

# NOTE TO USERS

This reproduction is the best copy available.

**UMI**<sup>®</sup>



**SHAPING POLICY DISCOURSE IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE:  
EVALUATING CIVIL SPEECH IN AN ONLINE CONSULTATION**

by

Anna Christine Hurrell, Bachelor of Arts, Honours  
University of British Columbia, Vancouver, 2001

A thesis

presented to Ryerson University and York University

in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in the Program of

Communication and Culture

Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 2004

© Anna Christine Hurrell, 2004

PROPERTY OF  
RYERSON UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

UMI Number: EC52907

### INFORMATION TO USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleed-through, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

**UMI**<sup>®</sup>

---

UMI Microform EC52907

Copyright 2008 by ProQuest LLC.

All rights reserved. This microform edition is protected against unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code.

ProQuest LLC  
789 E. Eisenhower Parkway  
PO Box 1346  
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346

## SHAPING POLICY DISCOURSE IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE: EVALUATING CIVIL SPEECH IN AN ONLINE CONSULTATION

Anna Christine Hurrell, BA Hons 2001, University of British Columbia

Toronto, ON, June 1, 2004

Master of Arts

Joint Program in Communication and Culture, Ryerson and York Universities

**Abstract:** The ability of the Internet to function as a public sphere, where citizens can come to public agreement and make recommendations that affect government decisions, has recently come under question. The aggressive style of discourse so prevalent in online discussion has been cited as a significant barrier to the deliberative and open discussion necessary for an effective public sphere. This paper focuses on web-based discussion in an online policy consultation called the Canadian Foreign Policy Dialogue, and examines specific discourse features to evaluate whether the moderated online policy discussion was civil, and whether that civility promoted meaningful interaction among citizens, and between citizens and government. The study results revealed that citizen participants in the dialogue were successful at developing, maintaining, and enforcing norms of civil discourse, and that these norms helped to promote understanding, tolerance, and consensus-building. The study also cautions that civil dialogue alone cannot ensure effective communication between governments and citizens.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Catherine Middleton for her consistent, thoughtful and exacting guidance through this process. Dr. Barbara Crow also made invaluable contributions along the way. I owe Dr. Liss Jeffrey and her team a huge debt of gratitude for giving me the opportunity to work on this project, and for providing lots of help and inspiration along the way. Financial assistance from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada made this research possible. Many thanks go to the faculty, staff, and my student colleagues at the Joint Programme in Communication and Culture for support and collegiality. Lastly, I would like to thank my parents for their endless love and support, and Jon, for joining me on this journey as well as many others.

## Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Objectives .....	5
Literature Review.....	9
<i>The Context: Citizen Engagement and Public Consultation in Canada</i> .....	9
<i>Online Consultations in Canada</i> .....	17
<i>The Public Sphere</i> .....	20
<i>The Public Sphere Online</i> .....	25
<i>Civility: Why does it matter?</i> .....	31
<i>Civility and the Foreign Policy Dialogue:</i> .....	41
<i>To moderate, or not to moderate?</i> .....	45
Methods and Sources .....	51
<i>Data Sources:</i> .....	51
<i>Discourse Analysis</i> .....	55
Discussion and Analysis of Results .....	57
<i>Developing Trust and Online Reputation</i> .....	58
<i>Negotiation Techniques</i> .....	70
<i>Interaction with Moderators/facilitators:</i> .....	78
<i>Civility: is it enough?</i> .....	87
<i>Influence on Government</i> .....	92
Lessons Learned.....	97
Conclusion .....	108
Appendix 1: Qualrus Screenshot .....	112
Appendix 2: Discourse features hypothesized to indicate civil and uncivil speech .....	113
Bibliography .....	114

## Introduction

The Internet has come under increased scrutiny in recent years as a medium that has the potential to increase political participation and citizen engagement. However, much debate exists over whether or not democratic discourse and thoughtful deliberation are possible online. While proponents of the Internet's ability to re-engage cynical citizens argue that civil society and the public sphere are being revitalized partly through this new technology, critics point to the anarchic nature of much Internet discourse, which tends to be aggressive, fragmented and confrontational. This research examines an important case study in order to evaluate the civility of online citizen discourse. In Canada, the federal government is increasingly turning towards new information and communication technologies such as the Internet to deepen and extend processes of citizen consultation and engagement over important policy issues. In this context, where significant resources from government, civil society, and citizens are being dedicated to these new processes, research is needed to address whether or not current methods of consultation and deliberation are serving the needs of each sector. This study examines specific discourse features to evaluate whether an online policy discussion is civil, and whether that civility promotes meaningful interaction among citizens, and between citizens and government.

Civility is defined here as an orientation towards understanding and a respect for

difference in public discourse. This definition goes beyond a traditional view which associates civility with politeness or etiquette, and instead associates civility with the goals of democracy in a pluralist society. Civility is important in the context of the online public sphere because it is one of the conditions that allows participants in public conversation to find commonalities, reach agreement, and influence decision-making bodies: a non-adversarial approach increases the likelihood that people will really hear each other's views, and orients them towards the reflexivity and understanding that are key aspects of the public sphere. Increased cooperation and understanding in turn contribute to a more productive discussion that can be better interpreted by government and policymakers. This study adds to the already significant body of work that looks at the concept of the public sphere, an autonomous public site of discussion and consensus-formation among citizens that is able to influence government (Habermas, 1991). By identifying civil behaviors that develop, maintain, and promote a democratic conversation around Canadian foreign policy issues, this study identifies how civility can help constitute an online public sphere, and asks whether civil dialogue is sufficient to ensure that citizen deliberation has a meaningful impact on public policy formation.

This study will use discourse analysis to examine data collected from the Canadian Foreign Policy Dialogue-le Dialogue sur la politique étranger (Dialogue). The Dialogue was a bilingual online policy consultation operated as a partnership between government and civil society (<http://www.foreign-policy-dialogue.ca> or

<http://www.dialogue-politique-etranger.ca>). Besides the online consultation, the Dialogue also used town halls, expert roundtables, and a youth panel to engage citizens on the subject of foreign policy. The goal of the online portion of the Dialogue, which ran from January to April 2003, was to use the Internet in an innovative way to consult Canadians on the future shape of Canadian foreign policy (Graham, 2002). It was conceived and run as a partnership between the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT), the Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development (CCFPD), and the byDesign eLab. The Dialogue was an asynchronous, text-based discussion forum that allowed citizens to engage in moderated discussion on a wide range of issues broadly related to Canada's foreign policy. It was based on a formal written consultation document produced by DFAIT on the subject of the future of Canada's foreign policy.

The data for my research have been collected from discussion threads stored in the archived Dialogue website. After a broad examination of citizen posts to the Dialogue, I defined and coded a range of data using an iterative schema that developed as I examined the discussion threads more closely. I chose the data set that is analyzed in this study because it contains samples that shed the most light on questions of civil speech. I used an iterative process of discourse analysis to examine the nature of the discussions that took place on the Dialogue website, as I examined how Dialogue participants exhibit the quality of civil speech in the context of the online public sphere.

As the Dialogue was a moderated discussion forum, I also addressed the relationship between participants and moderators, and its affect, if any, on civility.

## Objectives

This study uses Habermas' model (1991) of the public sphere to examine the civility of online discourse displayed on the Foreign Policy Dialogue. The public sphere is an integral aspect of political life for it affords a non-partisan site of discussion, debate, and learning, allowing citizens to develop public opinions around issues of public interest. The public sphere also ideally allows citizens to have an influence on government and the policymaking process (Habermas 1991). However, for the Internet to function as a public sphere, a commitment to civil dialogue is essential. The anonymity, communicative freedom, and diversity of *netizens* (citizens on the Internet) and Internet dialogue mean that the universalistic conventions that governed civil speech in Habermas' homogenous bourgeois public sphere are absent (Salter 2003). If online discourse is to accomplish the goals of the public sphere, namely deliberation leading to public opinions, participants in the dialogue must find some way to accept responsibility for their utterances and to treat other participants with civility and respect. Using the Dialogue as a case study, the following research questions emerge:

1. Is civility established and maintained through the norms of conduct developed by site participants?
2. What is the impact, if any, of the site's civil rules, and the moderators that enforce them, on the nature of online discourse?
3. Does civil dialogue in an online policy consultation allow citizens and

government to interact in a meaningful way?

These questions will evaluate how civility, defined as an orientation towards understanding and a respect for difference, developed on the Dialogue website. By doing so, this study will contribute to the debate over whether or not the Internet has the potential to nurture meaningful democratic discourse, citizen engagement and the public sphere.

In addition to the Habermasian model, my discussion will be informed by the work of scholars who have refined, extended, and challenged his ideas (Fraser, 1993; Dahlberg, 2001), theories of online identity formation and interaction (Donath, 1999), and documentation of other online projects dedicated to enhancing electronic democracy (Berkman Institute for Internet and Society, 2000). Benefits that will result from this research include a better understanding of online policy-related discussion, and recommendations on how to foster and maintain civil dialogue between citizens on policy issues. As governments across the world are increasingly promoting participatory strategies similar to the Foreign Policy Dialogue, research is needed to discover how best to design, run, and facilitate these exchanges between citizens and government.

The research site for this study is the online portion of the Foreign Policy Dialogue. The web-based Dialogue was just one stream of the Canadian Foreign Policy Dialogue. In its totality, the Dialogue comprised a large cross-country consultation

process that involved town hall meetings, expert roundtables, youth panels, and e-mail and regular mail correspondence. 1,848 people participated in the web-based portion of the Dialogue that is the subject of this study (Jeffrey, 2003). Each of these individuals registered on the site, and all are technically verified as unique individuals through site logs. All Canadian citizens and landed immigrants were eligible to participate (this information was verified by site administrators), and the Dialogue was promoted in a number of ways in cooperation with DFAIT and the CCFPD. Promotional activities surrounding the online consultation included banner ads on prominent Canadian websites (e.g. *glob2andmail.com*), as well as newspaper editorials, town halls, expert roundtables, and a youth forum. At the grass-roots level, the Dialogue was promoted by the civil society partner through postering, the distribution of flyers, website linkages, an e-mail and telephone campaign, and word-of-mouth.

The Canadian Foreign Policy Dialogue is a groundbreaking case study, for it represents one of the first Canadian online consultations. Between January and April 2003, the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs asked citizens for input on foreign policy. To date, there has not been a national government that has invited its citizens to take part in the shaping of foreign policy online, which has traditionally been considered the exclusive preserve of academics and think tanks (Graham 2002). Additionally, the Dialogue's use of civil rules designed by civil society administrators, and the role of civil society moderators (members of the general public not aligned with government), is

notable in the history of online policy consultations, which are often operated by civil servants or by private consulting firms (Ronaghan, 2002). Analysis of how these factors play into online interaction and negotiations of civility will constitute a new contribution to the field of e-governance. An in-depth study of civil speech in the context of online policy dialogue has not yet been carried out, so this study will fill an important gap for both theorists and practitioners.

