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ABSTRACT
Planners often use the phrase 'hard-to-reach' to describe youth, people of color, and people with low incomes, people from whom they need information but are unsuccessful in reaching. Consideration of cultural premises for communicating can help explain why some people are 'under-heard' rather than 'hard-to-reach.' This study uses cultural discourse analysis to study under-represented community group deliberations about transportation, convened through a model of public engagement for environmental justice. Data include transcripts of 29 group deliberations and fieldnotes. Analysis and interpretation of cultural discourses about public participation processes focuses on three radiants of meaning: (1) respect for users and sociability, (2) being involved and efficacy, and (3) having a voice and feeling worthwhile. The model of engagement in deliberative processes allows for a reconfiguration of notions of being, acting, relating, and feeling in which participants give themselves amplified voice and agency. It contributes to literature on public engagement and how culture is conceived.

Why does the bus arrive 10 minutes before the end of class? Why are there no sidewalks nor a bus shelter? Why are there no buses when the third shift starts? Why is there no express bus from the train station to employers? Why does no one seem to listen, or care? People who depend on transit have opinions about transit. The people who plan that transit are legally required to seek community input. Despite this, it can be remarkably hard for a connection to occur. Across the US, planners' efforts at involving community members often fail (Federal Transit Administration, 2011). Public engagement in planning is insufficiently public unless all members of the public have a meaningful chance to learn about options and share ideas. Environmental justice demands it, especially when decisions disproportionally affect those communities that are traditionally unrepresented. Engaging youth, people with low incomes, and people of color poses a challenge for planners (Giering, 2011; Transportation Research Board, 2009), and voices from marginalized groups are often absent from planning discourse (Brenman & Sanchez, 2012; Villanueva et al., 2017). Design for engagement affects who is heard.

People who do not participate in planning processes have plenty at stake. As Kim and Dutta (2009) have argued regarding crises, 'Although marginalized publics […] are hit the hardest by the exposure to a crisis, voices of these publics are largely absent from

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dominant discourses of crisis' (p. 143). The persistence of inequitable transportation infrastructure and systems steadily erodes publics' faith in government agencies to provide adequate services. While Kim and Dutta's case focuses on grassroots activism, the analysis of 29 cases presented here focuses on people who did not speak of themselves as activists. In a project aiming to engage low-income communities in urban planning, the 'needs and visions' 'of community stakeholders' in the region, scholars 'trained community members to map "communication assets" […] in low-income communities that can be utilized for social change and healthy communities initiatives' (Villanueva et al., 2017, pp. 477–478). Planners and activists have bemoaned the difficulty of connecting planners and the people whose movement throughout a region must be supported. When there are collaborations, often the voices are heard as merely 'expressive,' 'rather than the meaningful integration and negotiation of diverse perspectives' (Milam & Heath, 2014, p. 369). Through this work, I demonstrate how a process that engages the targeted community members themselves as seekers of their neighbors' and friends' concerns can yield both the necessary comments for legal mandates and initiate a new way of relating to each other. Deliberative forums, led by community college students in their own social groups, can be applied to a variety of public participation processes.

The meta-communication about traditional public involvement (and the new model used) was an outcome of this method of engagement, and it requires a theory that has a commitment to 'interpreting the meaningfulness of those practices to participants' themselves (Carbaugh, 2007, p. 179). Therefore, I draw from cultural discourse analysis's (CuDA) key questions, 'how is communication shaped as a cultural practice?' and 'what system of symbolic meanings or what cultural commentary is imminent in practices of communication?' (p. 168) in order to seek out the meanings that planning communication has for people who engage in it. How do people from under-represented communities communicate about that experience? When they encounter a new model of engagement, how do they talk about that? CuDA studies are valuable for their commitment to theorization and description of communicative practice.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the cultural discourses of the people who participated in a new model of public engagement. Since participants talked about the experience of communicating in this way, I explore cultural themes that emerge from this metacommunicative reflection in meetings. I address the research question: When members of a community collaborate with their peers for the purposes of deliberative public engagement, what cultural discourses about public participation processes emerge? This study contributes to literature on public engagement relating to deliberative practice, and it adds to CuDA literature in how culture is usually conceived. I argue that this model of community member-led engagement in deliberative processes allows for a reconfiguration of notions of being, acting, relating, and feeling, in which community members give themselves amplified voice and agency.

The analysis is of data generated from a partnership of a community college, a regional planning agency, transit planners, and community members. The partnership allowed for deliberation about transportation priorities in culturally sensitive ways in 2010–2011. First, I describe the applied context of communication and public engagement. Then I explain the theoretical foundation and methodology for the design of the data generation and analysis. I focus on three cultural themes related to public engagement

that emerged from this data: respect for users and sociability, being involved and efficacy, and having a voice and feeling worthwhile. In each section, I define these, present representative excerpts from the discussions, and analyze and interpret them for their premises for being, acting, relating, and feeling. The discussion section addresses the research question and offers implications for public engagement scholarship, cultural discourse theory, and planning practice.

