Is Telling Stories Good for Democracy?
Rhetoric in Public Deliberation after 9/11

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This article develops a sociological perspective on the rhetorical conditions for good public deliberation, a topic of longstanding interest to scholars of the public sphere. The authors argue that the capacity of reason-giving, storytelling, and other rhetorical genres to foster deliberation depends on social conventions of the genre's use and popular beliefs about its credibility relative to other genres. Such beliefs are structured but contingently so: concerns about the generalizability of personal stories or the abstraction of logical arguments come into play on some occasions and not others. The authors appraise this argument by way of a systematic comparison of personal storytelling and reason-giving in public deliberation, the first such empirical study. Drawing upon an analysis of 1,415 claims made by 263 people in 12 discussion groups, the authors show that ordinary conventions of storytelling helped deliberators to identify their own preferences, demonstrate their appreciation of competing preferences, advance unfamiliar views, and reach areas of unanticipated agreement. The ambivalence, however, with which participants generally viewed storytelling as a rhetorical form restricted personal stories to discussions that were seen as without impact on the policy-making process. More broadly, by drawing attention to the evaluative structures through which people's use of cultural forms is differentially assessed, the authors provide an alternative to both instrumentalist and structuralist approaches to culture.

Public and public-spirited talk increasingly has come to be seen as the core of strong democracies. Communitarians, pragmatists, and critical theorists alike have converged on the idea that democratic legitimacy depends on the existence of public settings in which citizens reason together about issues of mutual concern (Barber 1988; Bohman 1996; Dryzek 2000; Cohen 1989; Fishkin 1991, 1995; Guttman and Thompson 1996, 2004; Habermas 1984, 1989, 1996). Indeed, no idea has been more discussed by political theorists in the past two decades (Guttman and Thompson 2004). Public discussion is thought to increase levels of civic engagement, the quality of policies, and citizens' trust in political institutions (Barber 1988; Bohman 1996; Cohen 1989; Fishkin 1995; Fishkin and Luskin 1999; Gastil and Dillard 1999; Ryfe 2005).

Yet what kind of discussion best fosters those outcomes? Are arguments that are passionately made a threat to reasoned public deliberation or do they open deliberation to groups that are usually excluded? Are accounts of personal experience better able to pierce conventional wisdom than appeals to shared values? Must

deliberative discourse be oriented toward reasons? Questions like these have spurred a vigorous debate among political theorists, with some arguing for the deliberative value of personal and passionate forms of talk (Young 1996, 2000; Sanders 1997) and others insisting on the necessity of rational argument (Guttman and Thompson 1996; Dryzek 2000; Miller 2002)—but there has been little empirical examination of these questions. Sociologists, for their part, have tended to concentrate on the social contexts and cultural content of a vibrant public sphere rather than on the rhetorical forms that predominate within it. So, with respect to context, they have looked, for example, to the organizational structure of civic life (Skocpol 2003), nationally distinctive routines of news-reporting (Ferree et. al. 2002), and the associational backgrounds of deliberative forum participants (Baoicchi 2003). With respect to the content of a democratic public sphere, sociologists have assessed the prominence of self- or other-regarding orientations in the culture at large (Bellah et al. 1986) and examined the micropolitical cultures that promote arguments based on self-interest or that privilege one understanding of individualism over another (Perrin 2005; Eliasoph and Lichterman 2003). The existing empirical work on the rhetoric of good deliberation has been either historical (Schudson 1992, 1997; Fraser 1992; Ryan 1992) or based on the ethnographic study of activists or of people in nonpolitical settings (Hart 2001; Lichterman 1996; Eliasoph 1998; Eliasoph and Lichterman 2003). In an exception, Gamson's (1992) study of talk among groups of ordinary Americans showed that people's experiential knowledge, typically expressed in personal stories, was a source for a critical understanding of political issues. Gamson, however, did not evaluate storytelling along any other dimensions of political deliberation.

The larger gap reflects in part a tendency among cultural sociologists to focus on meaning more than on rhetoric; but it also reflects the methodological difficulty of studying a phenomenon—the public sphere—that has existed mainly in the historical and theoretical imagination. That is, until now. In the past decade, public deliberative forums touted as a real-world incarnation of deliberative democracy have proliferated, some of them convened as part of local or national policy-making processes

(Delli Carpini, Cook, and Jacobs 2004; Ryfe 2005; Fung 2003; Baiocchi 2003). These forums provide an opportunity to appraise the conditions for democratic discourse among citizens in a nonexperimental setting.

We argue that doing so requires a distinctly sociological perspective. The capacity of rhetorical forms such as arguments, explanations, and stories to foster good deliberation rests not only on features of the form but also on social conventions of its use and evaluation. In this article, we draw on scholarship in sociolinguistics to identify norms of everyday conversation that open up possibilities for effective deliberation, possibilities that have been overlooked by democratic theorists. Conversational norms also levy previously unnoted constraints on fair deliberation, however. In particular, we draw attention to popular beliefs about the authority of different rhetorical forms. The "grammars of worth" that structure the evaluation of aesthetic objects and positions in political disputes (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006; Lamont and Thévenot 2000) also structure the evaluation of rhetorical forms. They operate, however, in ways that are variable rather than fixed. Concerns about the credibility or authority of a particular form are more likely to be triggered by some users and in some contexts rather than others. Teasing out the hierarchies of evaluation through which citizens' talk is variably assessed can shed light on the conditions for genuinely democratic deliberation. Such an inquiry also suggests a new answer to the age-old sociological question of why it is that even as people use culture practically and creatively, they do so in ways that largely sustain the status quo. Social inequalities may be reproduced not only by people's uneven capacities to use culture effectively (Bourdieu 1984) but also by the disparate ways in which the culture they use is assessed.

In this article, we focus on rhetorics of reason-giving and personal storytelling. Democratic theorists have debated the merits of these two rhetorical forms (Guttman and Thompson 1996; Young 1996, 2000; Sanders 1997; Dryzek 2000; Miller 2002). There also exists a rich literature on storytelling in a variety of institutional settings, for example, legal (Briggs 1997; Conley and O'Barr 1990; Maynard 1988; Manzo 1993; Trinch and Berk-Seligson 2002), medical (Clark and Mishler 1992), occupational (Linde 1993), and familial

(Ochs and Capps 2002; Johnstone 1990). There has, however, been no empirical comparison of personal storytelling and reason-giving in public deliberation. Here, we study twelve groups of ordinary citizens as they deliberated online about how to rebuild the World Trade Center site in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attack. In a forum sponsored by rebuilding authorities and civic groups, participants were asked to make recommendations about the design of the site, as well as about housing, transportation, and economic development plans, and a memorial planned for the victims of the disaster.

Through a quantitative analysis of the distribution of reasons and personal stories across kinds of claims, claimants, and responses, we identify patterns in who used personal stories in relation to what topics, and with what effect. Through a qualitative analysis of a sample of storytelling exchanges, we probe in more detail the formal features and conventions of use that equipped personal storytelling to gain a hearing for marginalized views, spur deliberative engagement, and advance compromise positions. Finally, through a qualitative analysis of participants' talk about storytelling in the course of their discussions, we account for a puzzle: participants were enthusiastic about the value of personal storytelling but told personal stories mainly in discussions that were seen as without impact on the policy-making process. In brief, we find that narrative's conventional openness to interpretation—in essence, its ambiguity—proved a surprising deliberative resource, especially for people with marginalized points of view. Yet the ambivalence with which storytelling was popularly viewed—as simultaneously normatively compelling and politically unserious—ended up disadvantaging just those people.

DEMOCRACY AND STORYTELLING

Arguments for the virtues of deliberation go back to Aristotle, but they have taken on special force in the context of widespread concern about contemporary democracies' low levels of citizen engagement and the generally polarized character of political debate. As theorists of deliberative democracy see it, the solution to this state of affairs is to create opportunities for public deliberation (Habermas 1984, 1989, 1996; Barber 1988; Fishkin 1991, 1995; Cohen 1989; Dryzek 2000; Bohman 1996). Public discussion of hot-button political issues can yield areas of unanticipated agreement. Even if participants do not change their minds, they will likely come to recognize a greater range of preferences as legitimate. Once that recognition occurs, people are likely to accept a decision that does not match their preferences exactly (Cohen and Sabel 1997; Shapiro 2002). This means that public deliberation can be integrated with existing electoral, legislative, and administrative processes (Cohen 1989; Fishkin 1995; Guttman and Thompson 1996).

The key question, then, is what makes for good deliberation. Most scholars agree that discussion must be open to all, and participants must be unconstrained in the arguments they make, save by the requirement of civility. Deliberation should be free of outside control and should aim for agreement that is uncoerced (Bohman, 1996; Habermas 1984; Cohen 1989; Fishkin 1995; Guttman and Thompson 2004). In such a setting, deliberation properly takes the form of reason-giving. Participants justify their preferences by making arguments that others can accept as persuasive (Bohman 1996; Cohen 1989; Habermas 1984; Gutmann and Thompson 2004:3).[1]

Yet it is precisely this requirement, considered foundational by most deliberative democrats, that has been powerfully challenged by a recent line of criticism. Even if people are granted equal access to deliberative forums, they are not equally able to use the reasoned discourse that is privileged there. Men, white people, native speakers of standard English, and those with cultural capital are both better equipped to formulate abstract reasons and are more likely to be heard as giving good reasons, no matter what they actually say (Young 1996, 2000; Sanders 1997; Bickford 1996; Mansbridge 1999). Further disadvantaging some groups, critics

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[1] Deliberative democrats differ on whether the values and principles to which participants appeal should be shared by all participants already or whether it is the possibility of unity that motivates them. Most deliberative theorists, however, talk easily about the "universal standards" (Dryzek 2000:69), the "common good" (Cohen 1989), or the "impartial values" (Elster 1998:6) to which deliberators should appeal.

argue, the widely shared values and universal principles to which deliberators are supposed to appeal unfairly universalize the experience of particular, powerful groups. Those with different experiences are easily dismissed as deviant (Minow 1990). In short, privileging reasoned discourse comes at the expense of another deliberative standard, that of equality.