## Literature Review

### *The Context: Citizen Engagement and Public Consultation in Canada*

The theme of “citizen engagement” has emerged in the last decade in Canada as a subject of heightened concern and interest for governments, the private sector, academia, and the voluntary sector. Canada's Institute on Governance (1998) defines citizen engagement as:

Processes of deliberation with individuals and groups who may be affected by policy or program changes, but who lie outside the circle of departmental clients as conventionally defined. It ... entails shared agenda-setting and more open time-frames for deliberation on issues of public policy. (p.1)

Citizen engagement is distinct from traditional consultation methods, which generally canvass the views of stakeholders through advisory boards, forums, or task forces.

The Federal Government of Canada holds citizen engagement as a priority because of the decline of participation in traditional party politics, the sophistication of public knowledge, and the diffusion of political power within society (Institute on Governance, 1998, p.2). Policymakers may also wish to “enhance the quality, credibility, and legitimacy of their policy decisions” (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2001, p.1). The concept of deliberation is central to the majority of these consultation methods. Reasonable deliberation is seen as a necessary means to arrive at legitimate decisions in a modern pluralistic society

such as Canada, and has the potential to provide a much richer and nuanced account of Canadians' priorities than public opinion polls can. Besides legitimacy, deliberation also has the potential to increase the “civic literacy” of participants, allowing them to learn more about their country's political situation, the intricacies of policymaking, and about the expertise and experience of their fellow citizens. However, despite the government's general endorsement of new citizen engagement tools, concerns exist over the goal to engage a wider range of citizens in the policymaking process. Many politicians and civil servants are worried about how citizen engagement and consultation may affect their professional roles, and they are also wary of tampering with tried and tested methods of policy development.

Changes in Canadians' values and responses to the political process have been well documented by Nevitte (1996), who observes that citizens are becoming less compliant and less deferential to authority, including political leaders. He suggests that this “decline of deference” is part of the reason why Canadians are less engaged in traditional political activities. Voter participation in federal elections has decreased from 75.3% in 1988 to 61.2% in 2000 (Elections Canada, 2002). In 1998, 45% of Canadians who participated in a national survey indicated that the federal government consults badly with Canadians on national issues (Institute on Governance, 1998, p.3). Citizens' trust in government is low, cynicism is high, and traditional methods of consultation have not been successful in combating these trends. However, just

because Canadians are no longer voting or engaged with national political parties does not mean that they are not interested in politics. Many citizens are involved with special interest groups, community organizations, or global social movements.

Canadians are involved politically, but the connections between citizens and the state are shifting. Nevitte suggests that Canadians are becoming more “cognitively mobile” and that “the knowledge-skill gap between ... political leaders and an increasingly well-educated (and growing) middle class is narrowing” (Institute on Governance, 1998, p.20). New information technologies, including the Internet, can facilitate citizens' access to policy-relevant information and news, making these issues seem more immediate. Canadians increasingly believe that they are knowledgeable about national issues, and they are becoming less willing to leave policymaking and governing up to public officials they may not trust. Thus, citizens become more difficult to govern and more eager to have substantial input into the political process.

While there is a general recognition among government officials that practices of governing must be changed in order to increase citizen engagement, not all members of government are entirely accepting of new tools and processes. While some are eager to strengthen citizen engagement and engage in new methods of consultation, Members of Parliament (MPs) and civil servants are also concerned about how these new procedures may affect the policymaking process. Although citizens have the potential to advance innovative new policy ideas, the huge increase

of input into the policymaking process has, according to some experts, the potential to upset the direction of government and undermine legislative objectives. As one participant in a roundtable on citizen engagement stated:

If the content of the policymaking process (the formulation and discussion of policy options) becomes public, there will be a chilling effect on policy development. In the current policymaking model, policy is presented after options are considered – this ensures consistency and uniformity. If that “consideration” process is made public, media and opposition members may use it to call into question the direction of the government and undermine the credibility of the minister. (Institute on Governance, 1996, p.3)

Policymakers are afraid that more transparent processes could leave government open to attack. In addition, MPs may feel personally threatened by new citizen consultation practices. Some MPs, especially backbenchers, feel that by giving citizens a voice to speak directly to a Federal Government department or a prominent Minister, their own role in the parliamentary process may be undermined. An MP's traditional role has been to convey public opinion from their riding to the national stage, and if citizens can log on to a consultation website or send an e-mail directly to the Prime Minister, this role is bypassed. Many MPs are not content to act as facilitators or enablers in a citizen consultation process; they want to be decision-makers (Canadian Policy Research Network [CPRN], 2000, p.8). Thus, elected representatives do not uniformly embrace new forms of citizen engagement.

Members of Parliament are not the only government players who are concerned about how citizen consultation exercises are implemented. Consultation processes can also be challenging for unelected civil servants, for they are often the ones on the “front lines” of public consultation efforts. Ministers are very busy people, and do not generally have time to participate in consultation exercises on a daily or even frequent basis. However, protocols for “front-line” civil servants to interact with citizens are missing. Especially in online consultations, citizens will expect government response or input in a timely fashion. But as one civil servant noted, “the response process ... [goes] through many levels of approval, let alone translation” (CPRN, 2000, p.5). The private sector often has standards guaranteeing a 24-to-48-hour response time to answer customer requests, but trying to achieve this level of service within government is currently almost impossible.<sup>1</sup> In order for service standards to be ensured, front line workers must be empowered to make decisions and provide responses to citizen input (CPRN, 2000, p.8). However, some civil servants feel that they may not be a legitimate interface between citizens and government, and do not want to be responsible for conveying information to the public that may be perceived as an

---

<sup>1</sup> Many theorists of electronic service delivery and electronic consultation have criticized the recent trend among government service providers to follow a private sector model, where citizens are viewed as “customers” or “clients”. Slaton and Arthur (2004) prefer to position citizens and elected officials as co-owners of government, while MacKinnon (2004) refers to the “dual accountability” of citizens and governors. These models stress that increased citizen involvement brings with it increased citizen responsibility and that citizens are not well served if they are treated as passive customers by government.

official position of a Minister or of the department. The horizontal, networked nature of the Internet and related technologies presents a great challenge to government, which still runs on a very hierarchical bureaucratic model.

Another concern among policymakers with regards to facilitating citizen engagement in the policymaking process is the resulting effect on policy. Some politicians and policymakers feel that the so-called “information revolution” brought about by new information and communication technologies creates tension between the growing immediacy of information and the established practices of policymaking. One policymaker has this to say about the issue:

Increasing technology equals greater immediacy of issues, but immediacy is the antithesis of thoughtful policymaking. When media or interest groups obtain new information and present it to political leaders, the current system demands that political response is immediate. The result is reactive “microphone policy”, a short circuit of thoughtful policymaking and a threat to the role of policymakers. (CPRN, 1996, p.6)

Ironically, it is just this short circuit of action and reaction that new citizen consultation mechanisms attempt to alter. Qualitative consultation exercises are designed to move beyond the “snapshot” of public opinion provided by opinion polls, and to allow citizens and governments to work through policy issues together in a thoughtful and systematic way. However, for this to be successful, policymakers must not be

threatened by citizens' increased involvement in the policymaking process.

It is clear that new methods of citizen engagement in the policymaking process will require new relationships between government and citizens. How best to shape and direct these relationships is still being practiced and tested, but a number of best practices have been identified by theorists and practitioners (Clift, 2002). Certainly, political support and leadership is required in consultation and citizen engagement exercises. As well, citizens must be given some context with regards to their role in the consultation, so that they know how their input will be used and so that their expectations will be realistic. The Foreign Policy Dialogue adhered fairly well to these best practices. The Minister of Foreign Affairs, Bill Graham, was personally very supportive of the entire consultation process and of the online portion in particular. He mentioned the website frequently at public meetings, and made reference to it in a comment piece published in a national newspaper. The Foreign Policy Dialogue website clearly outlined the purpose of the consultation, and how citizens could expect to see their input used. One of the most important lessons learned by other online consultation practitioners—that during the consultation, citizen participants must be given access to key decision-makers and staff such as deputy ministers, key bureaucrats, and policymakers—was not followed during the Dialogue's run. The Minister of Foreign Affairs has an extensive and high-profile portfolio, and the Foreign Policy Dialogue took place during a stressful and busy time on the national and international

stage. During the Dialogue's run, the Iraq war began, the Quebec provincial election was held, and the Federal Government was thrown into flux in anticipation of a change in leadership. All of these factors, combined with the aforementioned vertical structures of government, hindered the department's ability to provide input into the Dialogue, or to engage with citizens in the policy deliberation process. This inability or unwillingness to directly engage in the online consultation is an issue that should be addressed in future consultations, and possible mechanisms for ensuring the input of government will be discussed later in this paper. However, it should be noted that, after an extensive review of electronic consultation processes worldwide, Coleman and Gøtze (2001) found that almost all cases were frustrated by the fact that governments fail to integrate them into the policy process or respond to them effectively. The consultations that have effectively involved government representatives into deliberative processes have tended to be small-scale consultations, involving participation from a smaller group of citizens and municipal officials who are all bounded within a relatively small geographical region. In addition, these consultations generally deal with less explosive issues than foreign policy, such as municipal planning, and they have been highly structured events with strict time constraints (Coleman and Gøtze, 2001). In contrast, the Foreign Policy Dialogue dealt with expansive international issues and broad policy choices. Many of the issues discussed during the Dialogue relate to long term policy objectives that may not even have specific policy positions or decisions attached to them. This makes it difficult for

citizens to easily see their input in action, and for government to report back to citizens in an attempt to bring a sense of closure to the consultation process.