Communication and public engagement

Communication scholars have contributed to a greater understanding of public engagement, often focused on issues of process, outcome, and quality. McComas (2003c) finds that officials' perception of a successful meeting focuses on process. Citizen perception of fairness and competency leads to greater acceptance of outcomes; the judgement of quality affects 'acceptance of decisions' (Webler & van Over, 2011, p. 3). Public meetings as public involvement have purposes including 'providing information, discussing issues, obtaining information, reviewing projects, evaluating opinions, developing recommendations, and making decisions' (McComas, 2001, pp. 36–37). Meetings may fall along a continuum of minimalist attempts to satisfy the floor of the law or striving toward a 'participatory ideal' (p. 39). If practitioners work with the participants, this takes time, and 'legitimacy and fairness' are at stake (Webler et al., 2001, p. 448).

Planners and officials, not community members, typically design and implement public participation efforts (cf. Weeks, 2002 for an exception), and often do not seek out marginalized groups (Conrad et al., 2011; Kim & Dutta, 2009). Yet who best knows the kind of involvement and ways of speaking indigenous to a culture? Community members themselves have this local knowledge. Their participation provides legitimacy.

Scholarship in democratic deliberation and CuDA frame the theory and methods for research in the current study. Gastil (2009) explains that democratic deliberation involves enough opportunities to speak and 'understand each other' with mutual respect, based on trusted information, involves prioritization and value determinations, and considers benefits and consequences (p. 2). Deliberation can lead to additional civic engagement (Gastil et al., 2010). Understanding the normative practices of deliberation from the perspectives of marginalized people contributes to what must be 'fought for each and every day' as part of a democracy (Flyvbjerg, 1998, p. 5). Deliberation in public meetings is a form of public involvement that can develop deeper issue-learning and clarify values, making community values present before planners.

The communicative practices at such meetings are important for understanding how people come to solve problems together. At these events, the 'issue' (Craig & Tracy, 2005) is constructed, and other forms of 'talk about talk' (Leighter & Black, 2010, p. 548) create participants' senses of what is going on. These events are often metadiscursive (Craig, 1999; Craig & Tracy, 2005). Social interaction studies of public meetings (Leighter et al., 2009) help to understand meetings of 'ordinary' citizens engaged in local democracy (Tracy, 2007, 2011; Tracy & Ashcraft, 2001). Studies of deliberation at public meetings can examine participant action (Leighter & Castor, 2009; Sprain & Reinig, 2018), or involve those whose voices may seem 'interruptive' and focus attention toward privilege (Brooks, 2016). Many of these employ inductive approaches that focus

on 'the practical deliberation of citizens in a democracy' (Townsend, 2009, p. 69) and begin with participants' own sense-making (Schwartzman, 1989; Sprain & Boromisza-Habashi, 2012; Townsend, 2006, 2019). Tracy and Hughes (2014) describe 'an ideal of democratic action from considering interlocking activities of multiple parties' (p. 322). McCormick (2014) takes this approach in showing how local theories inform exemplarity. Others address moments where 'meaningful moments' approach 'deliberative ideals' (Sprain & Black, 2018, pp. 1–2; see also Mendelberg & Oleske, 2000). While this latter perspective argues for theory's 'relevance to the local practices' (p. 2), the reverse is also true. Deliberation occurs for a practical reason, reasons often critical to people's lives (Tracy & Hughes, 2014).

Communication scholars focusing on public involvement have differentiated types of meetings and various processes in them (Gastil, 1993; McComas, 2003a, 2003b, 2003c; McComas & Scherer, 1998; Tracy & Muller, 2001; Tracy & Standerfer, 2003). Studies have examined meeting rules (Tracy & Durfy, 2007) and authority to speak from one's position in a group (Witteborn & Sprain, 2009) or similarly, constructions of community (Spoel & Den Hoed, 2014), and the role of moderators (Dillard, 2013). They study 'openness in deliberation' (Sprain & Ivancic, 2017) and the role of procedures designed to 'enhance' the deliberative competency of '"ordinary citizens"' (Guttman, 2007). This essay expands the literature to focus on meetings that community members convened and facilitated themselves, for the goal of listening to fellow community members' opinions and preferences on public policies and services. Planners and public officials then discussed results. In contrast to other studies, officials were not present when deliberations occurred, granting participants a sense of comfort.

Although few projects in communication studies focus on issues relevant to transportation planning, extant research (Rudnick & Boromisza-Habashi, 2017; Schwartzman, 1989; Sprain & Boromisza-Habashi, 2012, 2013) suggests that culture plays a role in preferences for processes of public meetings and public involvement processes. This study builds on that to expand how we can understand cultures of discourse emerging in practical moments.

Transportation is a developing area for applied communication researchers, despite its ubiquity, requirements, and practitioners' interest in improving public engagement. As in other kinds of planning, legal requirements for public involvement in government decision-making originated with from within a public-information model (McComas, 2001). Since 1991, deeper public involvement has been legally required, and awareness of negative policy consequences increased. Agencies can mitigate impacts in ways communities prefer, to 'allow the project to fit more harmoniously into the existing community' (Federal Highway Administration [FHWA], n.d.). Often 'box-checking' kinds of involvement at the tail-end of a project will ensure compliance with the letter of the law. The US Department of Transportation (n.d.) distinguishes among public hearings, public meetings, open house forums and meetings, workshops, retreats and conferences; however, interactional differences and cultural components remain understudied.