The solution to these problems, as critics see it, is to legitimize diverse discourses in deliberation, chief among them, personal storytelling (Young 1996, 2000; Mansbridge 1999). In a deliberative setting, storytelling is equalizing, since everyone has his or her own story (Young 2000; Sanders 1997). By telling their stories, members of disadvantaged groups can gain an empathetic hearing for experiences and values that are unlike those of the majority (Murphy 1993; Young 2000). By showing how their particular experiences elude categories that are supposed to be universal, disadvantaged groups can expose the particularistic character of those principles. That is the first step to crafting more inclusive principles (Delgado 1989; Smith 1998; Sanders 1997; Young 2000).

Deliberative democrats in the classical mold remain unconvinced by these arguments. They point out that listeners have no way of knowing how representative a story is, or even what the policy implications of a personal experience are (Miller 2002:217; Dryzek 2000). A story that is told badly may widen perceptions of difference rather than narrowing them (Miller 2002:219), and a story told too well may lead listeners to identify so strongly with the victimization described as to make them prone to vengeance rather than reasoned remedy (Dryzek 2000:69). Absent special effort on the part of storytellers to "appeal to universal standards" (Dryzek 2000:69) or "reasons and principles that are widely shared." (Miller 2002:221), stories are likely to inhibit deliberation rather than advance it. Disadvantaged groups may have the satisfaction of expressing their needs in their own distinctive voices, but they do nothing to help deliberators move beyond a Babel of competing needs. Theirs is a "politics of futile gesture" that leaves the status quo intact (Gutmann and Thompson 1996:137; Miller 2002; Dryzek 2000).

Which side is right? We argue that both sides have tended to treat personal stories as raw accounts of personal experience. This is why even proponents of storytelling have argued that personal stories must be combined with explicit appeals to normative principles to be effective (Young 2000:74). They, like deliberative theorists in the classical mode, have denied personal storytelling the capacity to move beyond registering differences to forging agreement across differences. We argue, to the contrary, that the narrative character of personal stories equips them to do the latter as well.

To make this argument, we draw upon scholarship that addresses not only narrative's literary form but also its use in everyday life; that is, the norms governing how people typically tell, hear, and respond to stories. We define a story, conventionally, as an account of a sequence of events in the order in which events occurred to make a point (Labov and Waletsky 1967; Labov 1972; Linde 1993). In a personal story, the protagonist is the narrator and the events recounted are presented as true. We define a reason (in a deliberative context) as a justification for an opinion that is based on the opinion's consistency with a more general principle (Baumeister and Newman 1994; Bruner 1991; Elster 1998). Storytelling differs from reason-giving in ordinary conversation in at least four ways. Stories integrate description, explanation, and evaluation; they are detached from the surrounding discourse; they are allusive in meaning; and they are iterative in the sense that they elicit more stories in response. We elaborate on each of these features as we describe how they work to meet three critical challenges of deliberation.

One challenge is to get deliberators to listen as well as speak (Barber 1988; Bickford 1996). Research shows that the quality of people's opinions is improved when they take into consideration other people's opinions (Price, Cappella, and Nir 2002; Wyatt, Katz, and Kim 2000; Stromer-Galley 2005)—but it is a distinctive kind of consideration that is required. If one danger is that people hear other perspectives as incomprehensible or threatening, another is that they so assimilate other perspectives to their own as to miss what is different about them. In addition, deliberators must not only hear other perspectives but also communicate that they have done so. This is important both because understanding is improved by checking one's perceptions against those of the person whom one is trying to understand

(Goodin 2000) and because deliberative legitimacy depends on participants' belief that their preferences have been recognized as legitimate even if they are not ultimately acted upon (Cohen and Sabel 1997).

Proponents have argued that personal storytelling conveys the particularities of people's experiences in a way that reasons do not (Henderson 1987; Murphy 1993; Young 2000). Why, though, would anyone want to submerge themselves in the details of another person's experience? Because when that experience is structured as a story rather than as an account or description, listeners anticipate that it will make a larger point, one that is relevant to their own lives. To understand the story is to grasp its moral implications (Bruner 1991; Labov and Waletsky 1967; Linde 1993; Ochs and Capps 2002; Polanyi 1979; White 1987). This is different from saying that people can combine their stories with an appeal to shared values. Rather, the values are built into the story itself. It is also different from saying that what is important about personal stories is their personal, particular quality. Rather, stories integrate the particular and the general. They do this by way of plot. Plot is the structure of the story; it orders events such that those peripheral to the central causal thread are excluded. Plots are conventional in the sense that they are drawn from a common, cultural stock. An account of a personal experience makes sense against the backdrop of similar stories (Bruner 1991; Polletta 1998; Polkinghorne 1988; Johnstone 1990). A story is recognizable as a David and Goliath story about the little guy triumphing over the big one or a Pride Before a Fall story about the little guy biting off more than he can chew. The plot lines available at any one time, however, are numerous, and stories never hew to familiar plotlines exactly (Bruner 1991; Ewick and Silbey 2003). This means that people can convey genuinely new perspectives in the reassuring form of generic plot lines. In a deliberative context, personal stories can help listeners comprehend experiences both as unlike and analogous to more familiar experiences.

Turning unfamiliar perspectives into compelling personal stories obviously takes skill, but narrative's very form prepares audiences to listen empathetically. People understand an argument by evaluating the consistency between claim, justificatory principle, and evidence. By contrast, they understand a story by tacking back and forth between the events described, the internal emotional states of the protagonists experiencing those events, and the larger whole to which the story adds up (Baumeister and Newman 1994; Bruner 1991). They reject a story not because it lacks evidence but because the protagonist's experiences or insights are not "believable" given what they know about the protagonist and her world (Johnstone 1990; Linde 1993). Audiences are prepared from the very beginning of a story to suspend disbelief. Even in ordinary conversation, speakers rely on a variety of linguistic devices to effect a transition to the separate time and place of the story (the equivalent of "Once upon a time . . ."): for example, indications that a story is about to be told; an orientation to the time and place of the story; or a shift in verb tense (Jefferson 1978; Labov 1972; Linde 1993; Polanyi 1985). These devices, which detach the story from the ongoing conversation, encourage listeners to suspend their skepticism about the credibility and relevance of the story and strive to grasp the motivations of the characters and the unfolding logic of events. In other words, when audiences enter the story-world created by the narrator, they know from the beginning that they are making a projective leap. In a deliberative context, this should prime them to empathize with the narrator without misrecognizing his experience as their own. Finally, by retelling other people's stories or by explicitly imagining the experiences associated with a particular position, deliberators can demonstrate their understanding of an opinion with which they do not agree, or at least show their appreciation of the experiences that gave rise to it. In sum, narrative's conventionally normative and discursively detached character equip it well to communicate, rather than merely express, people's distinctive preferences.

A second challenge in deliberation is that the connections among preferences, principles, and practical solutions are rarely obvious, even to those who profess them. The assumption that preferences are alterable stands behind all arguments for deliberation: if preferences were fixed, then bargaining or voting would be better mechanisms for sorting among them (Cohen 1989; Elster 1998). Preferences, however, are often inchoate as well as open to change (Button and Mattson 1999; Conover, Searing, and Crewe

2002:53). People's experiences may have given them a feeling about an issue rather than a clear opinion; they may have an opinion but see no relevant principle with which to justify it; they may have a principled opinion but not see any policy option that matches it. All of these are especially likely to be the case for deliberators whose experiences or opinions put them in the minority.

Telling personal stories in this situation is a way to get other people's help in formulating one's opinions, crafting justifications for those opinions, and defining the options that are available. Again, people listen to a personal story because they trust that it will make a normative point; it will have relevance to their own lives. But if all stories have a moral, the moral is rarely announced explicitly. Rather, audiences accept that they will have to interpret the story to extract its meaning (Bruner 1991; Iser 1972), and, indeed, that the story's meaning may not even be obvious to the person telling the story. Here, we draw attention to narrative's allusive character. Of course, all discursive forms require interpretation; but audiences expect good stories to be interpretable more than they do good reasons or good reports. Conversational analysts have found that when people tell their stories, their listeners often participate in interpreting and even telling the story (Goodwin 1986; Ochs and Capps 2002). The point of the story may be offered by the narrator, then modified or amplified by her interlocutors. Or the narrator's interlocutors may supply the point of an account that the storyteller presented as ambiguous (Robinson 1981:69; Maynard 1988:451; Manzo 1993; Ochs and Capps 2002). People may tell stories in deliberation with just this possibility in mind. By interpreting the narrator's story, or by telling one of their own, deliberators can help illuminate a larger point. If solving problems requires identifying what the problem is and what solutions are available as well as matching one to the other, personal storytelling may be a valuable resource.