*Online Consultations in Canada:*

Canada, along with most other developed democracies, is using new information and communication technologies to deliver government services and, to a lesser extent, to engage with citizens. The federal government has a Government Online (GOL) Initiative, whose goal is to “provide information and services on the Internet by 2005” (Government of Canada ¶1). Service delivery has been the focus of most developed countries' online strategies, which use the Internet to—in theory—make existing services and information more accessible for citizens. To date, the Canadian GOL Initiative has spent hundreds of millions of dollars to provide cross-government, integrated service delivery mechanisms. Using the Internet and related technologies to actually engage and consult with citizens is a process that is much less developed, and projects have been undertaken only as pilots or experiments. The Privy Council Office (PCO) is the government agency responsible for online consultations. In an effort to build capacity for online consultation and engagement within the government, the PCO has prepared guidelines for online consultation and engagement. Some of the advantages of online consultations identified by the PCO include the ability to reach traditionally inactive portions of the population such as rural communities and youth, and the more flexible mechanisms of participation that the Internet offers busy Canadians. Some drawbacks of

online consultations include the lack of public awareness of consultations, unequal levels of access to the Internet, and ensuring online security and privacy to users (Cook, 2003, ¶ 4).

Within online engagement models, the OECD (2001) has identified three stages of consultation. The first is “Information,” where governments produce and deliver information for citizens. As stated, this is the venue that the Canadian government, as well as most other OECD country governments, has focused on. Today, Canadians can access public records, parliamentary gazettes, and information on political candidates from the World Wide Web. The second stage in the OECD model is identified as “Consultation,” which is defined as a two-way relation where citizens provide feedback to government. This model requires government to identify a policy issue, provide information to citizens, and accept feedback from citizens. Traditional consultation exercises such as public opinion surveys fit into this category, as do some electronic consultations that merely provide a feedback form or an e-mail address. The third stage is designated “Active Participation,” and it entails a partnership between citizens and government. In this model, citizens actively engage in the policymaking process by proposing policy options and shaping the policy dialogue. Of course, the final policy decisions still rest with government.

The Foreign Policy Dialogue rests somewhere between these last two models, for

while citizens were encouraged to give policy-relevant advice and to provide input into the policymaking process, the extent of the “relationship” between Foreign Affairs and citizens was unclear. Within the discussion forum section of the website, citizen participants did develop relationships with one another, but government voices were absent from the discussion. Because government officials did not actively engage with citizens during the course of the online consultation, participants were basically left with an advanced “consultation” level model, where they were providing government with feedback (some of it deliberative feedback) but were not truly engaged with government. Using the Internet to facilitate active participation is still considered a “new frontier” by the Canadian government, and as previously discussed, mechanisms for government to engage in these processes are still in their infancy.

In 2003, Canadian Heritage, along with the PCO, launched a website entitled “Consulting Canadians” (<http://www.consultingcanadians.gc.ca>). The site, which is a pilot project that responds to the GOL initiative, is a consultation portal where citizens can find structured lists of consultation exercises taking place across the country. However, a minority of these consultations contain an online component, and it is unclear whether the Consulting Canadians website will be a permanent feature on the Internet. Clearly, the place of online consultations within Canadian democracy is still tentative, and current research on the subject is still needed in order to evaluate its direction for the future.

*The Public Sphere:*

Habermas' influential study of the bourgeois public sphere was first taken up by English-speaking scholars in 1989, when *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society (Structural Transformation)*, first published in German in 1962, was translated into English. In this work, Habermas closely studies the autonomous site of debate and consensus forming that arose, independent of state and market, among propertied male members of the rising English bourgeois class at the turn of the 18th Century. *Structural Transformation* looks at how the specific social and political climate of the time allowed for this ideal form of a public sphere to take shape. The bourgeois public sphere had some specific features. First, the public sphere was formally open to anyone, regardless of position or class: the salons and coffeehouses that provided the social space for dialogue "preserved a kind of social intercourse that, far from presupposing an equality of status, disregarded status altogether" (Habermas, 1991, p.36). Secondly, the radical changes in economics, culture, and social life going on at the time in England compelled members of the rising bourgeois class to publicly question matters that were previously attended to only by the church and court aristocracies. What Habermas (1991) calls "the domain of 'common concern'" (p.36) expanded as capitalism and a formal state system rose out of a feudal society. Habermas views this ideal public sphere as a domain of our social life where substantive public opinion can be formed through the public use of reason and debate.

Habermas believes that informed and logical discussion is what will lead to the public decision-making that is an essential component of the democratic tradition. However, *Structural Transformation* also outlines how this substantive public opinion generated through the bourgeois public sphere disintegrated through the effects of a more diverse “reasoning public,” the role of the corporate media, and the manipulation of public opinion by authorities.

Although *Structural Transformation* tends to be the work most consulted by other theorists working with Habermas' ideas, he did go on to develop his ideas around the public sphere in two subsequent books, *The Theory of Communicative Action* (1987) and *Between Facts and Norms* (1996). An important influence on the public sphere model is Habermas' dichotomy of the system and the lifeworld, which is developed in *Communicative Action*. Habermas argues that the lifeworld, "a reservoir of taken-for-granted, of unshaken convictions that participants in communication draw upon in cooperative processes of interpretation" (1987, p.124), acts as a resistant force against blunt systemic demands related to the market and authoritative force. The lifeworld, in Habermas' view, is the only part of the dichotomy with a valid claim to social interaction and activism. However, the lifeworld, which is based (like the public sphere) on communication, can be colonized by the system, thereby disempowering those who seek to understand one another through dialogue. In order to resist this colonization of the lifeworld by the system, Habermas again calls upon the public sphere. In *Between Facts*

*and Norms*, he works through the structural elements necessary to a functioning democracy in a modern pluralistic society. One of these elements is a peripheral public sphere that ideally can influence the central administrative bodies: "binding decisions, to be legitimate, must be steered by communication flows that start at the periphery and pass through the sluices of democratic and constitutional procedures situated at the entrance to the parliamentary complex or the courts" (Habermas, 1996, p.356). This peripheral sphere should, Habermas argues, be grounded in civil society organizations that are free from government and the market. As Salter (2003) points out, Habermas conceives of civil society as being structured around "communication oriented to mutual understanding" (p.124). Thus, the public sphere cannot be pinned down or defined explicitly; it is characterized by open, permeable, and shifting horizons. Habermas (1996) describes it as "a network for communicating information and points of view; the streams of communication are, in the process, filtered and synthesized in such a way that they coalesce into bundles of topically specified *public* [italics in the original] opinions" (p.360).

The means by which the public sphere can influence government is different in English bourgeois society than in more contemporary ones. Habermas (1991) explains that arguments developed in the public sphere were delivered to government through the press, which developed into "an instrument with whose aid political decisions could be brought before the new forum of the public" (p. 58). In this way, various periodicals

acted as the vehicle through which the public and the administration were able to communicate. However, newspapers were not yet a medium of consumer culture as they are today. The mid 1800s saw the intellectual press succumb to profit-driven private interests, and Habermas considers the contemporary media unable to serve as an effective conduit between government and citizens. Civil society also plays a role in the functioning of the bourgeois public sphere. As liberal market exchange and civil law developed in the 1800s, “the public sphere as a functional element in the political realm was given the normative status of an organ for the self-articulation of civil society” (Habermas, 1991, p.74). Today, we think of civil society as comprising nongovernmental connections and voluntary associations that, in connection with the private concerns and interests of diverse citizens, can organize, refine, and transmit these concerns in an amplified form to the public sphere (Habermas, 1996). Civil society has effectively replaced the press as the vehicle to keep the communication structures of the public sphere intact, and to directly influence the political system. To extend Habermas’ metaphor, civil society organizations operate the sluice-gate between periphery and center; they are responsible for transmitting focused streams of public opinion to government while at the same time stressing their own important place within the communication structures of complicated, media-saturated democracies.

Habermas’ (1992) more recent theories around the public sphere remain fundamentally loyal to his initial formulation, even as they take into account and respond

to many of the criticisms leveled at his work. Fraser (1993), one of Habermas' most significant critics, points out that the bourgeois model was highly exclusionary and that it served basically as a realm for privileged men to debate their points of view, since women, non-white, and non-propertied classes did not have the education or resources to enter the public sphere. Habermas' idealized model, although open in theory, was in practice an exclusive arena. Fraser responds to *Structural Transformation* by advancing a model where many counter-publics, not equally powerful, can respond to and resist the dominant administrative arena. Fraser's conception a multiplicity of public spheres has been very influential for other public sphere theorists, and in a diverse modern society such as Canada, it is not realistic to continue to think in terms of one overarching public sphere.

### *The Public Sphere Online*

Habermas (1996) admits that the "sluice theory" he employs in *Between Facts and Norms* does not often work as well as it could, and notes that attention must be paid to how existing patterns of will- and opinion-formation can be changed, in order to facilitate effective communication between the periphery and the centre. Many theorists have, in recent years, examined the Internet's ability to perform this function (Calhoun, 1998; Dalberg 2001a, 2001b, Dean, 2001; Papacharissi, 2002). Habermas' later, more fluid definition of a public sphere that is based in communicative practices facilitated by civil society seems to accommodate the idea of the Internet as a public sphere much better than the eighteenth-century bourgeois model. As a site that fosters a multiplicity of publics, the Internet is ideal. Its vastness, and its ability to transcend time and space make it a powerful vehicle for people with common interests or goals to connect, debate, and share information. And indeed the Internet can serve this function. Downing (1989) describes how Public Data Access, a computer communications project dedicated to government transparency in the United States, allowed activists to gather and share data across the country, leading to an influential report on racism that garnered a great deal of media and government attention. However, government attention to ideas generated in the public sphere is not assured; ideas do not always travel successfully from the periphery to the centre. In the case of Downing's study, computer networks allowed already-existing groups to share information across time and space, and to become stronger and more influential through this new online alliance. Ensuring

government attention to online consultations is somewhat simpler; after all, governments initiate these exchanges and therefore have an obligation to listen. Still, effective and open lines of communication between government and citizens do not come into being by default.

Besides its power to transmit ideas from citizens to central decision-making bodies, the Internet has also been praised for its ability to bring disparate groups together in a venue where critical discourse can flourish across lines of difference that might be debilitating in face to face conversation. Mitra (2001) has written about the liberating features of cyberspace for marginalized groups, who are able to overcome identity boundaries and communicate more freely and openly, thus promoting an exchange of ideas among diverse participants. This account seems to support Habermas' insistence that the public sphere should be a place where all are treated equally. However, others have argued that the Internet does more to promote existing power structures by dispersing and fragmenting resistant communities into many tiny "special-interest" groups which are powerless to effect real change. These groups are much more disjointed than the strong publics that Habermas advocates. Calhoun (1998) argues that the very fluidity and anonymity that Mitra finds liberating is actually a hindrance to virtual communities, making participants less committed to their cause and their colleagues. Calhoun insists that the Internet "does not facilitate coming to know others in the multiplicity of their different identities so much as the segmentation of these

different categories from each other" (p. 391).