Practitioners affirm the importance of engagement with people who have low incomes, people of color, or those who are young because '[i]n many instances these communities are disproportionately high users of transit' (Federal Transit Administration [FTA], 2011, p. 39). The FTA identified problems transit providers must confront, beyond funding, including 'feelings of cynicism and distrust, lack of time, and lack of

awareness.' Engaging 'traditionally hard to reach populations such as people with limited English language proficiency and low income and minority communities' increased perceived 'challenges' (p. 40). The FTA sponsored research into improving public participation, which supported the study on which this essay is based. This essay addresses the discourse of cynicism and distrust; in working with the so-called 'hard-to-reach' populations, it relies on a theoretical frame that provides ample room for such discourse to emerge.

Theory and method

The theoretical framework for this study is CuDA. It allows researchers to see 'what people accomplish in social interaction, what elements of communicative practices to attend to […] and when and how those practices are used, challenged, or transformed' (Carbaugh, 2007, p. 16). CuDA can play a role in group communication research; 'local meaning systems, that is, terms for talk, identification, and related meanings, are constitutive of speech situations and the ways in which people construct each other' (Witteborn & Sprain, 2009, p. 15). My approach values what the people who are communicating do. It aims to understand their meanings. It presumes that people are sense-making beings (Hymes, 1996; Schwartzman, 1989) illuminates components of communication to show how culture manifests itself, and 'whose interests are served' by the patterns of speech which are 'rooted in social practices and interests' (Woolard & Schieffelin, 1994, p. 72). Reijven and Townsend (in press) contend that through 'discourse, participants recreate a web of culture;' they position themselves and their fellow discussants through their talk based on their local knowledge' (p. 499). Relevant to any communication is the setting or scene, participants, ends or outcomes, acts or act sequences, emotional pitch or tone, channels, norms, and genres or categories (Hymes, 1972).

My use of CuDA examines all talk (and the symbolic silences) in the meetings. The framework emerges from ethnography of communication (Carbaugh, 1989; Carbaugh & Boromisza-Habashi, 2015; Scollo, 2011), 'while standing at the juncture of the theories of cultural communication […] and communication codes' (Carbaugh 2007, p. 168). It has a similar starting point: the importance of communication and culture to the meaning of human interaction. CuDA assumes that 'communication both presumes and constitutes social realities; [… and people] engage in a meta-cultural commentary.' People send explicit and implicit messages 'about who they are, how they are related to each other, how they feel, what they are doing, and how they are situated in the nature of things' (p. 168).

Participants and student facilitators

One of the public engagement innovations of this work was the collaborative method of data gathering. Undergraduate students, most of whom are members of communities traditionally underheard in policy planning, served as researchers. In this report I will refer to students as 'students' or 'student researchers' or 'moderators' and reserve the label 'community members' for the non-students. This research, approved by an institutional research board, is premised on the notion that when conducting research with participants, local knowledge and ways of speaking are essential to the outcomes. In over 1000

community colleges across the U.S., most students are commuters. This was the case for student moderators at the college in New England where the work was conducted. Students, most who receive financial aid, are firmly rooted in the state. With a population of approximately 720,000 people in nearly 800 square miles, the region has dramatic income disparities, increasing populations of people of color (the largest city in the region studied has Black and Latinx populations of over 70%), increasing percentages of people who have limited English proficiency, and jobs moving out of the core region. The largest city has the highest percentage of people using transit, and travel time has increased. Most of the region's population living below the poverty level reside in the largest city. Almost 60% of this city's residents also work there. And in many surrounding suburbs, Black populations are also in the majority or close to half of the populations.

Students helped generate data and worked with the community. They include 97 students in Public Speaking and Group Communication classes in 2010–2011. They were trained to facilitate transportation needs-assessment discussions among people in community groups and to take ethnographic fieldnotes. Students learned the International Association for Public Participation's Code of Ethics for Public Participation Practitioners. A community dinner with nearly 50 people (including local government leaders, community groups, social service providers, and transit agencies) initiated the study. Participants brainstormed the focus of the project, prioritized their top three areas, deliberated, and voted to focus on transit needs assessment. Guest presenters were from planning agencies, civil engineering, transit providers, and industry groups. Ethnography of communication and CuDA contributed to the creation of discussion guides. Planners and community members assisted in the creation of a qualitative analysis field kit, which included informed consent (in English and Spanish), and a set of questions that would form the base for the deliberations. Students were encouraged to conduct the discussions in the way the groups they represented felt most comfortable.

Students worked in teams based on geographical proximity and generated lists of groups with which they had a connection. There were 29 groups, and more than 500 people involved in the total project, with 212 community members participating in group discussions. Each group had an average of 8 participants. Discussions occurred at community groups' regularly scheduled times and places. Students audio-recorded most meetings and wrote fieldnotes. Groups ranged from a church with Black (African American, West Indian, and Jamaican) and Latinx (Dominican and Puerto Rican) congregants, clubs, co-workers in a fire station, belly dancers at a senior center, regulars at a gym, clients at a homeless shelter, forums at the college, and more. Organization names are confidential. While most community groups were in urban areas, two groups were in rural or suburban areas. Students administered a survey at the end of the discussions; however, only 108 were returned. Transcriptions of all audio-recorded discussions total 348 pages (1.15 spacing). Transcripts include the reading aloud of consent documents, to ensure that people who participated were able to give their informed consent. Participants directed the focus on what transportation issues mattered most to them. Students culled the findings about transportation needs and presented them to the community and planners at the end-of-semester symposium and dinner forum. Detail on the model as a pedagogical method is elsewhere (Townsend, 2013, 2014, 2017).