Finally, and this is the third feature of deliberation that we want to underscore, deliberators, at least some of the time, must be able to persuade each other of the merits of their views. This is notoriously difficult to do. Research suggests that while people like being exposed to other points of view, they are keenly sensitive to efforts at persuasion. They worry that they will be cowed into changing their opinion or that the discussion will become awkwardly argumentative (Button and Mattson 1999; Conover, Searing, and Crewe 2002; Eliasoph 1998; Mansbridge 1983). They may be especially worried when participating in an online forum, given such forums' reputation for hostile discussions (Sunstein 2001; Wilhelm 2000). The question, then, is whether people can reason together without antagonizing each other.

Telling personal stories may be helpful, not because they offer a clear moral but because they do not do so. We draw attention once again to the allusive character of storytelling but also to its iterative character. Reasoned argument invites assent or dispute. Telling a story implies an invitation to tell a story in return (Ochs and Capps 2002; Sacks 1992). "That reminds me of something that happened to me . . .," speakers often say. The longer conversational turn that stories require comes with an obligation to cede the floor once the story is done. The second story is expected to relate to the first one but may do so in any number of ways (Arminem 2004; Ochs and Capps 2002; Sacks 1992; Polanyi 1979). For example, the second story may offer an alternative perspective on the events related in the first story or may recast the first story's point. In a deliberative context, a speaker may offer his personal experience in the vein of an earlier speaker's story but use his story to advance quite a different opinion. Again, that the point of the story is usually implied rather than stated explicitly means that it is more difficult to reject as being wrong or irrelevant. Storytelling's allusive and iterative qualities allow deliberators to advance even competing opinions in a way that is not perceived as combative.

If the norms of storytelling in everyday conversation point to neglected benefits of telling personal stories in deliberation, they also point to at least one important risk. Some people's stories may be more credible than others, not only because of the skill of the storyteller but also because concerns about the credibility of the genre itself may attach more to some people than others and may arise on some occasions and not others. Storytelling's value in deliberation is shaped by popular assumptions about how stories work: assumptions about how audiences respond emotionally to stories, who is equipped to tell credible stories, how stories convey or cir-

cumvent the truth, and what stories are good for. We call them "popular assumptions" to distinguish them from the institution-specific storytelling norms that scholars have investigated, for example, in courtrooms (Conley and O'Barr 1990), plea-bargaining sessions (Maynard 1988), and hospital intake interviews (Clark and Mishler 1992). The assumptions that we are referring to cut across institutions. For example, the popular expectation that true stories remain the same in their retelling has hurt women who have made rape charges in court. Juries have fixed on the fact that elements of the victim's account changed from the time of her first agonized call to police and, as a result, have questioned her credibility, despite the fact that this is not an atypical occurrence for victims of sexual violence (Scheppele 1992).

Assumptions about how stories work and how credible they are relative to other rhetorical forms vary historically and culturally. They are also contingent. Different and, indeed, contrary assumptions may be triggered depending on the speaker and the setting. Sociolinguists have drawn attention to the first kind of contingency, noting that although personal narrative is generally denigrated relative to forms of discourse that are considered more scholarly or scientific, higher-status storytellers still have authority. As Hymes puts it, "[O]nly the anecdotes of some would count" (1996:113–14; see also Blommaert 2001; Briggs 1997; Ewick and Silbey 1995). We emphasize the second kind of contingency. The anecdotes of all may count, but only in relation to some topics or on some occasions. This reflects the fact that popular views of narrative are ambivalent rather than dismissive. People tend to see narrative as authentic if also deceptive, as normatively potent if also politically unserious. We suspect that these views reflect the symbolic codes of analogy and difference that produce cultural meaning more generally (Lévi-Strauss 1963; Alexander and Smith 1993). Just as people know what reason is through its relation to other binary oppositions—reason is to unreason what man is to woman, cognition is to emotion, and culture is to nature—storytelling makes sense when ranged along culturally familiar oppositions. Insofar as storytelling is understood in terms of oppositions of concrete/abstract, emotional/rational, female/male, personal/public, informal/formal, and folkloric/scientific, it is deni-

grated by its association with the negative pole of each opposition. "Scientific," however, is also commonly contrasted with "commonsensical," and narrative is favored by its association with the latter. Similarly, narrative's association with morality as against strategy and emotion as against rationality may make the form seem more trustworthy than, say, logical arguments, at least in settings that are perceived as private or informal.

What this means for deliberation is that when disadvantaged groups use narrative to challenge the status quo, they may be especially vulnerable to skepticism about the veracity, authority, or generalizability of the form. When advantaged groups use narrative, they may be less likely even to be heard as telling stories. Alternatively, the use of narrative on some occasions may raise doubts about the form's value. If personal stories are commonly seen as appropriate during discussions that are personal, casual, and social, they may raise such doubts during discussions that are public, policy-oriented, or technical. This perception may disadvantage already disadvantaged groups since it is in such discussions that supposedly neutral standards, universal principles, and technical criteria tend to operate with special force to marginalize their interests.

These possibilities call for a fuller understanding of the norms governing people's use of stories and reasons in real-world deliberation. We ask three sets of questions:

1. When and why do people typically tell stories rather than give reasons? Do they communicate preferences differently by way of stories and reasons? Is storytelling considered more appropriate for some kinds of people, in relation to certain topics, to advance certain kinds of opinions, and in certain conversational contexts?
2. What responses do stories elicit compared to reasons? Does storytelling foster or impede the unconstrained give-and-take, flexibility of agenda, and uncoerced agreement that are the hallmarks of good deliberation?
3. Does telling stories rather than giving reasons serve disadvantaged groups in particular? If members of disadvantaged groups do tell stories, are their stories engaged by fellow deliberators? Or does self-expression come at the expense of dialogue?

We outline our specific expectations in the next section.

DATA AND METHODS

We studied an online deliberative forum about the future of Lower Manhattan in the wake of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attack. The online forum, like the 4,300-person face-to-face forum that preceded it, was sponsored by a coalition of civic groups and public agencies, including the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation and the New York/New Jersey Port Authority, the two agencies responsible for planning the site. The civic groups, which included planners, environmentalists, victims' families, and neighborhood groups, had sought to curb what they saw as a rush to redevelop the site. They negotiated hard with rebuilding authorities to create a deliberative forum that would allow people to comment both on specific master plans for the site and on broader redevelopment issues (Polletta and Wood 2005). The face-to-face forum, which was held on July 20, 2002, was conducted by AmericaSpeaks, a nonprofit organization that pioneered the use of interactive technologies for large public meetings. The online forum, which ran from July 29 to August 12, was organized by Weblab, a group that had run similar online dialogues about topical issues. It was hoped that the longer timeframe of the online discussion would allow participants to discuss redevelopment issues in depth (Figallo, Miller, and Weiss 2004).

Listening to the City Online was advertised by way of media coverage of the face-to-face forum and by emails sent by civic organizations to their members. The personal information that the 830 participants provided when they registered allowed organizers to assign them to dialogue groups with roughly similar make-ups. Twenty-six groups discussed preliminary plans for the site, as well as housing, transportation, and economic development issues, and a memorial to the victims of the attack. The groups followed the same agenda, with topics and questions introduced at regular intervals by the forum organizers. Half the groups were moderated; half were not. Participants could post to any topic thread introduced by organizers and they could introduce their own threads. Periodically, groups were asked to summarize areas of agreement and debate. Participants were also asked to respond individually to 23 polling questions during the course of the discussions. Questions asked participants to rate the importance of specific

rebuilding options (for example, "how important is it to restore the street grid?") and rate opinions that had surfaced in group discussions. Group summaries and poll results were synthesized by organizers and forwarded to rebuilding authorities (Figallo et al. 2004).

Certain issues in the discussions were controversial, for example, whether to build on the original footprints of the towers and whether to build low-income housing. Many participants had a real stake in these issues. Some had lost friends and family in the disaster, and others lived or worked near Ground Zero. Still others had no direct connection to the site at all. Groups would thus deliberate across diverse experiences. The recommendations arrived at were not binding on officials or on participants, as is typical of public deliberative forums, few of which do more than secure officials' agreement to consider the recommendations produced (Delli Carpini et al. 2003; Ryfe 2002).

Deliberation in an online forum is different than in a face-to-face one. Scholars have drawn attention to the socially stratified character of access to online discussion (Fox 2005; Price and Cappella 2002) as well as to distinctive features of Internet-mediated communication, especially its anonymous character and the lack of visual and oral cues, although there has been disagreement about the likely impact of those features on discussion (Gastil 2000; Stromer-Galley 2002; Iyengar, Luskin, and Fishkin 2003; Wilhelm 2000; Walther and Parks 2002). Organizers of this particular forum took pains to discourage the antagonistic discussion that is frequent in online chat rooms (Figallo et al. 2004). Participants registered in advance and could post only to their own group. The asynchronous character of posting probably made for more considered responses. Group members were asked to introduce themselves at length, and brief biographies were easily accessible by clicking on posters' names. This forum was therefore probably less polarized than most Internet chat rooms. Still, it is likely that storytelling and reason-giving figured differently than they would have in an in-person forum; at several points in this article, we speculate as to how that may have been the case. At minimum, then, our findings should provide a baseline for comparison with face-to-face deliberation. Perhaps more important, the lower cost and easy accessibility of online forums has made

them a common supplement to, and sometimes substitute for, face-to-face forums (Gastil 2000; Delli Carpini et al. 2004). This suggests that generalizing about public deliberation based only on face-to-face forums may present an increasingly unrealistic picture.