Besides segmenting diverse populations into powerless factions, others who are skeptical of the democratic potential of the Internet point to the libertarian, aggressive style of discussion that is characteristic of many online discussion groups. The concept of "flaming," defined as a confrontational, hostile interaction that leads away from a substantive issue and towards petty attacks (Benson, 1996) has been well-documented by scholars studying online discussion (Benson, 1996; Connery, 1997). Aggressive online attacks can become so severe that they have been classified as "harassment" or even "rape" (Dibbell, 1998; Herring, 1999). Even in well-established online discussion communities with well-developed "netiquette" structures, flame wars can erupt, and may dissuade others from posting to the forum (Mitra, 2001).

At the same time, there are a number of scholars who, while concluding that aggressive discourse is almost inevitable online, especially in unmoderated environments, embrace the occasional flame war as a therapeutic or cathartic experience. Citing his experience in an academic list serve where he was able to "flame Freud," Millard (1997) states that "incendiary rhetoric can be no cause for panic but a productive hermeneutic tool" (p.158). Benson's (1996) analysis of political discussions on UseNet and NetNews computer bulletin boards found a high level of obscenity, aggressive discourse, and polarization of views amongst discussants. However, he states that

“amidst the hostility, ideological rigidity, name-calling, and obscenity, substantive arguments were advanced” (p.373). Benson suggests that the culture of political debate motivates people to seek some degree of closure and reasonableness, even in an environment filled with aggressive discourse. He notes that discussants were highly attentive to fellow participants, they took great pride in crafting articulate and clever responses, and they were exposed to a diversity of political views. Thus, Benson cautions against imposing any standards of civility that might result in censorship. Coate, (1997), speaking of his own experiences with an online community called “The Gate”, has a positively sanguine view towards flaming:

Some of the arguments and debates we've had over the years have been pointless personal hassles, but many have led us to a fuller understanding of what we were as an entity, or what we thought we ought to be. It is important to note that policy and custom have been shaped at times by arguments and hassles that were often quite personal in nature. (p.176)

Another experienced participant in online discussion notes that participants must strike a balance between blandly polite discourse and all-out argumentation:

I do not think that a 'can't we all just get along' appeal is desirable or realistic, but it seems to me that an 'anything goes' attitude toward argumentative method and personal address will soon leave whatever conversation exists in tatters. (quoted in Connery, 1997, p.177)

It is evident from the experiences of a wide variety of online discourse groups that

norms of civility will differ from situation to situation, and that discourse norms cannot be imposed upon any group as a “one-size-fits-all” solution.

So far, this discussion has only considered the democratic potential of the Internet for those who have access to it. But, as we must remember, the Internet cannot currently support a true multiplicity of spheres in the way Fraser envisioned. As of 2002, 61% of Canadians had some access to the Internet, but the gap between Internet “haves” and “have nots” is still significant: “households with high income, members active in the labour force, those with children still living at home and people with higher levels of education have been in the forefront of Internet adoption” (Statistics Canada, 2003). Of those Canadians using the Internet, e-mail remains overwhelmingly the most popular activity, followed by accessing medical and health-related information, e-banking, and online shopping. The percentage of Canadians with Internet access using it to find government information rose from 8.2% in 1998 to 24.3% in 2002 (Statistics Canada, 2003). The Internet, then, provides a site that nurtures multiple publics, but does not meet the ideal of free and open access for all. Websites that promote citizen engagement must compete with commercial sites and the day-to-day tasks that are increasingly being completed via the Internet. However, the Internet can play an important role facilitating some of the public spheres that can influence central decision-making bodies.

Today, most theorists agree that Habermas' ideal of one public sphere is neither possible nor desirable (Dahlberg, 2001a; Fraser, 1993; Poster, 2001). One of the most profound changes affecting the public sphere is the pervasiveness of communications media. Although some interaction in public spheres is still face-to-face, much of it is mediated by communications technologies. Today's public spheres are the site of discussion and opinion-formation among a group of people, who may be strangers, united by an awareness of their similarities (Benoit-Barné, 2000). Still, though, these public spheres, and the discussion that takes place in them, maintain a central position in democratic societies. The core feature of all public spheres is talk. Discussion is an indispensable condition to the public sphere, whether it be an eighteenth century coffee house or a twenty-first century Internet forum. However, the change of medium cannot be glossed over. The absence of the social cues present in face-to-face discussion creates new questions about how people express themselves online, how they interact with one another, and how to assess the impact that their words have. In an online public sphere, important questions must be asked about how rules and norms governing speech acts are formed, and if and how they should be enforced to ensure the respect and civil speech that are responsive to difference, yet aimed towards attaining mutual goals. Civil discourse is vital to a strong public sphere, so attention must be paid to how it plays out in the online public sphere.

*Civility: Why does it matter?*

Habermas' public sphere was, as Fraser (1993) points out, comprised of a very small segment of the population: educated, propertied bourgeois men. While this sexist and classist aspect of the public sphere is now recognized as one of its major drawbacks, it was also what helped to furnish the norms of discourse that guided discussion in the public sphere. In *Structural Transformation*, Habermas (1991) does not dwell upon the kind of speech that is employed in the public sphere; he states merely that it "replaced the celebration of rank with a tact befitting equals" (p.36). The one aspect of speech that Habermas does stress is reason. Reason expressed in the form of dialogue is the key to enlightenment; rational-critical public debate constituted a "claim to power" (Habermas, 1991, p. 28). He notes that the "educated middle class learned the art of critical-rational public debate through its contact with the 'elegant world'" (Habermas, 1991, p.29) of noble society. Reason, Habermas suggests, is not something innate or universal, but belongs to the lifeworlds of a certain class of people in a specific cultural context. Therefore, this concept of reason that is so central to the bourgeois public sphere becomes problematic when we consider online discourse in a modern, pluralistic and highly diverse society such as Canada.

In *Communicative Action*, Habermas (1987) elaborates on his conception of rationality to describe how communicative action, so central to the lifeworld, is based on

the existence of validity claims. In order for a speech act to be accepted, the hearer must be able to accept the truth of the statement, its corresponding normative basis, and the sincerity of the speaker. How can these validity claims be assessed in an online environment, where people who most likely do not share the same lifeworld, norms, or experience come together to debate issues of mutual importance? Habermas (1984) describes how freeing language from convention poses a challenge to the lifeworld:

The need for reaching understanding is met less and less by a reservoir of traditionally certified interpretations immune from criticism.... [The lifeworld] can be regarded as rationalized to the extent that it permits interactions that are not guided by normatively *ascribed* agreement but — directly or indirectly — by communicatively *achieved* [italics in the original] understanding. (p.340)

One's own lifeworld can be challenged constantly on the Internet, forcing a degree of introspection that would probably not be required within a more homogeneous group. Besides, Habermas (1996) conceives of the lifeworld as a set of values and meanings that is formulated in the *private* sphere, and that individuals are ready to participate in civil society organizations and the public sphere only after this lifeworld is “rationalized” (p.371). In terms of the diverse interactions that are characteristic of online discourse, the Internet cannot fill this private sphere role. In Internet discourse on a nationally-focused website, meanings and shared understanding are negotiated publicly among strangers. Salter (2003) suggests that the anonymity of the Internet “presents itself as a double-edged sword in terms of communicative action” (p.137), for while the

erasure of potential face-to-face obstacles such as gender or ethnicity can increase the chances that the better argument will prevail, anonymity also allows individuals to shirk their responsibility and commitment towards listening to others. The communicative challenges of the Internet can prompt citizens to either give up in frustration, or to revert to aggressive and impetuous verbal attacks.

A number of theorists have commented on how Habermas' emphasis on reason in public sphere dialogue becomes problematic in the context of pluralistic modern democracies. Kingwell (1995) finds that Habermas' "project of anticipating rational consensus in norm assessment seems too ideal to be practically illuminating" (p.176). He suggests that the kind of "political-pragmatic commitment" necessary to the public sphere should come not from some universal notion of rationality, but from a resolution to support common space: space that is shared by all citizens, not just those who share some normative conception of rationality, or to put it in Habermas' terms, a shared lifeworld. Peters (1993) calls Habermas' attitude toward communication "a Puritan notion of self-disclosure" that is "hostile to theatre, courtly forms, ceremony, the visual, and to rhetoric more generally" (p.562). In an online context that lends itself to play and creativity expressed through language (Poster, 2001), Habermas' sober principles of communication may be irrelevant and unsuitable. In the absence of universal rationality, then, what can function as a guiding principle to shape and guide discourse in an online, twenty-first century public sphere? Kingwell suggests a kind of "weak universalism," a

commitment by a group of people with certain commonalities to adhere to some norms of behaviour. This commitment is pragmatic and situational, and is bounded up in the notion of civility. Kingwell defines civility as "an orientation toward understanding, not agreement; it makes for a political conversation in which we try to sharpen our self-interpretation as common citizens of a society in need of justification" (p.230). The commitment to understanding instead of agreement is another divergence from Habermas' model. Habermas' public sphere is oriented towards a finite ending of agreement and understanding, reached through discussion. If two parties cannot reach an agreement, then the discussion has ultimately been a failure (Habermas, 1991). However, Kingwell and other revisionists of the public sphere model argue that modern democracies are just too diverse to remain firmly committed to agreement:

When multiple perspectives are the norm, the realistic test of a position's strength is less that it achieves agreement than that it can be understood across perspectives and, as a result, provide a basis for cooperation among interdependent partners. (Hauser, 1999, p.55)

The Internet, with its web-like structure, is itself inhospitable to finite conclusions: "there's no ending online. There's no closure, no linear basis. It's about bringing [opinion] in, checking it out, constantly evaluating" (Wallace, 1998, p.20). Thus, a commitment to civility is more suitable to online political dialogue than are validity claims and universal rationality.

This conception of civility as an orientation towards understanding, or a way to furnish meaning across disparate perspectives, is only one way that the term has been understood. A discussion of civil discourse can be found as far back as the writings of Aristotle, who was the first to coin the term *polis* to designate the form of political association typical to the agora within the Athenian state (Schmidt, 1998). In ancient Greece, to be a citizen was to exercise political will through civil discourse; those who did not were not considered to be citizens and were viewed as barbaric. Etymologically, civility is closely related to the Latin *civis* (citizen) and *civitas* (city) (Kesler, 1992). Thus, it is a distinctly public quality, and has usually been associated with civil society, a term whose meaning has changed since the time of Aristotle's *polis*. As Habermas points out in *Structural Transformation*, the economic and political changes that gave rise to the public sphere at the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century also redefined the role of civil society and of the civil discourse that took place therein. Civil society turned into a sphere of private autonomy as a result of private law and a liberalized market, and it began to view itself as having a “social contract” with a state that was required to respond to its needs (Habermas, 1991, p.75). This definition of civil society allowed individuals to think outside of themselves, and to recognize their place within a greater society as well as to value their individuality.