Analysis

CuDA starts with descriptive, then interpretive analysis. The latter explicates 'certain radiants of meaning' like 'symbolic terms, cultural propositions, cultural premises, semantic dimensions, and/or norms' (Carbaugh, 2007, pp. 178–179), not necessarily all present in every analysis. They allow for the researcher to create interpretations that account for cultural meanings in discourse. I use the terms 'radiant of meaning' and 'cultural theme' interchangeably. I examined 65 sets of student field notes, 29 posters of student work, and 348 pages of transcripts from audio recordings of the meetings. The outside evaluator's report (30 pages) provided supplemental material. Analysis focused on identifying a 'communication practice, and/or cultural theme' (p. 173). I looked for these in participants' meta-communication about public participation 'about who they are, how they are related to each other, how they feel, what they are doing, and how they are situated in the nature of things' (p. 168). Any section in which involved words related to 'relationships, action, emotion, and dwelling' were highlighted and clustered together (p. 174). This is the 'semantic content' that has cultural meanings for participants as 'radiants of cultural meaning,' or 'semantic hubs' (p. 174). Participants can share messages about identity and messages about how people with different social identities relate to each other. They offer messages about action and ways that some people act or should act. Additionally, they create messages about feelings, and about the environments in which they live and work. Then I formulated 'cultural premises' 'about participants' beliefs about the significance and importance of what is going on' (p. 177). These are 'abstract formulations' that 'capture beliefs or values […] about specific terms and practices' (pp. 177–178), in this case related both to traditional and new public involvement processes. Consequently, this highlights the differences in the new process. Through understanding the cultural premises for these discursive practices, we can understand why this process succeeds.

Results: respect, voice, and efficacy

Discussion results centered on respect for transit users as people with dignity, sociability/passenger interaction, convenience, time, money, route and mode availability, comfort and cleanliness, safety, having a voice and feeling worthwhile, students, bicycles, children in strollers, walking and sidewalks, and involvement and efficacy. I focus on three radiants of meaning having related to public engagement in transportation planning: respect for users and sociability, having a voice and feeling worthwhile, and being involved and efficacy. These are affiliated with Carbaugh's notions of relating, being, acting and feeling. In each case, I present representative excerpts from the data before analysis and then interpretation. This discourse includes cultural premises about who people are, how they relate to each other, what kinds of actions are possible, and how they feel.

Respect for transit users and sociability

Participants expressed appreciation for respect for transit users and value sociability. Respect is treating people with dignity. Sociability refers to the sense of civil friendliness strangers in public spaces can experience. People can be treated with dignity by receiving

friendliness in public spaces, or they can be denied that dignity through unfriendliness or actions that push people away. In Excerpts 1-4, we see the student Moderator and participants reflecting on what it means to be users of public transportation. In Excerpt 1, the discussion is about experiences of trying to catch a bus. It also reveals an issue of trust in public participation processes, and demonstrates cultural meanings related to feeling, being, and relating:

(a) Moderator: Have you guys ever run for the bus and caught it at a light and tried to get on there?

(b) Participant 1: Yup.
(c) Participant 2: And they still won't let you on. They'll be like, 'No, the bus stop is back there.'

(d) Participant 3: They'll be like, 'That's not the bus stop.'
(e) [LAUGHTER]
(f) Participant 2: I know the bus stop is back there. If I could catch it back there, I would have done that.
(g) [SPEAKING SIMULTANEOUSLY]

(h) Moderator: Honestly, my teacher, she is very down-to-earth. She wants you to be honest.
(i) Participant 1: Oh, okay. I just want to shoot the tires then.

Participants describe the belittling feeling they endure when they try to catch a bus in the wrong spot. Aware they are in a non-prescribed place, they may feel humiliated, then anger at that humiliation. The radiant of meaning related to feeling is prominent here. Denial of service leads to anger, anger that is repressed due to fear of sharing that anger publicly. Where that anger may be expressed arises via this discussion. Additionally, bus riders feel a loss of privacy on the bus. This is compounded when a private shame at missing a bus, and running to catch it a light, results in denial of service or an admonition.

Too often planners and providers do not hear transit users' perspectives as valid. Participants are skeptical and cautious, seeking the moderator's reassurance (line h) that they can speak freely. Participant 1 recognizes the nature of the discussion as a recorded class project and has hesitancy about how explicit to be. The Moderator reassures Participant 1 that honesty is important. This gives Participant 1 opportunity to share an opinion that may be left unsaid, had the Moderator not been a trusted member of the community. This perspective could emerge because of the tight connection, and often overlap, between moderators and community members. This way of relating to others, built on trust, is one cultural meaning that inheres in the innovation of this process compared with processes that do not have such joint community membership of participants.

The exploratory nature of the question in Excerpt 2 leads to positive affirmations of public transportation based in common humanity:

(a) Moderator: So when you prepare to go out, what do you expect to happen during your trip?