Another feature of this particular forum bears note. Convened in the wake of a national tragedy, Listening to the City attracted many people with a high emotional investment in the discussion but little direct material stake in it. Yet, this could be said about a number of issues that have been the subject of deliberative forums, such as abortion and welfare reform. As we will show, although people did tell stories about their experience of 9/11, they told many more stories about matters that were more prosaic, and they told stories far more often to express their opinions about redevelopment than to express their feelings about the 9/11 attack.

Scholars have wrestled with the question of how to measure good deliberation (Bohman 1996; Mansbridge 1983; Nemeth 1986). Given the difficulties of identifying the products of good deliberation, we focused instead on the process of deliberation and on indicators that correspond to standards widely cited in the literature. We looked to see whether storytelling more than reason-giving fostered discussion that was open to diverse speakers and points of view (Bohman 1996; Wilhelm 2000; Habermas 1984); engaged speakers' claims (Guttman and Thompson 1996; Graham and Witschge 2003; Goodin 2000; Stromer-Galley 2005); allowed the introduction of new issues into the deliberative agenda (Bohman 1996; Young 2001); and fostered agreement without manipulation (Mansbridge 1983).

In the quantitative portion of the research, we used logistic regression models to estimate the likelihood that people told, responded to, and engaged narrative claims. We chose twelve of the 26 discussion groups by way of quota sampling and, with three additional coders, coded every claim advanced by way of a story or a reason that appeared in the twelve groups. We omitted the introductions thread in each group, since participants were effectively invited by organizers to tell their personal stories there. We reviewed 4,913 messages in total (a single message could include more than one claim). We defined a narrative claim as an opinion or pref-

erence that was advanced by way of a story (we use the words "story" and "narrative" interchangeably). Stories were composed of (a) an orientation, which set the scene, (b) a series of complicating actions (implicit "and then . . ." clauses) ending with one that served as dénouement, and (c) an evaluation, which could appear at any point in the story, establishing the importance of the events related (Labov and Waletsky 1967; Labov 1972). We suspended one Labovian requirement, that an account refer to a specific past time-event, in order to include what Polanyi (1985) calls "generic narratives," in which events were recurrent. The following are two examples of narrative claims:

> [Example 1] As I stated in my bio, my youngest child, Paul, was murdered on Sept. 11. He was attending [a] conference at Windows on the World. He did not even work at the WTC. He was only 25 years old, standing on the brink of a wonderful future. Though Paul is dead, as a parent, my need to care for him has not gone away. To that end, I became the co-chairperson of the Memorial Committee. [. . .]
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> All this started by my wanting to see Paul's name etched in stone. Many people resent calling Ground Zero a cemetery, but in fact, many people's remains have not been found, including Paul, and this site will be their last resting place. I want to see a respectful and dignified memorial. I want to see a museum that will tell future generations what happened in NY on Sept. 11. I don't want this event remembered as a mass murder, but the loss of many individual human souls. A museum will give a human face to this tragedy. I want Ground Zero to become a meaningful place that will honor those murdered as well as create a vital neighborhood in the city Paul truly loved. My immediate reaction cannot be described. I am no longer the person I once was and I will never ever recover from the fact that Paul will not be able to live out his life . . . and he truly loved life.[2].
>
> [Example 2] Last evening I walked around the circumference of the site with my nephew and a friend visiting from San Francisco. As I was trying to explain where the buildings once stood (particularly the Twin Towers) in relation to the 16 acre pit and the surrounding buildings, I was

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[2] Bracketed ellipses [. . .] indicate text that we deleted; unbracketed ones were in the original. Here and elsewhere, to protect the anonymity of participants, we have given pseudonyms to all names used in the messages that we quote.

shocked that I couldn't really place where those footprints would have been. I've walked around/through the WTC area many thousands of times since I moved downtown in 1976—I could still draw you a map of all the shops in the concourse mall (something so unimportant)—and yet my spatial recollection of the towers against what's there now is vague. My point is, yes, there must be a memorial there that will honor all those thousands who lost their lives that day, but I don't know that we must preserve the footprints.

The story of the first writer's son backed up her preferences for the memorial and a museum but it did so by recounting how she came to hold those preferences, an account that took the form of a tragic but literarily familiar story of a parent's loss of a child. The second writer recounted her shocked realization that she did not remember where the towers had stood to make the case for allowing rebuilding on the towers' original outline.

Both writers could have justified their preferences without telling a story. The first writer could have argued that a museum was important to honor those who had died. The second writer could have argued that memorializing the victims of the tragedy could take place at multiple sites. Justifications that appeal to shared values—here, respect for the dead and an understanding of memory as transcending physical space—are consistent with deliberation in the classical mold. Accordingly, we labeled as "nonnarrative claims" those opinions that were combined with a reason rather than a story. Reasons could be practical ("that option has worked elsewhere"), normative ("that is the fair or democratic thing to do"), or symbolic ("that option signals our commitment to freedom or environmental sustainability"). We also coded every response to a claim that appeared in the same thread as the claim (participants rarely posted responses in other threads).[3]

DEPENDENT MEASURES. We were interested in three outcomes. One was the likelihood that a participant used a story rather than a reason to advance a claim. The second was the likelihood that a narrative claim was responded to. The third was the likelihood that a narrative claim was engaged. The last measure reflects the fact that responding to a story by thanking the narrator for telling it or by remarking on its emotional resonance is not the same as taking up the point made by way of the story. Only the latter would indicate that the story was spurring the kind of give-and-take that deliberation requires. We defined as "engaging a claim" any one of the following responses: agreement; acknowledgement of the claim's impact on the author's opinions, priorities, or definitions; a similar or corroborating claim; disagreement; expression of doubt about the claim's relevance or generalizability; request for clarification or elaboration; or a challenge to the interpretation of a prior claim.

INDEPENDENT MEASURES. All participants completed a questionnaire providing personal information when they registered for the dialogues. This allowed us to match claims with demographic characteristics of their authors: gender, race (white/nonwhite), educational attainment (college degree/less than a college degree), and income ($50,000 or more/less than $50,000). To determine the conversational prompts to narrative and non-narrative claims, we coded the relationship of a claim to the ongoing discussion. A stand-alone claim was advanced without reference to previous messages in the thread; a directed reply responded explicitly to a previous message; an undirected reply responded to a theme in the previous messages; a solicitation asked explicitly about other people's views on an issue. To detect whether participants used stories to advance marginalized views, we coded whether participants contrasted their opinions and experiences with those of other people. We identified a minority perspective where the poster explicitly distinguished his or her opinion from that of a group of people. Prefatory comments such as, "I guess I'm in the minority for thinking . . .;" "I am

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[3] Intercoder reliability was good for coding the characteristics of claims that had been identified as narrative or non-narrative (Krippendorf's alpha of .89 for both) but was fair for identifying narrative and non-narrative claims in the first place (Krippendorf's alpha of .56 and .64 respectively; 91 percent agreement on the number of claims and 72 percent agreement on the number of non-narrative claims). We responded by reviewing all the statements that coders had marked as ambiguous and reaching agreement

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on whether each statement should be coded as a narrative claim, a non-narrative claim, or neither one.

also opposed to some people . . .;" "I know it will sound strange, but I think . . ." signaled minority perspectives. When a writer distinguished his or her experience or opinion from that of an individual rather than a group, we did not code it as a minority perspective. To determine the topics in relation to which people told stories rather than gave reasons, we identified the discussion thread in which each claim appeared. In an email sent to all participants, organizers described one set of threads as focused on "specific rebuilding issues, including business development, employment, transportation, housing, parks, and other issues." We were interested in claims-making in these threads, which could be construed as technical or as about a defined set of policy options.

In the qualitative portion of the research, we analyzed all the narrative claims in which deliberators advanced a minority perspective, in order to catalogue the ways in which people used personal stories. We also analyzed a number of exchanges prompted by narrative claims to see whether stories were fostering convergence on a new position in the discussion itself, along the lines of the fourth standard of good deliberation that we described earlier. We looked for evidence of participants visibly reformulating positions, to demonstrate that the convergence was not being manipulated. To capture the successful addition of new issues onto the deliberative agenda (the third standard for good deliberation), we studied the timing and content of forum organizers' creation of polling questions over the course of the dialogues. Finally, to probe participants' assumptions about storytelling as a rhetorical form, we searched the dialogues for every reference to "story" or "stories." There were 180 in total. We studied the context of these references to gain a sense of what people saw as the virtues and liabilities of storytelling.

