92; Robert O. Wyatt, Joohan Kim and Elihu Katz, "How Feeling Free to Talk Affects Ordinary Political Conversation, Purposeful Argumentation and Civic Participation," *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* 77, no. 1 (March 2000): 99-114.

12. Robert Huckfeldt and John Sprague, "Networks in Context: The Social Flow of Political Information," *American Political Science Review* 81, no. 4 (December 1987): 1197-1216.

13. David C. Barker, "The Talk Radio Community: Non-Traditional Social Networks and Political Participation," *Social Science Quarterly* 79, no. 2 (June 1998): 261-272.

14. Phillip J. Tichenor, George A. Donohue and Clarice Olien, *Community Conflict and the Press* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1980).

15. Scheufele et al., "Social Structure and Citizenship;" Leo W. Jeffres, Jae-Won Lee, Kimberly Neuendorf and David J. Atkin, "Newspaper Reading Supports Community Involvement," *Newspaper Research Journal* 28, no. 1 (winter 2001): 6-23.

16. Leo Jeffres, David Atkin and Kimberly Neuendorf, "The Spiral of Silence: Expressing Opinions When the Public Opinion Climate is Unambiguous," *Political Communication* 16, no. 2 (January 1999): 115-131.

17. Jennifer Brundidge, "Encountering 'Difference' in the Contemporary Public Sphere: The Contribution of the Internet to the Heterogeneity of Political Discussion Networks," *Journal of Communication* 60, no. 4 (December 2010): 680-700. In particular: "...people are more likely to discuss politics with heterogeneous others if they live in a geographic locations with a politically diverse population... In addition, certain types of social settings may be more or less conducive to heterogeneous political discussion networks. The workplace..., for example, is particularly likely to foster discussion among diverse individuals. Church on the other hand, is a somewhat less likely venue for fostering such discussion...they almost invariably select one that reflects their particular religious beliefs. This process of self-selection may mitigate the potential for dialogue with non-likeminded others..."

18. Scheufele et al., "Social Structure and Citizenship;" Brundidge, "Encountering 'Difference.'"

19. Elizabeth Noelle-Neumann, *The Spiral of Silence: Public Opinion—Our Social Skin* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

20. Ray Oldenburg and Dennis Brissett, "The Third Place," *Qualitative Sociology* 5, no. 4 (winter 1982): 265.

21. Ibid.

22. Ray Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place* (New York: Marlowe & Co., 1989). As he recounts, "They are on neutral ground. All are welcome and no one plays 'host.' They are a leveler; people of different socio-economic strata attend. Conversation is the main activity. Even though the setting may be a place for drinking, or exercising, or playing a game, talking is always present. They are accessible; there are no physical, policy, or monetary barriers to entrance. They are a home away from home. There are 'regulars' who find the atmosphere comfortable enough to 'root' them there. The mood is playful, laughter is often heard and wit is prized," 266.

23. Wyatt, Katz and Kim, "Bridging the Spheres."

24. Tichenor, Donohue and Olien, *Community Conflict and the Press*.

25. Huckfeldt and Sprague, "Networks in Context."

26. Mutz, *Hearing the Other Side*.

27. Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000); Robert D. Putnam, "Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital," *Journal of Democracy* 6, no. 1 (January 1995): 34-48.

28. William P. Eveland, Jr. and M. H. Hively, "Political Discussion Frequency, Network Size and 'Heterogeneity' of Discussion as Predictors of Political Knowledge and Participation," *Journal*



of *Communication* 59, no. 2 (June 2009): 205-224.

29. Huckfeldt and Sprague, "Networks in Context;" Mutz, *Hearing the Other Side*.

30. The telephone list was purchased from Survey Sampling International, a commercial firm in Fairfield, CT that generates numbers randomly, then screens for non-residential, non-working and business numbers to maximize the likelihood of obtaining a legitimate household.

31. Peter M. Blau, *Inequality and Heterogeneity: A Primitive Theory of Social Structure* (New York: The Free Press, 1977). Blau's formula for variance provides the equivalent to statistical variance when the categories are ordered or interval data:  $Diversity = 1 - [(category1^2 + category2^2 + category3^2 + category4^2) / (category1 + category2 + category3 + category4)^2]$ . When the population is concentrated into a single category, e.g., all Caucasian or all African American, the resulting figure is small but when the population is spread more equally across the available categories, the figure is larger. For an example of where this formula has been used in communication, see Leo W. Jeffres, Connie Cutietta, Leslie Sekerka and Jae-Won Lee, "Newspapers, Pluralism and Diversity in an Urban Context," *Mass Communication and Society* 2, no. 3 (spring/summer 2000): 157-184.

32. Francis L. F. Lee, "The Impact of Political Discussion in a Democratizing Society: The Moderating Role of Disagreement and Support for Democracy," *Communication Research* 36, no. 3 (June 2009): 379-399.

33. Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place*.

34. Putnam, *Bowling Alone*; see also Ferdinand Tonnies, *Community and Society*, trans. Charles P. Loomis (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University, 1957).

35. See, for example, Scheufele et al., "Social Structure and Citizenship."

36. Zizi Papachrissi, "The Digital Citizen: Promise and Predisposition," in *Encyclopedia of Digital Government*, eds. Ari-Veikko Anttiroiko and Matti Malkia (Hershey, PA: Idea Group, 2007).

37. Lee, "The Impact of Political Discussion in a Democratizing Society;" Jeffres, Atkin and Neuendorf, "The Spiral of Silence;" Mutz, *Hearing the Other Side*.

38. Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*.

39. Bucy, Gantz and Wang, "The 24 Hour News Cycle."