(b) Participant 1: An adventure.
(c) [LAUGHTER]

(d) Participant 2: I could take advantage of the time to talk to people about the gospel and make friends.
(e) Moderator: So you expect to make friends when you go out?
(f) Participant 1: Yes
(g) Moderator: To take the bus? Now isn't that great?

In contrast to the belittling feeling one can get from drivers and other passengers' intrusion on their privacy (as in 1), in 2, participants have a positive outlook in their expectations, especially when it comes to interaction with other passengers. The Moderator frames the interaction as 'mak[ing] friends,' which the Participant affirms. A semantic dimension, or 'continua of meanings with two sets of values' (Carbaugh, 2007, p. 178) emerges. Participants value privacy and sociability. They use both these dimensions of ways of relating to others on the bus. This is further developed with comparisons to private transportation.

Excerpt 3 contrasts public transportation with privately owned cars:

> The thing I don't like about the bus as opposed to the car is like your problem is everybody else's problem on the bus. Like, you know, if you have a problem, everybody's going to have that same problem because you're stuck in there with them. It's like a really close space. It really takes away from your individuality. I guess you could say, like, you're not just one person anymore.

A different participant in 3 has a contrast with those in Excerpt 2, in that the proximity to other people can feel 'stuck' in a 'close space.' Where the people in Excerpt 2 view that proximity as an opportunity, the person in Excerpt 3 views it as a problem.

In a different discussion, Excerpt 4 participants describe a deep conversation that can happen on public transportation:

> And then we started talking for a while and it's like, you know it's just one of those moments when you're like, so entrenched in something, like if the person's telling you, it is so great, […] Anyway, so it's just like, it was a great experience for me because she says, like, if we weren't in all this mess, we, if everybody loved each other we wouldn't be in all in this mess. And like, going on about things … Her words made sense. … it was absolutely positive words, civic words.

This participant describes the ineffable sense of connection with others that is possible on public transportation.

We can ask of this data, 'what does it presume, or create, as messages about identity?' and 'how it works to relate people, one to others, or others to one' (Carbaugh, 2007, p. 175). The data have a great deal of commentary about personhood and relationships. Riding in a car can make riders feel insular; it privileges 'individuality' (3). This is often a desire, yet sociability is a competing desire, and is exhibited in 2 and 4. Seeing each other as humans, full of wonder and possibility (2 and 4), and of mistakes (1) is part of

participants' experiences in public transportation. Fellow commuters often know one another and grow to rely on consistently seeing the same group of people. Individual concerns may become social concerns. Participants have difficulty speaking to fellow riders who are causing problems; they expect bus drivers to supervise behavior. Rider respect from drivers and fellow riders demonstrates concern for personhood. Currently, passengers view drivers as sometimes having an adversarial relationship. People on the bus should relate to one another with mutual respect and dignity. The importance of respect, whether respect for privacy, or for the innate humanity we all share, was a prominent feature. Messages about identity are rooted in the interactions and stories about interactions.

Having a voice and feeling worthwhile

With respect for users and sociability forming one key theme, a related radiant of meaning arises in the voices that participants have, and their need to feel worthwhile. Having a voice means being able to share what is meaningful, to express preferences and needs. Feeling worthwhile means having value or importance, both to oneself and the greater world. When people share their thoughts, they can feel valuable. Excerpts 5–10 illustrate this. Participants reflected on the experiences of speaking with others as a platform for them to share their voices.

   In Excerpts 5 and 6, participants reflected on the experience of sharing their opinions. Excerpt 5 is a concise description of this: 'I like my voice to be heard and I didn't mind coming in, coming in and contributing and putting my efforts in to doing this. Thank you all for letting me come here and talk.' Participants were thankful for this project, regarding it as worth their own effort. Excerpt 6 affirms this: 'The best advice I can give is basically to have more of these and then maybe get them on a bigger scale with a lot more people.' Seeing the value of this project, the participants wanted more people to engage in it.

   In Excerpt 7, when the participants were asked about whether they would go to meetings to 'give your ideas,' the following discussion ensued, representative of the cultural themes related to respect for users as well as having a voice and feeling worthwhile:

(a) Response: Personally, I would. Only because I'd want to voice my opinion. I work, I pay taxes, I might as well have a say-so in something or at least hear me out. Even if it's not going to happen, at least I made an effort to say something to try to change.

(b) Moderator: So, do you think … ..The youth, most of the time, is a majority of the population that takes the city bus, either because they can't drive or they aren't financially capable. Why do you think, do you think the youth would take the time to voice their opinion or do you think the wrong people are voicing their opinion; the people who have jobs … .

(c) Response: They're going to look at them like 'why are you talking, you're not even in this predicament.'

(d) Moderator: No, no, not even that. Do you think that not enough people who take city buses are voicing their opinion or are there people who are just making educated

guesses, voicing their opinion and messing up. Like it's not meeting the needs of the people who really use the bus.

(e) Response: I think the reason why it's like that is because they feel like they can't drive, they're not eligible to get a car of their own so, therefore, they feel like they're not eligible to be heard. They don't feel like they're important enough.

(f) Response: I think what you're talking about is this idea that's called marginization, so people who are in the margin often times don't have as much say-so. So if people feel that they're marginalized, they're less likely to contribute to making change. The people don't feel their voice is heard, why should I participate.