Civility has also been associated more closely with morality and good manners. This more bourgeois interpretation of the term can be found in the writings of the

American Founding Fathers. For George Washington, civility came about through moral education, and it is primarily demonstrated through good manners, as well as a concern for others and for one's own honour (Kesler, 1992). The notion that civility is basically a more sophisticated form of good manners is still held today by some who bemoan our society's supposed descent into incivility and moral decline. Carter (1998), for example, argues that American society is facing a "crisis of civility" that can be traced back to the influential social shifts that began in the 1960s with women's liberation, the Vietnam War, and the civil rights movement. Carter views civility as being a profoundly moral virtue that requires people to make sacrifices, something that he thinks people in our individualistic and selfish culture are loathe to do. Some of the examples of incivility that Carter provides are rude sales clerks, angry drivers making lewd gestures on the highway, and even offensive rap lyrics. Carter seems to be harkening back to the idea of civility as a moral virtue, as it was articulated by Washington. Others who have studied civility in the context of discourse have also defined it as a virtue, although one less tied to specific morals. Smith (2002) states:

Civility is a properly grounded character trait which moves an individual to treat political opponents well and/or to feel certain emotions toward political opponents, emotions which move an individual to treat political opponents well. (p.15)

Although Smith goes on to refine his definition of civility somewhat, the reader is never sure exactly how this quality becomes "properly grounded," or what is involved with

treating an opponent “well.” Thus, these definitions of civility try to impose certain aspects of morality that may not reflect current practices of discourse within civil society. They are similar to Habermas' emphasis on reason in that they are not sensitive to the diversity of traditions and approaches to civil speech within the public sphere.

In contrast to these interpretations of civility are theorists who see civility as being constituted through dialogue among members of civil society. Instead of accepting civility as a privileged discourse of the privileged, it redefines civility as a perpetual negotiation between differences that is not morally consistent. Keane (2003) sums up this shift by saying:

Most of these old meanings of civility . . . understandably grate on the conscience of today's friends of civil society. For them, 'civility' has quite different connotations: it means not only 'non-violent', but also 'respectful of others', 'polite towards strangers', 'tolerant', even 'generous'. The connotative change is immense. It dovetails with these reflections on the morals of civil society, and could be summarized in the following formula: civil are those individuals and groups who use such techniques as indirection, face-saving, and self-restraint to demonstrate their commitment, in tactful speech and action and bodily manners, to the worldly principle of a peaceful plurality of morals.

(p. 199)

Keane's notion of civility effectively demonstrates the plurality of ways that disparate

groups constitute civil speech, and shows how it is impossible to define civility in terms of strict moral guidelines or through etiquette manuals. Hauser (1999) emphasizes the rhetorical nature of civility, noting that civil judgments can only emerge through formal and informal conversations among diverse voices who may not share values or ends, but who are committed to finding mutually acceptable outcomes to common problems without having to rely on shared values or commitments. Hauser (1999) argues that the public sphere still has a role in hosting these diverse exchanges: “the primary concern of the Public Sphere has become the constitution of discursive spaces with the capacity to encourage and nurture a multilogue across their respective borders and from which *civil judgments* [italics in the original] may emerge” (p.98). Thus, civility is not foundational; it is suggestive and responsive to the demands of the historical moment in the midst of human discourse and action. This is because civility is constructed through dialogue; it is generated, altered, and strengthened by groups identifying their common interests in the public sphere. Thus, although actors in the online public sphere may come to the discussion with “an already rationalized lifeworld” (Habermas, 1996, p.371), they must be willing to negotiate with others and challenge their own beliefs and preconceptions, at least partially. The common lifeworld that develops out of this public sphere is not based on full assent or agreement, but on enough common understanding to facilitate mutual cooperation. In this way, civility differs from the “tact befitting equals” (Habermas, 1991, p.36) employed in dialogue in the bourgeois public sphere. Instead of the bracketing off of difference that Fraser (1989) criticizes, participants can talk across lines

of difference. Instead of forcing all participants to assimilate to a single lifeworld or norm of discourse, discursive techniques and protocols are developed within the public sphere, where civility arises inter-subjectively. As Kingwell (1995) states, “civility is...*both* the governing value of the legitimation conversation *and* [italics in the original] one of the principles justified within that talk” (p.230).

Civility is a norm that governs discussion outside of the private sphere; I use the term civility instead of respect to bring “a clear public perception to awareness” (Arnett & Arneson, 1999, p.286). Civility is also distinct from politeness, a quality associated with etiquette and formality. Although politeness and civility are related, a focus on politeness may exclude discussion that is robust, lively, or informal, but is still oriented towards understanding:

It is challenging to establish politeness standards that all public discussion can measure up to, without sacrificing some of the irascibility of discussion. This highlights the reason why civility should be redefined as a construct that encompasses, but also goes beyond, politeness. (Pappacharisi, 2004, p.266)

Civility promotes public respect and cooperation, but still allows for spontaneity and uniqueness of human discourse. My research will focus on how this quality of civility developed on the discussion forums of the Foreign Policy Dialogue, how it was challenged and enforced by participants, and if it allowed participants to transmit their interests to government in an effective and meaningful manner. Evaluating civility is

important for it is one of the conditions that enables the public sphere to function as a vehicle for bringing the views of the periphery to central decision-making bodies.

Using the Internet to facilitate public policy consultations is still a “new frontier” for the Government of Canada. However, declining citizen engagement continues to be an issue of concern for government departments, and it is likely that they will increasingly turn to online consultations in an attempt to engage cynical citizens with the democratic process. Thus, it is important to evaluate how Internet-based deliberative consultations can best be carried out to serve the needs of citizens and government. The public sphere is a useful model to analyze public consultations because it focuses on a social domain where public opinion is formed through public discussion and is transmitted to central authorities. The Internet can function as this social domain, although its success in this role is not guaranteed. One of the requirements for successful dialogue within the public sphere is civil speech. In an online environment where physical bodies are absent, words are the only tools that people have to communicate. Thus, civil speech helps to ensure a productive and tolerant space for dialogue that is aimed at finding common interests and goals. Civility goes beyond good manners or etiquette to encompass an orientation towards understanding, and an attitude of respect for the opinions and experiences of all participants in a discussion.

Because Canada has held so few online consultations, it is vital that research be

done on existing cases so that best practices and lessons learned can be transmitted to future practitioners. This research approaches a national online consultation, The Foreign Policy Dialogue, using the concept of the public sphere. The public sphere model focuses on the ability of individual citizens to construct public opinions through discussion, and to transmit these opinions to government. Specifically, this study focuses on the quality of civil speech. I will be examining whether civil speech is established and maintained by Dialogue participants, whether the website's civil rules and civil society moderators have an impact on the quality of online discourse, and whether civil speech in an online policy consultation facilitates citizens' ability to transmit their public opinions to government. This research constitutes a new contribution to the field of citizen engagement and e-governance, for an in-depth study of civil speech in the context of a public consultation has not yet been carried out. The findings of this study will be of use to theorists and practitioners who are interested in how to improve public online consultation processes in the future.

#### *Civility and the Foreign Policy Dialogue:*

The rules that guide online dialogue in other list serves, websites and discussion forums are diverse, and are related to the culture and local legal frameworks of those participating. While some facilitators insist that only very basic rules (against harassment, *ad hominem* attacks, and threats) should exist (Coate, 1997), others have

used a more comprehensive set of guidelines. Researchers at the Harvard-based Berkman Centre for Internet and Society (2000) decided that the preservation of an online environment in which respectful discussion and decision-making may take place is more important than allowing unfettered speech.<sup>2</sup> However, they also state that it is extremely important to make clear to participants the criteria by which their discourse will be judged, and to make the moderation process as transparent as possible. This process is deemed necessary to promote a culture of trust and accountability between administrators, moderators, and participants. Coleman and Gøetze (2001) have, through their experience administering online consultations in the United Kingdom, noted that participants feel safer and more comfortable when participating within a rule-based framework.<sup>3</sup> Moderated discussion is especially important in public policy consultations, since the goal of these online discussions is to facilitate purposive debate on specific issues (Edwards, 2004).

The civil society partner in the Foreign Policy Dialogue, the byDesign eLab, has had experience hosting online discussion and dialogue on a variety of topics since 1998.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup>The Berkman Institute surveyed a wide range of online communities to draw up a set of recommendations on how best to govern these discursive spaces. They concluded that, given the goal of most online discussion sites is to promote democratic decision-making, administrators and moderators must be put in place to protect the “signal-to-noise” ratio of online discussions.

<sup>3</sup>Coleman and Gøetze have also conducted surveys of online policy consultations, and provide recommendations for the roles of moderators. Many of their recommendations, including setting out clear and transparent rules, regulating and moderating discussion, and summarizing deliberation, were implemented by Foreign Policy Dialogue moderators.

<sup>4</sup>Some of the byDesign eLab’s projects include: the New Media Forum (<http://www.newmedia-forum.net/>) (1998), constructed to consult citizens on new media policy at the CRTC; From Survival to Sustainability

The civil rules used on the Foreign Policy Dialogue have evolved since then based on the experience of in-house practitioners, best practices literature from other practitioners, and the specificities of the project. Since the Dialogue was a partnership between civil society and government, and because of its purpose to “engage Canadians in discussion about Canada’s place in the world” (Graham, 2002), civil rules were set up not only to guard against inappropriate speech but to ensure that discussion would remain on the topic of Canada’s foreign policy, and related issues. The civil rules of the Foreign Policy Dialogue are shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Civil Rules**

Participation in this electronic consultation implies acceptance of the following conditions:

1. This site is offered for dialogue and exchange among persons interested in Canada's foreign policy.
2. Contributors to this electronic consultation are solely and entirely responsible for their messages, particularly with regard to any information and data that may be exchanged.
3. When you post messages, please stay on topic. If you wish to supply additional information off topic, offer a mailing address or Internet address where others can locate it. Note, your message cannot include attachments.
4. Advertising and spam of any kind are not to be included in messages posted to this site.
5. Moderators are responsible for facilitating discussions and ensuring that the Civil Rules are respected. They reserve the right to take whatever measures are required to ensure the Civil Rules are respected by site visitors. Such measures

(<http://www.ecommons.net/sustain/>) (2001), which had a forum enabling Community Learning Networks to discuss issues around the sustainability of Ontario-based not-for-profit groups; and the Electronic Commons (<http://www.ecommons.net/>) (1998-present), which has hosted a variety of online forums dedicated to topics such as citizenship, electronic democracy, and new information and communication technologies.

include, but are not limited to, refusing to accept any message that may be construed or interpreted as discriminatory, promulgating hatred or obscenity, or defamation of any kind.