Proponents of storytelling in deliberation would expect to see traditionally disadvantaged groups, that is, women, nonwhites, and people with lower income and educational attainment, using stories to advance their claims—unless, that is, such groups felt constrained to use the privileged discourse of reason-giving, in which case, they, like everyone else, would avoid stories altogether. If stories are especially well equipped to integrate novel perspectives into familiar templates for understanding, to solicit audiences' help in recognizing the normative principles illuminated by a personal experience, and to demonstrate the storyteller's appreciation for other points of view, as we have argued that they are, we should see people from all demographic groups using stories to advance views that they believe are likely to be unfamiliar or unpopular. In other words, the use of narrative will be patterned more by the kind of claim than by the social status of the claims-maker. We also expect that the conventionally collaborative character of storytelling will have the effect of integrating narrative claims into ongoing discussions better than non-narrative claims. Narrative claims will be made in more direct response to the previous thread of discussion and they will more commonly elicit responses than non-narrative claims. Democratic theorists who are critical of storytelling might also expect that narrative claims would elicit responses—but not a real engagement of the claim made by way of the story. We expect, to the contrary, that narrative claims will elicit more engaged responses than non-narrative ones.

In these respects, storytelling should foster good deliberation. We expect, however, that storytelling's deliberation-enhancing capacity will be hampered by popular doubts about narrative's credibility and authority. If such doubts are fixed rather than contingent, we would likely see participants ignoring narrative claims altogether or responding to them only superficially, in ways that do not engage the points that the stories made. We do not expect to see those patterns. Rather, we expect that stories will be treated dismissively only when they are told by some users and in some contexts. We expect that when disadvantaged groups make narrative claims, they are likely to be ignored or responded to only superficially. With respect to context, we expect that all participants will avoid making narrative claims in discussions that are focused on policy rather than on broad themes in rebuilding. When people do make narrative claims in policy discussions, they will probably be ignored or responded to without engagement. Finally, we expect to see in participants' commentary about storytelling in the course of their discussions evidence of the more general popular ambivalence surrounding the form.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

We discuss our results in three sections. In the first, we describe patterns in the demographic characteristics of storytellers and in the topics that spurred storytelling. We focus on a smaller sample of stories to show why participants may have chosen that rhetorical form to advance certain kinds of opinions. In the second section, we turn to the responses elicited by storytelling and reason-giving, estimating whether participants used stories successfully to elicit deliberative responses and focusing on a sample of exchanges to show how they may have done so. In the third section, we turn to the contexts in which stories were told. We draw on participants' comments about storytelling as a genre as well as on the distribution of stories and reasons across conversational contexts to identify popular beliefs about the credibility of storytelling and their effects on deliberation.

WHO TELLS STORIES

We identified a total of 182 narrative claims and 1,415 non-narrative claims. Fully 76 percent of the 4,913 messages that we read did not contain any claims at all. In those messages, participants described design preferences, advanced opinions without backing them up, recalled personal experiences, reported news that they had heard about the rebuilding process, commented on other participants' posts without making a claim of their own, or passed on links to other sources of information. In this online dialogue, typical of others, a minority of participants was responsible for most of the posts. The top 25 percent of posters were responsible for 91 percent of posts. Nonetheless, 85 percent of the posters in our sample made at least one claim.

Overall, narrative claims accounted for 11 percent of all claims. In general, people were much more likely to advance their opinions by way of reasons than stories. The stories they did tell were usually in the first person (76 percent). Although some were about the narrator's experience of 9/11 or about its impacts on his or her daily life, most of them (77 percent) related to redevelopment options and less traumatic experiences: for example, stories about changes in the narrator's neighborhood over the years, visits to other memorials, the narrator's use of amenities in Lower Manhattan before the disaster, good and bad commuting experiences, the narrator's experience of local politics, and so on.

Were stories used disproportionately by disadvantaged groups? Women, those without a college degree, nonwhites, and people earning less than $50,000 a year were underrepresented in the forum to begin with. According to the 2000 census, 53 percent of New York City residents were women, compared with 45 percent of Listening to the City registrants (and 45 percent of our sample); 69 percent of NYC residents did not have a B.A. degree compared to only 20 percent of Listening to the City registrants (and 20 percent of our sample); 55 percent of residents in New York City were nonwhite compared to 21 percent of Listening to the City registrants (and 19 percent of our sample); and 61 percent of residents made less than $50,000 a year, compared to 31 percent of Listening to the City registrants (and 27 percent of our sample). This probably reflected the unequal access of those groups both to public deliberative forums generally and to online ones in particular (Ryfe 2002). Once in the forum, however, members of those groups were not less likely to make at least one claim.

Table 1 shows logistic regression results for the use of a narrative claim.[4] Participants with incomes below $50,000, those without a college degree, and those who were not white were no more likely to turn to stories to advance their opinions than were people with incomes of $50,000 or more, those with a college degree, and those who were white. Women, however, were more likely than men to make narrative claims. Controlling for other variables, women were 1.72 times as likely as men to make narrative rather than non-narrative claims. Whereas

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[4] A total of 1,597 narrative and non-narrative claims were coded, but only the 1,415 claims for which we had complete information on each of the independent variables were analyzed. Robust standard errors are used because posters made more than one claim. This relaxes the assumption that error terms will be independent among claims made by the same author. While the models have relatively small pseudo r-squared values (.09, .02, .04, respectively), the Hosmer-Lemeshow goodness-of-fit test suggests that each of the models fit well. HLM and fixed-effects models produce coefficients that are almost identical (results not shown, available upon request).

Table 1. Logistic Regression Models for Making Narrative Claims, Responding to Claims, and Engaging Claims

	Making Narrative Claims		Responding to Claims		Engaging Claims	
	Odds	Coef.	Odds	Coef.	Odds	Coef.
Narrative			1.64	.49**	3.04	1.11**
				(.18)		(.35)
Female	1.72	.54**	1.05	.04	.95	−.05
		(.18)		(.11)		(.19)
Not White	1.06	.06	.93	−.07	.50	−.70**
		(.26)		(.16)		(.27)
No College Degree	.77	−.26	.84	−.17	.85	−.16
		(.23)		(.14)		(.23)
Income < $50,000	1.01	.01	.91	−.10	.85	−.16
		(.22)		(.13)		(.23)
Minority Perspective	5.32	1.67***	1.68	.52**	1.64	.50
		(.21)		(.19)		(.32)
"Specific Rebuilding Issues"	.36	−1.03**	.53	−.64***	.93	−.08
		(.32)		(.16)		(.30)
Constant		−2.98***		−.48**		.86**
		(.30)		(.18)		(.30)
Observations	1415		1415		544	

Note: Robust standard errors are in parentheses.
* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$ (two-tailed).

a claim made by a woman had a 12 percent chance of being narrative, a claim by a man had an 8 percent chance of being narrative.

Given narrative's utility in advancing claims for which there are not obvious justificatory principles available, we predicted that stories would be used not by disadvantaged groups alone but by all groups for that purpose. In fact, participants who saw themselves as having opinions or experiences that were not shared by others were more than five times as likely to make a narrative claim as were those who did not. In other words, while a claim signaling a minority perspective had a 32 percent chance of being narrative, a claim that did not signal such a perspective had only an 8 percent chance of being narrative. That men as much as women, and indeed, members of all demographic groups, used stories to advance unconventional opinions suggests that personal storytelling was seen as legitimate for such use. Personal storytelling was not discredited by its association with women. For disadvantaged groups, then, there seems to be good precedent for using personal stories to convey marginalized needs and priorities—since all groups are already using personal stories for just that purpose.

HOW PEOPLE USE STORIES

We analyzed the narrative claims that voiced a perspective their authors characterized as unfamiliar or unpopular, in order to probe the intentions behind participants' storytelling. The discursive context of such claims showed that people often used stories to illustrate a point or a practical idea or to flesh out imaginatively the implications of a position. Stories' creation of a separate time and space into which readers are asked to project themselves may have helped deliberators to "think in the subjunctive mode" (Wagner-Pacifici 2000) and to make more tangible what were hypothetical possibilities.

Participants also told personal stories to establish their stake in an issue. For example, participants told stories of their earlier visits to the World Trade Towers before they argued for a particular design plan, and residents of the residential neighborhood adjacent to the site recounted their struggle to develop a vibrant community before weighing in on the kind of development they wanted to see there. Personal stories served as an alternative to formal credentials: they communicated that the storyteller should be listened to because he or she had a valuable perspective. It was not the mere fact of

a relevant personal experience that authorized the speaker. Rather, the personal story followed the lines of a familiar plot. In the first example, people described their visits to the site as a kind of doomed love affair, ending with the desire to see the object of their affection properly immortalized; in the second, they cast themselves as pioneers who had carved a place in the wilderness only to see it threatened.

Narrative's champions point to stories' capacity to reveal the narrow character of ostensibly shared values and neutral principles: By recounting my experience (so the thinking goes), I make clear why people like me cannot embrace what seems to be a universal principle. Something like that may have been operating when participants told stories of the loss of a loved one to communicate why it was so inappropriate to talk about rebuilding the site as a "design opportunity," or an "economic development opportunity," as public officials were doing at the time (Nobel 2005). Storytellers cast a different perspective on the notion of opportunity, something that, under other circumstances, would likely be seen as a universal good. Their stories made clear, in a way that reasons would not, why the conventional idiom of development had to be altered for this project.

Personal stories also helped to define a new set of issues as worthy of discussion. As participants told stories of what the towers had meant to them personally, a number expressed surprise and pleasure to find that there were so many others in the group who also wanted the towers rebuilt to their original height. The familiar storyline of a nation that had been cowed rather than strengthened by an attack offered a resonant template for a new issue. Complaining that their views were being ignored in the public debate, they began to strategize about how to press their case. They were successful in convincing organizers to introduce a new polling question that explicitly asked for participants' views on whether the towers should be rebuilt: 60 percent called for buildings as tall as or taller than the original towers.