(g) Response: A lot of people won't say how they feel unless they're asked. They feel like they if they're heard, nothing's going to change. Maybe if they ask …

(h) Response: That falls into place like, that falls into, say like, as far as feelings and personally asking someone something, it falls into say, like 'oh, they recognized all my wrongs but never appreciated my rights.'

(i) Moderator: Yes.

(j) Response: You know what I mean? Like, I could go, me personally, I've been shot 10 times and everything falls into like, 'oh what he did bad in his life': rather than he is a respectable person that votes and stuff like that. They only recognize the bad things.

(k) Moderator: So focusing on the positive?

(l) Response: Yes, rather than focusing on, rather than seeing your positive or appreciating your positive they'd rather knock you down with all your negatives.

(m) Moderator: They never ask you anything about you, they never asked about … they just don't ask you questions like I'm asking you now?

(n) Response: Yeah, you're right. And it even falls into place like before, you know how, it's like probation.

Participating in these engagement sessions contributes to feelings of worthiness. Riding a bus can make some people feel less worthy. Participants often do not feel as though they are important to transit providers or to those who make plans. They do not feel as though they are asked to participate. In line e), the notion of being qualified, or 'eligible' financially is connected to being 'eligible' 'to be heard.' The specific choice of 'to be heard' rather than 'speak' is important, as it connotes what they think others will think of them. In the vivid example in line j), the Participant describes how his past experiences shape others' perceptions of who he is as a citizen.

This radiant of meaning is connected to the perception of others. In Excerpt 8 a moderator asks, 'Were any of you aware that you could contact someone about transportation needs? To give your voice?' and three respondents answer:

(a) Participant 1: Yeah, on the back of the bus they have the number.

(b) Participant 2: Oh, they have numbers on the back?

(c) Participant 1: Yeah, if you have a complaint you can call.

(d) Participant 2: I think I have to be someone important for them to listen.
(e) Moderator: You are important.
(f) Participant 1: You are important.
(g) Participant 3: You are important.

(h) Participant 2: No, I mean, like important to them.

This is an unusually explicit variation of what occurs in Excerpt 7. Participants affirm their own self-worth as they recognize that others disconfirm it.

In answering a question about 'How would you like to see our government spend money on transportation?' Excerpt 9 is an example of transportation-related concerns about speed, and engagement efforts:

> I would like to see it so it's faster, and I would also like more public relations, because you don't really see it. […] Outside, when you're walking around, they could be like, 'hey, we can make it better this way and if you can help out here then we can make this happen.' You know, just be more outgoing. I feel like it's one-sided. There's no conversation, no feedback or input, and I think that should be looked into.

The theme of engagement of participants' voices was expressed as a 'conversation' rather than a 'one-sided' effort.

Having a voice and feeling worthwhile was also part of what it means to take public transportation. In Excerpt 10 we see transit-riding related to feeling about oneself: 'But like, another thing, an issue with a lot of people is, as far as taking the bus rides and all, I think it's a pride issue. Some people feel as though they don't want to be seen on the bus; they feel as though they're too good.' Pride, or having a sense of oneself as worthwhile, is sometimes connected to the participants' choices or needs to use transit.

In interpreting what these excerpts and other data presumes about identity, relating, and feeling, we see a disconnect between self-worth and other-valuing. Participants presume that they have things to say, they have opinions. They presume that others do not see them in the same way. They have learned, through their lived experiences, that there are some people who are regarded as more 'eligible' or 'important' to be heard. This presumption also reflects a deep cynicism, borne out of their experiences of not being heard. They have opinions. Participants often do not feel as though they are important to transit providers. Participating in these engagement sessions – having a voice – contributes to a sense of worth.

Being involved and efficacy

Related to the cultural theme of being heard and feeling worthwhile is whether one is involved and has a sense of efficacy. Being involved connects one to the social and civic world. Efficacy is the ability to accomplish something. Through being involved, participants can accomplish goals. These are related to the radiant of meaning regarding 'acting.' Excerpts 11–14 illustrate these. In Excerpt 11, participants were discussing the possibility of constructing a bus shelter, what is locally called a 'garage' and what it would take to address the problem of not having one at their college.

(a) Participant 1: Some things can happen in time; some things won't happen because of people. Now the garage thing could happen over time. The potholes can be fixed over time; sidewalks fixed over time. Buses coming on time? That's people. That's not going to be fixed. The cleanliness; that's people. You can only do but so much. So, the outcome to this is, it's not what they can do sometimes, but what we can do … .

(b) Participant 2: Or what you can do. Because if you sign a petition involving just enough, they will get that road fixed because they want you to stop bothering them and sending them letters, and getting on their nerves.

(c) Participant 1: But it definitely got to be the voice of all of us. It can't just be one person individually trying to cope with something themselves. Say like, every student at (COLLEGE) just say 'we want a garage,' every student just consistently at (COLLEGE) say 'we want a garage, we want a garage,' eventually they're going to say, 'well, we need to get this garage because we're not going to hear the end of it.'