Decisions of the moderators and chief moderator are final. Thank you for respecting the Civil Rules.

From <http://www.foreign-policy-dialogue.ca/en/policies/civilrules.html>

The civil rules were designed by the byDesign eLab and the Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development to be as open as possible, to encourage speech within a broad, yet specific, set of boundaries. The civil rules do not address the more nuanced characteristic of civility, defined as an orientation towards agreement. However, the rules do provide for the necessary conditions of common interests, responsibility, and respect for others that help develop and promote civility.

In order to begin posting messages to the Foreign Policy Dialogue, participants were required to fill in an online form. The form could only be processed if the required fields were filled in, and if the participants agreed to abide by the civil rules (using a click-wrap agreement, which entails clicking a box to indicate one's agreement). As explained in item five of the civil rules, the civil society moderators assessed each post to the Dialogue before it was displayed on the live site, and either approved or rejected it based on its adherence to the civil rules. If a post failed to abide by the civil rules, that post was rejected. However, having a post rejected did not bar people from further

participation in the Dialogue.

*To moderate, or not to moderate?*

Some facilitators of online systems advocate for the bare minimum of rules outlining what is considered acceptable speech (Coate, 1997). These beliefs tend to be informed by an American perspective on democracy, which holds the model of free speech, as outlined in the First Amendment, as the primary human right for all individuals (Docter and Dutton, 1999). Theorists and practitioners who follow this philosophy do not use moderators, and allow totally unfettered speech in online dialogue. Posts are removed only if there is a legal reason to do so, such as obscenity or defamation. However, this approach is not without drawbacks. Analysis of an early American experiment with online discussion in Santa Monica's Public Education Network (PEN) indicates that concerns over civility prevented many citizens from participating in computer conferences (Docter and Dutton, 1998). When faced with rude and obscene language on the unmoderated PEN, system administrators struggled to control the civility of the discussion while still upholding citizens' First Amendment rights and avoiding any perception of partisan moderation by city-employed facilitators. The researchers conclude that perhaps citizen moderators would be the best choice for monitoring online dialogue, but stress that it is extremely difficult for participants to accept moderated discussion once they become accustomed to free form, unmoderated dialogue.

The perspective taken by the administrators of the Foreign Policy Dialogue, while still respecting free speech, tends to make provisions to ensure the rights of the group, in accordance with the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. Section One of the Charter states that “the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* guarantees the rights and freedoms set out in it subject only to such reasonable limits prescribed by law as can be demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society” (Department of Justice, 1982, Section 1). The rights of the individual can sometimes be curtailed in order to protect the broader community. This is the spirit in which the Dialogue was incubated, and what led to the model of moderating each post. As the Dialogue’s Frequently Asked Question section states, “this Web site space is a civil public place where citizens with diverse opinions and communication skills feel welcome to engage in these important deliberations within the reasonable limits of expression of a free and democratic society” (Foreign Policy Dialogue, 2003). However, the moderation of the Dialogue was designed to be as transparent as possible, and the website makes clear that moderators are non-partisan civil society members, not employees of the Federal Government. In the Discussion section of the site, there is also a section entitled “Tips for Newcomers,” which provides suggestions and background information for people who wish to begin posting messages to the site (Foreign Policy Dialogue, 2003). The “Tips” section offers basic “netiquette”; for example, do not type in all capital letters, develop clear subject lines for your messages, do not use jargon, and read your messages

carefully before posting them. It also advises people to be tolerant of others' views and opinions, and to approach the discussion forums with an open mind. Finally, it stresses that the Civil Rules are the overarching measure by which all comments will be evaluated.

There were fifteen moderators who worked on the Dialogue project. Most of the moderators were volunteer associates of the byDesign eLab, and were drawn from academic and research communities. I volunteered as a moderator from this category. There was also a smaller number of paid staff that performed moderation duties as well as other tasks. The moderation team followed a schedule so that seven days a week, during working hours, there was always at least one moderator surveying the site and screening posts. Moderators were all given training on how to use the web-based console to approve and reject posts based on the criteria set out in the civil rules. This training was also intended to increase inter-moderator reliability, so that moderators were making consistent decisions. When moderators were unsure of whether or not a post was acceptable, they were instructed to "pin" or hold the post, and to alert the Project Director who then used her discretion as to which posts were accepted.

Most posts submitted to the Dialogue complied with the civil rules and thus were approved by the moderators. In fact, of the 2116 posts submitted to the Discussion Forum portion of the Dialogue, only 60 were rejected. Some of the rejected posts were

test posts submitted by site administrators and programmers, while others were rejected because they were off-topic, rude or libelous, or were spam mail. These results support the notion that the civil rules and moderator presence were effective in establishing guidelines to ensure civil speech.

Besides approving or rejecting citizen posts to the Dialogue, the moderators sometimes took a more active role in the online discussions. When discussion in a particular thread began to move off topic or appeared ready to descend into “flame wars” and name-calling, instead of rejecting a borderline uncivil post, a moderator sometimes posted his or her own response to the forum thread, reminding participants of the presence of the moderators and of the expectations and rules that framed the discussion. This practice was used instead of rejecting posts that almost violated civil rules, because the site administrators were eager to keep participation levels as high as possible. Moderators also stepped in to request input to certain areas of the Dialogue website that policy-makers and government were most interested in.

The fact that the Foreign Policy Dialogue was a partnership between civil society and government is significant since I am analyzing it using the model of the public sphere. Habermas makes clear that public spheres must be autonomous sites of public communication, anchored in shared lifeworld structures. As Habermas (1996) says, “the development of such lifeworld structures can certainly be stimulated, but for the most

part they elude legal regulation, administrative control, or political steering” (p.359). In the case of the Foreign Policy Dialogue, governmental and administrative structures certainly had more steering power than Habermas would have liked. The government set the agenda for the consultation, providing the topic of foreign policy and the themes around which discussion flourished. In addition to the content of the Dialogue, the “look and feel” of the website itself was very much in line with other government websites. Although civil society web designers and programmers were responsible for the design and architecture of the site, they were required to follow (with some small deviations) the Treasury Board of Canada’s “Common Look and Feel Guidelines,” after original designs for the website were rejected by government partners. The fact that the byDesign eLab was able to secure a space for their logo along with the logo for DFAIT was considered to be a major success (L. Jeffrey, personal communication, June 28, 2003).

However, although government largely set the stage for the consultation, the civil society partners were for the most part the ones “running the show.” Site designers used open-source programs to develop a unique dialogue platform that was not reliant on commercial or proprietary software tools, adding to the openness and collaborative nature of civil society. Government officials did not have any direct control over the day-to-day workings of the moderation process or maintenance of the site. Text on the web site makes clear that moderators are non-aligned, civil society representatives. It

was important to the site facilitators that participants not perceive the moderators to be representatives of the Department of Foreign Affairs, and to assure participants that their posts were not being rejected on any conditions except those stated explicitly in the civil rules. In addition, the free-form nature of the Discussion portion of the Dialogue allowed individual citizens the power to initiate their own topics of discussion, and to articulate their own priorities and interests instead of merely responding to those put forward by the government. Thus, the Foreign Policy Dialogue represents a deviation from the sluice theory described by Habermas: the center set the agenda for the consultation, but the periphery still found space to negotiate common meanings, and express and promote their own interests within this structure.

## Methods and Sources

### *Data Sources:*

The Dialogue site, which is still archived at <http://www.foreign-policy-dialogue.ca>, has two main components: a set of twelve questions posed by the Minister of Foreign Affairs to Canadians, and a set of discussion forums. Both components address issues raised in a policy paper compiled by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which is available in numerous forms on the Dialogue website. The discussion forums, which contain over 2,000 posts, are the focus of my research. There were five discussion forums on the Dialogue site, organized under broad foreign policy-related themes: *The Three Pillars*, which debated the validity of basing foreign policy around the “three pillars” of security, prosperity, and values and culture; *Security*, which became the most active forum in the wake of the so-called “War on Terror” and the invasion of Iraq; *Prosperity*, which concerned issues of trade and globalization; *Values and Culture*, which dealt with how Canadian beliefs should be shared worldwide; and *The World We Want*, which was a wide-ranging forum designed to provide a space for a broad range of discussions. The topics of these forums were fixed, but within each forum any participant could initiate discussion by creating a new thread on a related sub-topic of his or her choice. Thus, within the *Security* forum, for example, there are many topic threads, ranging from the existence of biological weapons in Iraq to U.S.-Canada

relations, which discuss issues broadly related to security. Threads contain posts from a minimum of one and a maximum of nine participants, and the majority of threads are dominated by a small group of heavy users. Before posts appeared on the “live” site, they underwent the moderation process described above. As such, the Dialogue was asynchronous: users did not communicate in real time.

The Foreign Policy Dialogue used “pull” technology, meaning that participants had to go to the website in order to post messages (Herring, 2004). The discussion forums were text-only, with messages grouped by topic into threads. Past messages remained on the site and appeared in chronological order with newer ones in the same thread. The site was designed so that after registering, participants had to log in with a user name and password each time they wished to post messages to the discussion forums. In order to register, participants had to indicate their name, citizenship status, and agree to abide by the civil rules. They could also provide additional information such as address, home page URL, and other resources such as web links. Participants could choose to keep this information private, or to make it public. Most participants appeared to register with their real name and information, but given the nature of web-based registration, this is impossible to verify. The site policy on Personally Identifiable Information (PII) and data collection states: “While no attempt to verify identity will be made on behalf of the site administrators and any PII submitted to the site is done so by choice, contributing on false pretenses will undermine the analysis of this consultation as

well as the research into it" (Foreign Policy Dialogue, 2003). The research operates under the assumption that the personally identifying information provided is legitimate.

While the Foreign Policy Dialogue was designed to be as accessible as possible, so as to serve Canadians with differing levels of computer literacy and access, the discussion forums probably attracted users with higher levels of web fluency, and faster Internet connections. The high frequency of posting to the discussions by heavy users suggests that these participants were frequently online and were able to devote the time needed to keep up with the sometimes high volume of text that was produced every day. In contrast, the Question and Answer section of the website was more accessible, because users could download Minister Graham's paper to their computer, craft answers to his questions, and reconnect to the site in order to post their answers. The Question and Answer section did not allow interaction between citizens, and therefore does not address my research questions.