So, dialogue participants used stories to sketch future scenarios, establish the authority of their position, puncture reigning verities and values, and call for the inclusion of new issues on the deliberative agenda. In these ways, they used stories to express their differences. Yet they also told personal stories to advance the mutual understanding that deliberative democrats want to see—and believe that storytelling is ill equipped to foster. Our analysis shows that narrative claims were much more likely to be connected to the previous discussion than were non-narrative claims. Where 70 percent of the narrative claims were made either in direct response to another member of the group or in explicit response to a theme or argument that had surfaced in the discussion, only 37 percent of the non-narrative claims were.

It worked on the other side, too: In telling stories, participants invited commentary on, and, indeed, collaboration in drawing lessons from their experiences. In some cases, narrators recounted their experiences to explain their strong feelings about what should be built at the site—feelings that they had not yet connected to a principled opinion. For example, one participant wrote, "My friend in Tower One had asked me to apply at his company and I refused based on security concerns, especially after the first bombing. I can't really explain it, but NOW I would work in the new building, on the top floors." Another writer used a story to identify a feeling that she hoped could be translated into a design principle: "Recently, someone I know came back for a visit. She and her family went to Manhattan and took the Circle Line for a ride and she said that when they reached the WTC site the entire ship got silent. It's this reverence that needs to be addressed." Citing reasons would not have helped these writers to articulate their still fuzzy preferences in the way that storytelling did.

In some cases, participants offered their experiences not to illuminate a principle that should be added to those guiding the rebuilding process but to put into new perspective a principle that was already being invoked. For example, one writer objected to framing the choices as either rebuilding the towers for symbolic reasons or not rebuilding them, in the interests of good design. He recounted his own experiences of visiting the towers, towers that he described as well-designed, concluding, "I'm not advocating rebuilding a replica, and I believe that the footprints of the towers should be respected, but why not let what was there be a starting point for designing what is to be?" In stories like these, deliberators offered up their thinking to the group in a way that invited fellow group

members to think along with them. The collaborative character of storytelling was evident in an exchange in one group, where a woman told the story of her children, construction workers, who on 9/11 "left their jobs with the tools they could carry and started walking to Manhattan" to join the rescue efforts. She called for memorializing "the manner in which ordinary people responded." A fellow participant caught her drift, suggesting that the memorial should "show the world that it was Everyman who answered the call." The second writer thus recast the first writer's story in terms of the medieval morality tale of Everyman. The collaborative character of storytelling was also evident in the many stories that rehearsed the narrator's change of opinion. Such stories asked readers to identify with the narrator's own metamorphosis. They communicated, "I understand your position because I held it myself. What changed my mind was . . ." Their often tentative, open-ended quality encouraged readers to see possibilities that were only dimly recognized by the narrator. Even when the writer sought to persuade others of the position that she had arrived at, recounting the evolution of her views encouraged readers both to imagine the shift she described and to volunteer their own views.

Some participants asked people with other points of view to tell their stories. One writer asked a proponent of rebuilding the towers to do so, explaining, "I just think it would help the group, as the issue of whether to build high or higher is so contentious." Or they told stories from vantage points that they could only imagine. "When I think about the footprints, I place myself in the shoes of a person who lost a loved one and has no remains at all, not even ashes in an urn, to visit," one participant wrote, going on to recount what he believed might be a family member's experience of the site. Another writer described the powerful emotional impact that the Vietnam War memorial had had on him despite the fact that he had no personal connection to the war. He concluded, "How is someone who was just a baby on 9/11/01 going to feel when going to this memorial and what will they leave with?"

Finally, online deliberators sometimes told personal stories not to back up their own opinion but, seemingly, to back up a competing one. For example, one woman argued that honoring too many people as victims would make the concept of victimhood meaningless. She then told a poignant story of a friend who had lost his job as a result of the attack, was now driving a cab, and, near penniless, was about to lose his apartment. "Isn't he a victim of 9/11?" she wrote. The story suggested that he was a victim of 9/11, even though the writer presumably believed that people like her friend were not true victims. The writer was not a bad storyteller. Rather, she made clear that she understood the pain of those whose loss was primarily economic. Another writer argued firmly for resisting victims' families' demands for a large memorial but then recounted how the attack had affected her, writing, "While I did not know any of the victims, I cried for them for days on end." A third argued against improvements to a commuter railroad, writing in part, "My office moved to Jersey City 15 months ago. Since I live in Manhattan, I have a reverse commute that sucks [. . .] So, I'm not being unsympathetic." The last writer was explicit in his recognition of the complexity of the issues at stake, but other writers were just as clear in signaling their empathy with an opposing view. Their own opinion, they suggested, was hard won.

In sum, far from aimed only at self-expression, personal storytelling in the online dialogues was occasioned by other people's remarks and invited more commentary. The narrative character of people's accounts—an orientation that drew readers in, a series of complicating actions, and a reversal that made sense in terms of familiar stories of loss and enlightenment—involved people imaginatively in experiences quite unlike their own. Especially when speakers saw their positions as controversial, personal stories served to illustrate the ramifications of a plan, authorize the speaker's perspective where he or she lacked conventional expertise, challenge the universality of ostensibly universal principles, and push for the inclusion of new issues on the deliberative agenda. We have emphasized storytelling's capacity to do two more things, which have been largely missed by scholars because they stem from conventions of narrative's use rather than its form. Telling personal stories helped deliberators to determine jointly what options were even available and what their preferences were; and it allowed deliberators to communicate their understanding of views with which they did not necessarily agree.

HOW PEOPLE RESPOND TO STORIES

Did telling personal stories work? Did personal stories secure for their narrators a respectful hearing for unfamiliar or unpopular opinions? Did they foster a collaborative scrutiny of preferences and principles and the discovery of areas of agreement? To some extent, yes. Table 1 reports the logistic regression results for responses to claims. It shows that narrative claims were 1.6 times as likely as non-narrative claims to elicit a response. In other words, where a narrative claim had a 49 percent chance of being responded to, a non-narrative claim had only a 37 percent chance. Participants were also more likely to engage narrative claims. As Table 1 shows, a narrative claim was three times as likely as a non-narrative claim to be responded to with agreement or disagreement, a request for clarification or elaboration, doubt about the claim's generalizability or relevance, corroboration, or alleged misinterpretation. While a narrative claim that was responded to had an 85 percent chance of being engaged, a non-narrative claim that was responded to had a 66 percent chance of being engaged.[5]

We want to focus on one kind of response. A greater proportion of narrative claims elicited corroborating claims (18 percent) than did non-narrative claims (1 percent). This was the largest difference in responses. More than simply agreeing with a claim, making a corroborating one indicates an effort to build on the prior claim in a way that makes it more nuanced, more broadly applicable, or more persuasive. Interestingly, people often corroborated narrative claims by telling stories of their own. When we examined those exchanges more closely, however, we found that the stories told in response often seemed to make a somewhat different point. For example, in one discussion, participants were highly critical of the tourists descending on Ground Zero. A former Manhattan resident told a story of returning with her husband and children to visit the site. She described her fury at the tourists and then her shame at realizing that she was now one herself. Another participant responded, "My thoughts exactly!" and then told of a friend coming to visit who was adamant about seeing Ground Zero. Far from critical of her friend, the writer empathized with her, explaining, "She needed to comprehend it all. It's one thing to see it on TV or in the paper, but to be there . . . and to see St. Paul's [the chapel adjacent to the site] . . . it's different." This writer announced that the story she was about to tell supported or confirmed the one that the previous writer had told ("My thoughts exactly!"), even though it did not obviously do so. But narrative's openness to interpretation may have allowed deliberators to reformulate each other's points so as to advance another position without seeming to disagree.

Let us continue with this exchange. After the second writer responded to the first writer's passionate criticism of World Trade Center "tourists" by describing sympathetically her friend's perspective, a third participant wrote, "I too want to respond to the issue of 'tourists,'" and then recounted her experience of volunteering at St. Paul's: "We at the gate made a point of speaking to the passersby, and what became clear to me early on was that that was an important element of our ministry. Another volunteer described these 'tourists' as pilgrims, and that is how I see them too." This author seemed to have reconciled the first two points of view by recounting her own conversion on the issue. She modestly credited a coworker with her new view of visitors as "pilgrims." Two more participants weighed in, both thanking the previous writers. The first one took issue with those who were critical of visitors to the site: "How ungenerous and needlessly judgmental. All I saw were witnesses and pilgrims." The second writer picked up on the earlier mention of volunteers, describing people cheering volunteer aid workers on their way to the site. He went on, "For me, the nightmare of the buildings coming down has evolved into a strange dream that they were [n]ever there in the first place. Folks aren't going to get that from a big hole in the ground or a T-shirt, but people should want to come and understand it in the ways that they can." Without drawing attention to the contrasting views of tourists thus far expressed, this writer too sought

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[5] Engagement was calculated by treating non-responses as missing cases. We modeled the outcome in two additional ways: as the result of a two-step selection process with linked equations and as one of three possible outcomes, with no response and a non-engaged response as the other two, in a multinomial logistic regression equation. These alternatives yielded similar results (not shown, available upon request).

to reconcile them: visitors wouldn't understand as the people who lived in Lower Manhattan did, he suggested, but they should try to understand as best they could.