In that excerpt, efficacy is tied to multiple people acting together. When we examine beliefs, we can view those 'about what exists […], or about what is proper or valued' (Carbaugh, 2007, p. 178). Here, we see an attempted distinction among kinds of change: those that require unified effort and those that are linked to people's behavior in line a). The participant in line b) expands the range of possibility to include those acts about which large quantities of people advocate, to which participant 1 agrees. Action is bifurcated: some actions can happen over time; other actions cannot occur without unified action: 'it's not what they can do sometimes, but what we can do.'

Efficacy depends on the audience that participants want to affect, as is illustrated in Excerpt 12. One participant asserts, 'public transportation is not bad enough where you need to speak up' and two others affirm, 'Yeah.' The first clarifies, adding, 'To the government. Maybe you contact [BUS SERVICE PROVIDER] but not the government.' Laughter and affirmations of 'Right' follow. The service provider is a different kind of agent than the government. Whether it's this difference, or others, participants do feel efficacious with some, not all, audiences.

Regarding this dichotomy, the 'government' is seen as an absent agent, and these meetings are scenes where change can be initiated. In Excerpt 13, a Moderator asks, 'Are you involved in the government? Whether it be like talking to your public rep … I mean your representatives or your governor, mayor … .' And five participants respond negatively, with the fifth adding 'We should,' the sixth following with 'These people ain't around. [LAUGHTER].' This shows the relationship participants have with the government: one marked by government's absence as a partner in social-political life. Just as bus riders and drivers can have an adversarial relationship, the relationship between the public and the government is one of distrust and suspicion. Members of the participating groups believe that one person may not be able to make a difference. They won't contact people in government (in part because they 'ain't around'), but they say they should. Participants saw this meeting as a chance to be effective. The Moderator asked, 'What was your motivation for coming to this meeting?' (Excerpt 14) and the response was 'I needed to speak about making some changes.' Participants viewed this event differently. While most participants would not have come, they viewed this event as a place for action.

The meta-cultural commentary in this cultural theme concerns the nature of efficacy's relationship to certain audiences. Some are not present in their lives, so being effective is out of the question. One cannot be effective with an absent agent. Additionally, dimensions of efficacy are constrained by who is acting. If participants collaborate, the sizable numbers of them will force change. The implicit presumption is that a single person cannot create change.

Discussion and implications

Participants made explicit comments about bus routes and timing, sidewalks, strollers, or bicycles, safety or pricing. While they were doing that, they also explicitly and implicitly made 'meta-cultural commentary' on public engagement. The research questions that frame this study find answer in three prominent cultural themes or radiants of meaning, comprised of dual foci: respect for users *and* sociability, having a voice *and* feeling worthwhile, and being involved *and* efficacy. The patterns of discourse demonstrate how and why cynicism and distrust manifest.

The cultural themes in the discourse are meta-cultural commentaries on relating, being, and feeling. They concern how people in transportation and planning relate and *should* relate, on how participants regard themselves and others, and how they feel effective. These develop a coherent sense of cultural expectations. Participants' local knowledge concerns how different kinds of people are treated. Participants discussed feeling disrespect from drivers and believe people should relate to one another with mutual respect and dignity. They want to have a good experience and believe in the social and environmental benefits of riding the bus.

A latent conflict between concerns for independence and community emerged as participants discussed ridership. Respect for persons is a prerequisite for cultivation of community, for without respect, no one would want to share the space. Transit entails respect for individuals that comprise the community, relating to convenience and uses of time. On-time, frequent transit helps promote community. When expectations of transit's uncertainty dominate, riders feel disrespected. Transit punctuality results in riders' feelings of respect, worthiness, importance to society. This promotes independence and success, and stability in jobs. Transit providers promote this sense of respect for individuals and community.

Participants expressed feelings of efficacy, interest and involvement in planning and government, the role of the social world in effecting change, and their own emerging roles in society. They often expressed little faith that their voices would be heard. This is not due to lack of interest, as participants did express desire to have their say. Perception, borne of experience, that they are unimportant to transit providers or to the government more broadly was a primary concern holding them from full expression of democratic rights to speech.

Meeting location and time contributes to involvement and feeling worthwhile. Student researchers met with participants at their preferred locations and times. Often this luxury is reserved for high-status stakeholders who are perceived to have busy schedules that must be planned around. According the same status to transit-dependent riders signals respect and interest. Participants at all levels must be involved in the leadership of the process. Often in public meetings, certain stakeholders are absent, requiring a

tailored approach. Those who have been traditionally under-represented in planning discussions have a variety of reasons for their non-participation. Absence may be intentional (on their own, or by planner design), unintentional (unaware), or completely irrelevant (the entire purpose, scope and topic may seem beyond what they regard as important or possible). Having the ability to check the accuracy of the students' work gave participants the sense that the students cared. Being able to mingle with transit planners and providers at semesters' ending symposiums and poster sessions (with meals) was another democratic outcome of the project.

This study has implications for public engagement scholarship and practice. People engage in a variety of talk in planning meetings. They tell stories, make evaluations, give opinions, and raise questions (Leighter & Black, 2010; Sprain & Hughes, 2015). This study corroborates that finding. Since planners admit great challenges in reaching out to youth, people of color, and people with low incomes, this study builds on public engagement literature to show how those who are 'hard-to-reach' can be reached and provides a culturally sensitive way to achieve that connection.