Within the discussion forums, I have chosen a subset of threads to comprise my data set. The focus sample has been chosen to include samples that yield as much insight as possible into issues around civility in online policy discussions (Fairclough, 1995). Again, civility is defined as an orientation towards understanding and a respect for difference in public discourse. Samples that indicate conflict or cooperation between

participants are useful, for they will help to uncover the linguistic techniques used by participants to either provoke crisis or maintain civil norms. The data set contains 364 posts from 23 discussion threads. The earliest posting in the focus sample is from January 22, 2003. The last posts were submitted on April 29, 2003, which was the last day of the Dialogue. The analysis process took place in March 2004. The sample involves 41 participants, some posting as little as one message and some posting more than twenty messages. The discourse characteristics present in this sample are representative of the entire dialogue; during the initial examination of the data, these features were identified and it became obvious that they were widespread throughout the discussion forums. The data set was limited to make the analysis task more manageable, and specific threads were chosen because they provide the clearest insight into specific discourse characteristics. The focus of this research is the publicly available data contained on the Foreign Policy Dialogue website. The data, with personally identifying information removed, was transferred into qualitative analysis software called Qualrus for scrutiny. Qualrus was chosen because it was also used for the main project-related tasks of analysis. Thus, I was familiar with the software, and all of my data had already been deposited into a Qualrus file. Each thread of dialogue was a separate text file within the project file, and the same set of codes was applied to each. Qualrus functioned primarily as a data management tool, for it allowed me to easily code and categorize discourse samples, and later to search for and group them (see Appendix 1 for a screenshot of Qualrus that shows the analysis process). Before proceeding with this

study, the project was reviewed and approved by the Ryerson Research Ethics Board.

### *Discourse Analysis*

Discourse analysis is the most effective method for analysing questions of civility in online discourse. In online interaction, in the absence of physical cues or context, words are everything: “language is doing, in the truest performative sense, on the Internet, where physical bodies (and their actions) are technically lacking” (Herring, 2004, p.1). Civil speech is analyzed by examining both the intention of speakers, which can be inferred through speech evidence, and by looking at the interaction between participants. The goal of this analysis is to identify discourse characteristics that are persistently and demonstrably present in the sample, and to do this, I have chosen to analyze threads of discussion. A thread can be defined as a series of exchanges between two or more people, all on the same topic. Because my research addresses interpersonal exchanges as well as specific discourse characteristics, I have coded individual messages both for their content and for their contribution to the civility of the discussion. Since the concept of civility is somewhat abstract and context-dependent, I wanted to devise coding structures that were based on phenomena I observed in the data, instead of trying to fit the data into preconceived categories. From my role as a moderator on the Foreign Policy Dialogue, I already had a good grasp of the content, discourse styles, and extent of the data.

Because of my familiarity with the data, I had already identified some of the speech acts that participants used in order to develop and maintain civil speech. The goal of civil speech is to ensure an environment of mutual respect and understanding. Some of the specific speech acts that promoted this goal include providing evidence or personal information in order to substantiate an opinion, quoting other participants to demonstrate one's attentiveness, and using negotiation techniques and showing restraint. In addition, there were a number of techniques used by site moderators to enforce or encourage civil speech. All of these techniques have been recognized by other theorists as contributing towards a civil space that is responsive to difference and committed to purposive discussion (Coleman and Gøetze, 2001; Donath, 1999; Rouner, 2000). These general categories were identified before the coding began, but more specific sub-codes were identified during the analysis process. I read messages in their entirety and coded the data iteratively, beginning with general coding categories and then identifying more specific codes during the analysis. Most of the coding categories employed in this research are semantic phenomena; that is, they are exhibited in speech acts. There are also some structural categories, such as quoting and providing references, which can be identified more or less objectively (Bauer, 2000). However, the coding of most of these phenomena requires an interpretive, subjective component. In order to maintain a rigor in my analysis of the data, I defined each code explicitly and compared all instances of a code's presence to make sure that it was being applied consistently (see Appendix 2 for detailed table showing how codes were operationalized).

## Discussion and Analysis of Results

Many of the discourse features that are displayed in the Dialogue's discussion forums are familiar ones that have been observed by other theorists studying similar communications tools. The majority of Dialogue posts are organized into what Herring (1996) calls "macrosegments;" that is, they contain an introduction, "contentful body" and closing, and usually have a link to an earlier message, an expression of views, and an appeal to other participants. Topics are introduced with "catchy" titles that sometimes mimic newspaper headlines, a technique that helps participants draw others' attention to their thread (Crystal, 2001). The use of Internet slang and acronyms such as "WMD" for weapons of mass destruction, or "IMHO" for in my humble opinion were used by many participants to indicate their facility with web-based discussion and their knowledge of current events as reported by the media (Donath, 1999). Most posts are submitted anonymously and are only identified by the participant's screen name or number in the message header. A minority of participants, however, consistently sign their posts with either what appears to be their real name, or with a descriptive pseudonym (e.g. "Vox - Canadiana"). These discourse features, while common and relatively standard throughout, did not have any noticeable effect on how the participants responded to one another. However, there were discourse features that respond to my research question of whether site participants develop, enforce, challenge, and maintain norms of civil dialogue. The discourse characteristics that had the most significant impact on civility

lie in three different areas: developing trust and online reputation, negotiation techniques, and interaction with moderators. These characteristics will now be identified and discussed.

### *Developing Trust and Online Reputation*

A central research question to this study asks whether civil speech is established and maintained by site participants. My analysis of the study's sample indicates that participants do work to develop and enforce civil norms. One of the ways in which participants maintained norms of civil speech in the Dialogue was by establishing a trustworthy online reputation. Participants constructed fixed personae by consistently performing speech acts that added to their perceived trustworthiness and reliability. In online environments like the Foreign Policy Dialogue, "there is no editorial board ensuring standards of reliability; each posting comes direct from the writer" (Donath, 1999, p.30), so participants have to prove their credibility. The skills and attributes necessary for a trustworthy online presence developed over time, and were most remarked upon when new participants entered the discussion, or when established participants failed to adhere to an already-developed norm. A trustworthy online reputation acts as a necessary condition for participants to give each other the benefit of the doubt and to work through the diversity of evidence, experience, and lifeworlds that meet on the Internet. As Dean (2001) states:

The political norms at stake in the information age have less to do with truth ...

than with a credibility that is never secured. Such an unstable credibility, moreover, makes alliance particularly problematic: how might opposing constituencies (not to mention the individuals within them) trust one another under these conditions? Clearly, particular subject positions (those attempting to warrant themselves with reference to a specific authority or experience, say) and claims will have to work to earn and retain credibility. (p. 263)

Dialogue participants undertake this “work” by establishing their online identities through providing evidence to substantiate their comments, quoting other participants, and disclosing personal information to give credence to their views or to their authority on a certain issue. A trustworthy online identity was an important precondition for participants to accept at face value each other’s remarks and to debate opinions in a civil way.

One of the most important aspects of establishing an online reputation on the Dialogue site was providing evidence and sources to back up claims made. Participants provided three main forms of evidence: links to media and informational websites; quotations from experts such as politicians and academics; and personal experience and expertise. When participants consistently made statements without providing evidence, they were almost always criticized and discredited by others. However, although backing up claims made on the Dialogue website garnered respect from one’s opponents, it did not always orient the discussion towards agreement or even understanding, for

opposing experiences and media perspectives could always be found and pitted against one another.

The fact that the Dialogue took place online made finding evidence to support claims even more important. As one participant chastised another, “You might also remind yourself that you also have the responsibility to research and present your own ideas and proofs ... We’re on the Internet after all.” The Internet, it is implied, should make it easy for people to find information to support their arguments. Media websites from the CBC to CNN to Al-Jazeera are cited by participants, as are government, non-governmental organization, and think tank sources. Participants who fail to document their sources are criticized. As one contributor writes to another (*note: all typos and spelling mistakes in quoted examples are from the original messages, and participants are referred to in gender-neutral terms unless they have revealed their gender online*):

Nobody is right or wrong here [...] its not black or white, but by reading your responses, you have not fully disclosed facts, while i have (and i think others)... and by lacking facts, its very difficult for me, at least, to understand your position.

Another participant is even more abrupt, stating “If you want to discuss your ideas you need to first do some research.”

Citing personal experience served both to add credence to one’s own argument

and to discredit another's. In a thread that discusses whether France has a significant influence on Quebec politics and therefore on Canadian foreign policy, one participant, cfallon, states that France interferes in Quebec politics. Another participant, codc01, retorts:

I am a Quebecer and Francophone, and i know exactly what is happening in my province (even though I'm not living there for the moment), and i can tell you that your statement is absurd. Yes, France checks on Quebec politics, which is normal, but they don't interfere actively with us now.

However, this example is one in which one contributor's experience is directly at odds with another's. The next post states, "I am a Quebecer as well - but an Anglophone. I know full well that France has more than an 'innocent' interest in Quebec politics."

Personal experience is revealed to be subjective and sometimes contradictory. To a lesser extent, the same can be said for media sources. Participants criticize each other for only citing what are perceived as "left wing" or "conservative" sources, and often, opposing points of view on the same subject are both supported by media reports or opinion pieces. Some of the time, this leads to entrenched and opposing positions that participants are never able to resolve. In other cases, however, opposing viewpoints are somewhat harmonized as people are exposed to conflicting perspectives. One participant declares, "Let's stick to one on one debate rather than simply cutting and pasting outside articles," suggesting that posting links to opposing sources will not be fruitful. This participant's opponent retorts:

Absolutely not. I will read the issue of The Economist [referring to a suggestion from the other participant] and then we shall discuss again. I did not cut and paste anything. I gave you a reference. I'm not afraid of challenging my knowledge or preconceptions. Let's NOT stick to one-on-one debate. Let's rely on facts. Hope you've read the column I sent you.

This participant has faith in the ability of “facts” to bring opposing sides together. And indeed, they do go on to discover much common ground as they continue to debate. A trustworthy online reputation acts as a necessary condition for participants to give each other the benefit of the doubt, and to work through conflicting evidence.

As these examples show, an insistence on evidence-based discussion became one of the key norms exhibited by participants in the Dialogue. Participants who backed up their statements with facts, whether generated by the media or researchers, or arrived at through personal experience, were received with more civility than were participants who did not provide evidence. New participants in the Dialogue quickly acquiesced to this norm. There was a widespread belief that participants had a duty to share information with each other that could lead to mutual solutions. These solutions were not always found, even when evidence was cited, but the probability of respectful dialogue oriented towards agreement was much higher when this norm was respected.