In the course of this series of stories, then, visiting the site was remade from a reprehensible tourist activity to an understandable and, indeed, laudable, effort to make sense of the disaster. "Tourism" had become a normative obligation. Those who criticized visitors, by contrast, were recast as "needlessly judgmental." These shifts occurred without anyone acknowledging a difference of opinion. To the contrary, each writer represented her or his view as like that of the others. Telling personal stories may have made it possible to do that without seeming inconsistent. There was enough that was similar to make each story seem to follow on from the previous story, even though the normative point in each case was quite different.

In another exchange, a participant recounted Manhattan's early settlement, writing in part, "Economic development is very important. Since the Dutch settled here, Manhattan has always been about business. They even handed over control to the English so that business could go on interrupted." The next poster wrote,

> I have to agree a bit with the previous post about the settling of Manhattan and business. And what occurs to me is revitalize the transportation, the economic development will follow. The Dutch settled and Manhattan grew because of the transport afforded by the natural harbor and rivers. For better or worse, LI or NJ widen a highway and low and behold, more homes and business sprouts and the road gets crowded.

A third writer chimed in, "I agree with the previous posts." As in the exchange about tourists at Ground Zero, the second poster here said that he agreed with the first story, and then told a story that made a contradictory point: authorities should not subsidize business but instead improve transportation. This exchange had a different tenor than the earlier one. In that exchange, respondents' stories seemed to have been offered in emotional support to the initial storyteller. The latter exchange resembled much more a kind of narrative ju-jitsu, in which the second speaker elaborated on the first story and added another one to extract a different moral. In both cases, however, stories allowed speakers to advance competing positions while not seeming to do so.

If our reading holds true more generally, then narrative's champions are right about narrative's capacity to foster deliberation but have misunderstood its sources. Because stories call for more stories, each one both connected to and distinct from the previous story, and because the moral of a story is always more implied than stated explicitly, storytellers can advance different points, as well as compromise and third positions, all in the guise of telling a corroborating story. Interpretive ambiguity is a surprising resource in deliberation.

THE APPROPRIATE CONTEXTS FOR STORYTELLING

Personal storytelling's value for deliberation would be diminished if the status of the storyteller affected the rhetorical power of the form. We focused here on the reception of claims made by women and men. We found no significant difference in the likelihood that narrative claims made by women were responded to or engaged. This suggests that, contrary to our expectation narrative claims made by women were not discredited by women's lower social status.

The problem with stories was not people's reluctance to engage them, but their reluctance to tell them in certain contexts. Dialogue participants tended to make narrative claims in discussions of the memorial and discussions of broad themes in rebuilding. They tended not to do so in the discussions of housing, economic development, and transportation. As Table 1 shows, controlling for other variables, participants were just over a third as likely to make a narrative claim in a thread centered on what the organizers called "specific rebuilding issues" as in a thread centered on broad development or memorial options.[6]

One could conceivably explain this disparity in terms of our own argument about what stories are good at doing: namely, helping people to discover their own preferences and helping to identify options that are not already known.

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[6] This was not a function of women having made fewer claims in such discussions; to the contrary, no demographic group was more or less likely than any other to make claims in rebuilding discussions (results not shown; available upon request).

When it came to policy issues such as transportation, housing, and economic development, one could argue, the options available were already on the table and more appropriately discussed in terms of technical merits than personal preferences. The problem with that explanation is that it suggests that decisions about housing, transportation, and economic development were only technical. That was not true, however. Many participants in the dialogues had a real stake in decisions about where new transportation facilities would be located, whether low-income housing would be built on the site, and what kinds of support would be made available to those affected financially by the disaster. Some residents of Battery Park City had signed up for the dialogues precisely because they were so concerned about a proposal to move a street in their neighborhood below ground. Small business owners might have described their struggles to survive financially before and after 9/11 as a way to talk about the inequities in grants being given by the city to retain large businesses. Had low-income residents told their stories, they might have convinced their fellow deliberators of the importance of low- and mid-income housing in Lower Manhattan. Indeed, the organizers may have had this in mind when they introduced the economic development discussion: "In the short run, thousands of people were economically impacted because of 9/11, ranging from a Chinatown restaurant worker who barely scraped by to a store owner, to a banker who made millions. . . . How do we help them get back on their feet?" Orienting questions about housing were similarly framed: "Finding an affordable place to live in New York is one of the hardest parts of living here for everyone, but particularly for those who make less money," participants were told, and were then asked, "Do you feel that there should be new housing in Lower Manhattan? If so, where should it be located?" In statements like these, organizers seemed at pains to get participants to relate the issues to their personal experiences.

If, as we suggested earlier, corroborating stories did indeed foster good deliberation, then it seems that the only thing that stopped people from telling such stories in the discussions of policy was the convention against it. If stories were a way for participants to clarify their own preferences as much as to gain support for them,

then the fact that they were discouraged in discussions of housing, economic development, and transportation may have made it more difficult for people to work out their preferences on those issues. Either way, the norm against storytelling—a popular norm rather than one fostered by dialogue organizers—may have reproduced a view of policy-making as expert problem-solving and as properly insulated from public input, even, paradoxically, as it was opened to public input.

What happened when people did tell stories in discussions that were apparently viewed as policy-oriented? We expected that they would be ignored or responded to superficially rather than engaged. The small number of narrative claims that appeared in these particular threads overall makes it difficult to generalize about responses, and so we coded the same threads in an additional three groups. Our numbers are still small (17 narrative claims and 296 non-narrative claims were made in housing, transportation, and economic development threads in the original twelve groups combined with the additional three), but they show that while narrative claims were much more likely to be engaged than non-narrative ones in discussions of the memorial and general themes in rebuilding, they were no more likely than non-narrative claims to be engaged in discussions that might be seen as technical or policy-focused. Narrative claims were not ignored altogether, but they did lose rhetorical force in such discussions.

Clues to why that was the case can be found in the passing comments that participants made about "story" and "storytelling" in the course of the dialogues. People talked about storytelling's purposes, virtues, and risks in contradictory ways. They described stories as at once moral and manipulable, authentic and artificial, powerful and powerless. For example, several writers asserted that victims' and survivors' stories would foster a deeper and truer understanding of 9/11 than a mere chronology of the events alone could do. One participant criticized a tendency to refer to "the events of 9/11" in a way that denuded them of their horror, a tendency to "euthanize memory." Preserving the stories of the victims would prevent that, he insisted. Yet deliberators also worried about stories' openness to interpretation. In that vein, one writer explained his disagreement with a group member by remarking, "You told one side of the

story, I told the other." If there were two contradictory sides to every story, then what authority could storytelling have? Another writer complained that forum organizers' promise to sum up the dialogues for rebuilding authorities was like "an advertising gimmick, a blip to show the world your own patched-together story in the guise of ours." Stories could generalize unfairly.

Another tension was evident in participants' assessment of the normative power of storytelling. Telling and retelling the story of 9/11 was what stood between memory and forgetting, they said. "Story" here meant not only an account of a personal experience but also a larger narrative that captured the meaning of 9/11 in an enduring way. Storytelling would ensure that future generations remembered the meaning of the tragedy. It would even help to ensure that a similar tragedy never happen again. One participant wrote, "I don't care how many times people have seen the footage, the story needs to be preserved and retold for future generations." And another wrote, "As a country, we are the storytellers. It's our responsibility to redesign the WTC in a new chapter and verse. To reflect the lives lost . . . to encourage the living . . . and to bring hope to the new generation." Stories, on this view, had powerful normative force. At the same time, people often worried that stories lacked such force: they were, after all, just stories. Future generations would "only have a story in a history book," one participant complained. Another wrote of the memorial, "I wish to see something that is emotionally big so that my future grandkids felt a connection to something that they would have never seen and can truly understand and remember the ramification of the event. I would like that it would be a little bit more than a story." A third worried about how much money rebuilding the towers would cost, "Yes, we could float bonds, but is the legacy we want to leave to our children an inspiring story, a fine view and a pile of debt?" "Inspiring stories" in other words, were no match for financial imperatives in compelling action.

Even when dialogue participants did tell stories to argue for particular positions, they drew attention to their stories' subjective and potentially obfuscating character. For example, we referred earlier to the participant who recounted being deeply touched by the Vietnam War

Memorial despite his having had no connection to the war. Yet he introduced this evocative story about the power of design to transcend subjectivity by cautioning that everyone's opinion was "subjective . . . we need to be careful." Not only were personal stories represented as personal but also as misleading. One woman told the story of her brother going back into the towers to rescue people. She called for memorials that honored people like her brother along with the firemen and policemen who lost their lives. She introduced her story, however, by saying, "I know I might be biased." There was thus an irony: even as deliberators' stories invited engagement, their comments about their stories discouraged that engagement.

One last clue to personal stories' status for dialogue participants: a number of groups on their own established a topic thread where members could talk about issues unrelated to Ground Zero. They called the threads variously "Bar and Grill," "Corner Lounge," "Coffee Shop," or other names for a café or bar. In launching the new thread, members of the group often described it as a forum for storytelling. It was a place where people "could place . . . stories and/or tidbits of personal information;" "share typical New York stories;" "just kick back, hoist a glass, relax, and trade personal stories, ideas, reminiscences, etc." Storytelling was associated with "kicking back," relaxing, going off topic, and so on. Storytelling was a way to get to know people, but it was also a break from the serious business of deliberation.