When people talk, and when they make judgments about an activity, they produce visions of what could have been accomplished. There are norms for the proper kinds of interaction that occur in public meetings, as in any other communication event. And when those who value local knowledge have a role in the design of the process, results are likely to be responsive (e.g. Leighter et al., 2013). While simply stating norms is helpful to ascertain a general understanding of the process and practices, providing detailed narratives of those deliberations can help the reader see what is going on from a ground level, helping create a phronetic quality – the practical wisdom gained from certain cases (Flyvbjerg, 2001).

This study also has implications for CuDA, regarding radiants of meaning and how culture is conceived. The radiants of meaning, or cultural themes about public engagement, were bi-focal areas. Akin to the relation between an image and an afterimage, one radiant (e.g. having a voice) leaves the impression of another (e.g. feeling worthwhile); these connected radiants of action and feeling. This duality of related radiants emerged from interpretation of how the radiants associated with each other. The interpretative vision of this new model of public participation efforts was consequently placed alongside the afterimage of traditional methods. Researchers using CuDA may wish to make use of this kind of interpretive move where they sense the relation emerging. Additionally, the webs of culture created by participants' discourse transformed their settings to scenes of engagement. Connected by a past of disconnectedness to planning process, participants developed a way of speaking where there had not been one before. Culture need not exist *a priori* as a way of speaking but can emerge through a new experience.

My argument that this new model of engagement in deliberative processes allows for a reconfiguration of notions of being, acting, relating, feeling, and dwelling in the world in which they give themselves amplified voice and agency has had practical applications already realized. The planning agency used the results to inform their long-term planning, collaborating with students on another project. Other colleges looking to create effective public engagement learning opportunities with real-world value have used it. The federal government singled this study out for recognition and to serve as a model of engagement.

Any time the planners and providers hear unvarnished opinions and ideas from members of the public there is an opportunity to improve. Cost-savings accrued by training and involving students to conduct public participation as an unpaid academic requirement via ongoing courses. Costs for this work are minimal compared to the costs of hiring consultants. The contributions of students in the community were both what permitted the data to be collected and a limitation. Student facilitators of the discussions prompted some participants to think about issues that may not have been mentioned otherwise. This, however, is a qualified limitation, since the students themselves are part of the communities we need to hear from.

Conclusion

This cultural discourse analysis of data emerged from a partnership of planners, scholars, and those people who are most affected by transit. It aimed at understanding how participants communicate about 'public involvement' and whether this model would indeed generate the public engagement necessary for planning. This model involved community-member-led deliberation and reflection on past and present processes. Since the very people who are most transit-dependent are also members of the traditionally under-heard populations in transportation planning, it was important to have trusted organizations and people solicit their advice, ideas, solutions in making transportation decisions. Diversity of group representation was already present among students. Their meta-cultural commentary about voice demonstrates that this method was something that felt different to participants.

Those in government, transportation planners, and industry professionals need to seem available to, and interested in, participants. At the start and end of a public meeting, if planners or providers stay off to the side, they communicate indifference to the people who they have ostensibly come to hear. Social stratification can be easy to witness and perpetuate. The student researchers did not have such expectations; they felt obligated to the people who were so generous to give their time to help them complete a college project. Students were intermediaries who could be trusted both to receive and transmit the opinions to the transit providers and planners. They approach oft-heard comments anew; they are not jaded by years of accumulated complaints about bus service, for example. This freshness of perspective comes across in the recordings and transcripts. This study assumed that in being heard in this way, the participants would feel trust to continue. There is evidence of this trust in the data. The degree of acceptance and kind of information provided demonstrate that students were treated as if they would listen carefully. As a result, people feel heard and respected, this develops trust. Trust that someone will listen is essential to democratic practice.

This study builds upon studies of culture in public meeting research. Tracy and Hughes's (2014) analysis of meeting research places import upon culture. McCormick (2014) shows how local theories inform rhetorics of exemplarity 'with careful considerations of local political cultures' (p. 206). As part of the 'ordinary' democracy Tracy (2010) refers to, the ordinary participants in this case are not those who are regularly found in attendance at public meetings.

People planners labeled 'hard-to-reach' did indeed participate, they created their own sense of what they were doing. Because students at a community college chose those

groups with which they shared a membership, they co-constructed the organization of participants. This study conceived of culture as emergent in the discourse and the organization of participants. There are advantages to this approach, as it focuses attention to the ways identity and relations are constantly crafted through talk. Participants can communicatively create and situate scenes (Scollo, 2011). While the settings may be familiar to participants, the scene, constructed through talk, is a new one for these participants. No one had participated in something like this before. Participants created the webs of culture through their talk. They constructed their own 'eligibility to be heard' in this scene and affirmed their bi-focal needs for respect and sociability, voice and worthiness, and involvement and efficacy, each an image and afterimage of cultural discourse.

One study post-script is worth mentioning. Following the year that students engaged in this work, a student came to my office to ask if he could do something. He recognized he had not been particularly engaged during the class but was deeply troubled by one man's story about having to endure rain or miss the bus because of a lack of a bus shelter on the campus, questioning his 'eligibility' to be heard by those in power. This student wanted to do something about that, he told me. His efforts took time, but they were ultimately successful: the campus now has a bus shelter.

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