There are two ways to read these tensions between storytelling as serious and unserious, powerful and powerless, authentic and deceptive. One is to say that this is the way culture works. People have many conceptions of what narrative is and what it is good for. They invoke different conceptions to deal with different sorts of challenges. At times, they emphasize narrative's authenticity, at others its artifice; at times its morally compelling character, at others, its entertainment value. If culture is conceptualized as a practical toolkit (Swidler 2001), an ambivalent view of narrative makes the form flexible enough to serve diverse purposes. From another perspective, however, some people benefit more from that ambivalence than others. Lower-status groups or groups that challenge the status quo are more likely to be tagged with the negative poles of mixed views of storytelling.

In the online dialogues, we found that it was not certain groups that triggered negative assessments of storytelling but certain subjects that did so. Storytelling was seen as powerful when it came to issues of culture and memory but powerless when it came to issues of policy and finance. This assessment had indirect effects for disadvantaged groups. The rules around storytelling reproduced a view of policy as problem-solving rather than as politics. That may have made it more difficult for groups who were traditionally excluded from policy elites' considerations to register their preferences, even as they were invited to do just that.

At the end of the forum, fully 84 percent of participants reported being very or somewhat satisfied with the forum. Fifty-five percent said that they had changed their minds about some issues. Many worried, however, that their recommendations would not be heard by decision-makers (only 19 percent were very confident or confident on that score). Organizers forwarded a set of recommendations to rebuilding authorities that included reviving Lower Manhattan as a mixed-use neighborhood; integrating the planning of the memorial with the design of the site; and creating a focal point for the skyline. Authorities expressed gratitude for the recommendations but did not evince any willingness to act on them.

Of course, deliberative forums can be influential outside official channels. They may provide informal leverage to groups within official agencies; get issues publicly recognized as controversies; and mobilize forum participants. In this regard it is interesting that one group did seem to gain influence through the online forum: proponents of rebuilding the World Trade Towers to their original height. Before the forum, that idea had had little currency. Tall buildings were considered both energy inefficient and a potential terrorist target. A small group of people pressing for tall buildings began to organize well before the online forum, and a few were vocal participants in the online groups. We were struck, however, by the number of participants who expressed their surprise in discovering that others shared their feelings about rebuilding, and, in some cases, in discovering their own feelings on the issue. In telling vivid stories of past visits to the towers, they made sense of their desire to see the towers rebuilt, and gradually connected that desire both to a prin-

cipled justification (to show courage in the face of terrorism) and a plan for collective action. Participants who had had nothing to do with the rebuilding process until then got involved in a petition and letter-writing campaign to try to sway authorities to their cause. One of the main pro-rebuilding organizations reported that hits on their website soared in the following month, and rebuilding officials found themselves pushed to respond to pro-rebuilders' concerns (they agreed to consider buildings taller than the ones they had envisaged although not as tall as the original towers; Wyatt 2002). We recount this episode because it shows again how telling personal stories may elicit fellow deliberators' help in turning inchoate preferences into a principled opinion, and, in this case, a political agenda.

CONCLUSION

Our analysis of storytelling and reason-giving in twelve episodes of deliberation suggests that, as narrative's champions promise, storytelling is able to secure a sympathetic hearing for positions unlikely to gain such a hearing otherwise. It is also well equipped to convey the bias in ostensibly universal principles and to represent new interests and identities. Stories' creation of an alternate reality makes it possible for audiences to identify with experiences quite unlike their own while still recognizing those experiences as different. Stories' dependence on a cultural stock of plots enables storytellers to advance novel points of view within the familiar form of canonical storylines. Stories' openness to interpretation encourages tellers and listeners to collaborate in drawing lessons from personal experiences. The latter dynamic is especially interesting. While it might seem obvious that stories with strong normative conclusions (a clear "moral" to the story) would be more effective in deliberation, our research suggests rather that stories may be effective insofar as their normative conclusions are ambiguous. Stories' openness to interpretation makes it possible for deliberators to suggest compromise or third positions without antagonizing fellow deliberators. It enables deliberators to grasp practical possibilities that lie outside the current terms of debate. These assets are especially important for disadvantaged groups insofar as their perspectives are more likely to be marginal to mainstream policy

debate. In this forum, minority points of view did not match minority demographic status as much as they might have done in a forum on, say, welfare policy, sexual discrimination in the professions, or racial profiling. In such forums, we would expect to see significant differences in the demographic patterns of narrative claims-making.

If personal stories further the give-and-take that characterizes good deliberation, they do so only in certain circumstances. People are less likely to tell stories in discussions that are seen as technical or policy-oriented than they are in discussions that are seen as value-oriented. Insofar as storytelling is capable of communicating minority points of view, giving name to new issues, puncturing false universals, and opening established positions for reconsideration, the fact that it is discouraged in discussions of policy diminishes its capacity to do those things. Again, this further disadvantages already-disadvantaged groups in deliberation. The interesting point is that it is less narrative's intrinsic rhetorical capacities than popular views of storytelling as normatively powerful and politically unserious that limit its utility in deliberation.

This is the first systematic comparison of reason-giving and storytelling in deliberation and, as such, it raises a number of questions for further study. One set of questions has to do with how storytelling and reason-giving operate in different kinds of deliberation. In face-to-face rather than online deliberation, we might expect to see people telling more stories overall since speakers would find it easier to secure their audience's assent before launching into a full story. On the other hand, people might be less likely to tell stories specifically to demonstrate their empathetic understanding of a contrary opinion (since they could demonstrate that understanding through facial expression, body language, or verbal tone) and less likely to rely on personal stories to advance a competing perspective (since they would be less likely to worry in a face-to-face setting that disagreeing with someone outright would provoke a hostile response). In deliberative contexts, whether face-to-face or online, where conflicts are clear or where decisions are binding on participants, we might also expect storytelling to operate differently. Where views on an issue are polarized, for example, a deliberator might not accept a fellow deliberator's claim that a story is corroborating his own opinion when it is not. Certain deliberative forums might set a "tone" in which personal storytelling is encouraged or, conversely, where overt challenges to personal stories are permissible. Such a tone might be a function of the topic, the forum's make-up (say oncologists or breast cancer survivors), or a method of facilitation.[7]

Another set of questions concern the kinds of personal accounts that foster deliberation. For example, we argued that it was the storied character of personal accounts that made them useful in a variety of deliberative tasks. We did not, however, conduct a systematic comparison of how personal stories and personal experiences not rendered in the form of a story fared in deliberative contexts. We also drew attention to the interpretive openness of stories as a genre. Nevertheless, stories vary in their degree of openness (Barthes 1985; Wuthnow 1998). We suspect that interpretatively more and less open narratives elicit different kinds of responses. More generally, we would like to know when ambiguity fosters collaboration rather than distrust.

Our findings have practical implications for deliberation. Encouraging participants to tell personal stories at the beginning of a deliberative forum, as practitioners often do now, may be effective in building solidarity and trust (McCoy and Scully 2002). To capitalize on stories' capacity to foster unforced agreement, personal stories should be encouraged throughout the course of a deliberative forum. This includes discussions that are labeled technical or policy-oriented. Deliberation could also be strengthened by more fully capitalizing on narrative's openness to interpretation. In a deliberative

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[7] In a polarized setting, deliberators would probably be suspicious of the authenticity of personal stories altogether, which suggests that deliberation should be different where parties are deeply mistrustful of each other (Mansbridge 1999). The notion that the character of public deliberation depends on its institutional underpinnings recalls a point made by Adorno ([1964] 2005) in his critique of the undermining of independent public opinion by the very organs of opinion research that were intended to express it. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for the reference.

forum, participants could be encouraged to think through alternative normative punch lines to a story. They might imagine together what would happen if someone else recounted the same events or if a story was their own. Recounting the evolution of their views over time might help others to envision themselves doing the same thing. In sum, tools for deliberation may come from literature as much as logic.

Finally, the approach we have taken here can help to illuminate features of culture that have been difficult to get at empirically. Sociologists know that culture constrains as well as enables; that it reproduces inequalities even as it is equally available to all; that it sometimes bolsters the status quo even when it is used to challenge the status quo. The analytical challenge is to capture those processes without representing people as limited in their capacity to know their own interests and to use culture in diverse and practical ways (Swidler 2001). We have argued for paying attention not only to meaning but also to the social organization of the capacity to mean effectively. To put it simply, people can and do routinely think outside the box—but their ability to be understood in the ways they want is stratified. This is due in part to people's different socially endowed cultural capacities (Bourdieu 1984). It is also due to the likelihood that cultural forms used by some people or on some occasions may trigger doubts about the credibility or value of the form itself. We have talked about personal storytelling, but the same should be true of discursive forms such as questioning, analyzing, quoting, apologizing, and instructing.

If discursive forms capable of exposing the biases in supposedly neutral standards are devalued in precisely the discussions where such standards operate to marginalize the interests of disadvantaged groups, then simply opening deliberation up to those groups will not give them equal access to the power therein. Democracy requires more than open and vigorous talk; it requires also a willingness to scrutinize and possibly alter the norms of appropriate talk.

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