Another method that participants used to establish an online reputation was

quoting other contributors in order to prove that they had carefully read what others had written. In an online environment, this practice of quoting can be seen to stand in for the physical cues that people exhibit when listening to each other. Participants quote each other in order to agree or disagree with a particular aspect of a post, or to ask for clarification or evidence (Benson, 1996). However, quoting can also be perceived as being analogous to interrupting another participant. As Herring (1999) states. “when sentences in the quote are cut off, or when the quoter responds too frequently, the quoted participant may appear to be interrupted” (p. 155). However, this use of quoting was very infrequently used by Dialogue participants, who consistently quoted others’ words in context and in full. As one participant writes to another, “I am just going to quote you here just to keep our thoughts clear, don’t take it as being rude or anything like that, that is not my intentions at all.”

Quoting was generally used to increase the clarity of individual posts, and the technique was successful in helping participants understand each other’s points of view and find common ground. A request for more information from a participant identified as jwitt illustrates this technique in action. Jwitt states:

Vox,

I do understand where you are coming from, in part. However, before I comment more fully on your response, I’d like some clarification on one point.

You state “Israel is a total failure because it believes it can only exist by

subjugating another people”. Have you arrived at this conclusion on the basis of current Likud policies or are there additional points you can present to support your hypothesis?- please elaborate.

In Vox’s next post, Jwitt’s request is addressed, and the additional information that Vox supplies does satisfy Jwitt. Quoting is a technique used often by Dialogue participants, and like providing evidence, it helps the conversation remain civil. It demonstrates that participants have carefully read others’ contributions, it ensures that other people’s words are not misinterpreted, and it allows participants to gain a fuller understanding of each other’s positions.

Participants sometimes acknowledged that techniques for interacting successfully online are learned behaviors, developed by participants as the Dialogue unfolded, and that to enforce these learned norms was important for the continued health of the discussion. This phenomenon occurred when new participants joined the discussion, and established participants felt it necessary to introduce to them the norms of the group. In a thread dominated by an experienced participant, Barretm82, and a new participant, kn\_aesap, the latter participant becomes annoyed and highly negative when the former presses him/her to provide evidence to back up claims made and to clarify arguments. Kn\_aesap lashes out at Barretm82 for suggesting that s/he is “inexperienced,” writing “you should be griping about what I said- instead of things that you really know nothing about... such as my ‘world experience’.” Barretm82 responds:

Umm... fellow. I'm going to take a step back and try again... From having many forum conversation and observations over the years I have to eventually make a decision as to the experience level of the person I am talking with. I say this without disrespect, that you come across as a somewhat inexperienced fellow, now in life you may be experienced I don't know, but on the forum that is how you come across. It could simply be that you are new to debate in a text based forum; if that is the case then I apologize. Never the less I do look forward to your thoughts.

This response acknowledges that there are learned skills that make interacting in an environment such as the Dialogue much easier, and that kn\_aesap should learn some of the group norms in order to allow her/his fellow participants to better understand and respond to her/his thoughts. One of the norms that kn\_aesap rejects, using real-life experience to add credence to her/his claims, is a very important and commonly used tactic by experienced forum contributors. Her/his rejection of it shows that s/he has not yet become familiar with the Dialogue and the norms developed by participants. This may also be one of the reasons Barretm82 suspected that s/he was inexperienced.

Donath (1999) suggests that one of the motivations for people to devote large amounts of time and energy towards online discussions such as the Dialogue is the desire to build an impressive and credible reputation. As mentioned above, participants built their reputation by providing personal details about themselves. One participant

frequently made reference to his professional credentials as a computer programmer; another emphasized her career as a drycleaner and grandmother. Both of these writers used their personal backgrounds as evidence of their “average” status, to emphasize that they were just typical Canadians and not policy wonks or ideologues. As the latter participant wrote, “[participating in the Dialogue] was a good way to dust some of the cobwebs off.”

Another, more pervasive use of personal information was to demonstrate that one’s personal life coincided with one’s political opinions. In one thread where participants identified sustainable development and environmental protection as important foreign policy components, one participant talked about how s/he only bought organic food and was involved in the environmental movement. In another thread that debated whether trade between Canada and China was ethical, considering China’s human rights abuses, one participant spoke about terrible working conditions in Chinese mines. A participant identified as Barretm82 responds, “Terrible situation in China, curious you mentioned mining, I do have mining clients but they are in Australia, Africa, and Canada.” This post at once both establishes Barretm82’s authority to discuss mining and his personal separation from the issue of human rights abuses in China. The ultimate demonstration of this self-disclosure technique occurred on the last night of the Dialogue, when Barretm82 began a thread entitled “Backgrounds and Goodbyes.” His initial post to this thread contained practically his entire curriculum vitae, and even invites other

participants to e-mail him privately and to visit him if they ever happen to pass through Winnipeg, where he reveals that he lives. He justifies this post by writing:

Part of the reason for listing of the early background is to give an idea of where my skills originally developed and how it may affect my observations. Perhaps this will be of help in further understanding how different types of personalities perceive Canadian foreign policy and to provide some required transparency on these discussions.

As one of the Dialogue's most prolific participants, Barretm82 is keen to see his hard-earned reputation live on in e-mail or even face-to-face contact, and he suggests that personal details are important cues for understanding his perspective. Other participants follow Barretm82's lead, saying fond good-byes to each other, speaking about career or travel experience, and expressing their hopes that they can restart their discussion in another forum.

The presentation of what appeared to be "real life" experience in the Dialogue, and the importance these details took on, was almost unanimous. This trend can be seen as somewhat surprising for an online forum, as many theorists have emphasized how the Internet is perfectly suited to encourage identity play and creative misrepresentation, that "on the Internet, individuals construct their identities, doing so in relation to ongoing dialogues, and not as an act of pure consciousness" (Poster, 2001, p. 108). While Dialogue contributors did reveal different parts of their identities in relation to certain

thread topics, their online personae were almost always perceived to represent their real life bodies and subject positions. This hesitation among participants to play with different identities may be a factor of the Dialogue's nature as an official, government-sponsored forum. The Dialogue's position as an official venue for citizens to communicate their concerns to elected officials likely caused people to perceive it very differently from other online political spaces not connected to government.

One participant, identified as Yvon Latrappé, is a notable exception to the trend of establishing a "real-life" persona on the Foreign Policy Dialogue. Almost all of this participant's contributions to the Dialogue are extremely satirical, often to the extent of absurdity. A typical contribution from Latrappé consists of an original poem, written in rhyming couplets, about the necessity of "Universal Love" for establishing and maintaining global stability. Latrappé frequently satirizes George W. Bush, referring to him as "our supreme Captain," a "hero," and "a great humanist." Latrappé's contributions are witty, clever, and often do contain a clear message or viewpoint beneath the wordplay and jokes. However, this participant never gives any hint as to her/his motivations, political viewpoint on specific issues or personal experience. One is left wondering what Latrappé's opinion really is, and whether s/he is mocking the Dialogue process or really trying to engage with it. The most common reaction to Latrappé's posts is no reaction at all: the thread either ends after Latrappé submits a post, or it continues, making no reference at all to the ironic and playful message. This

reaction may have something to do with the trust on which the public sphere is premised:

Seen from the standpoint of the public sphere where trust is linked to unified, embodied subjectivity, play with differing identities and personae is threatening. (Dean, 2001, p.259)

Dialogue participants, in the absence of familiar physical cues or shared cultural norms, have come to rely on each other's online reputations to foster the trust and credibility necessary for online debate. Yvon Lattrappé's amorphous identity and unconventional responses threaten that norm, so other participants choose to ignore him/her. Lattrappé was not being impolite, but her/his online behaviour alienated others and was not conducive to typical discussion practices. A participant such as Lattrappé presents a challenge to the norms established by the group, and to the notion of civility that has been developed amongst participants.

Participants in the Foreign Policy Dialogue developed trustworthy online reputations by substantiating their comments with evidence, such as web links and references to books or magazines. They also demonstrated their attentiveness to others by quoting, which allowed participants to trust that others would fully read and consider their contributions. Most participants stayed away from the identity play and imagined subjectivities that have been characteristic of the Internet. Presenting themselves using references to their real, off-line lives helped participants establish a tangible and reliable presence within a space that lacks visual cues. These discourse features became

important ways by which participants judged one another's opinions, and contributed significantly to the quality of civil speech in the Dialogue.

### *Negotiation Techniques*

A trusted and consistent online presence was not a sufficient condition to ensure civil speech on the Dialogue website. In addition, participants maintained civil dialogue by employing number of negotiating techniques. Using these techniques became another way for participants to encourage civil speech. Negotiation techniques are not unique to online communication; they are used in face-to-face communication as well, and have been well documented by many theorists who have analyzed political discourse (Barrett, 1991; Smith, 2002). A commitment to negotiation is one of the ways that the conversation continues in a diverse, changing forum populated by participants with disparate opinions and interests. Negotiation demands that participants look beyond their own position and work within a model of public discourse that is created amongst the people involved. It is central to civility because it recognizes that meanings are open to negotiation, but it remains committed to avoiding domination and exclusion, and to respectful listening and additive change. Several techniques of communicative praxis became apparent among the Dialogue participants. When participants employed them, the discourse usually stayed civil, but when they were not used in some situation, participants became annoyed and often begin to focus on the perceived faults of others instead of on the topic at hand. Some of the negotiating techniques employed by

participants in the Dialogue include focusing on interests instead of positions, inventing options for mutual gain, simultaneously confirming and disconfirming an opponent's position, and showing restraint. Here, I will explain these techniques, and provide some examples illustrating their use.

The most striking technique used in the Dialogue is for participants to focus on their opponents' interests, instead of their position in its totality. The technique is striking because every time it is not used, the discussion moves away from productive dialogue to *ad hominem* attacks and petty criticisms. Focusing on interests means that participants concentrate on the content and intent of others' posts, seeing beyond what is said and examining the motives behind the statement. In addition, to focus on interests requires participants to not make assumptions about broader positions such as another's political persuasion or broad views. This technique is most noticeable in its absence. For example, in a thread in which participants discuss the merits of joining the war on Iraq, an anti-war participant criticizes another, cfallon, for describing war as a viable option in the Iraq conflict, suggesting that cfallon and U.S. President Bush are similar in that they have not considered other options besides war. Cfallon angrily responds, writing:

Well, I guess its hard to take opponents of the war seriously when they say, "all you/Bush have on your mind is WAR."

Don't you think this is pushing it a little? Shouldn't you give people you

disagree with the benefit of the doubt and argue based on their stated goals and objectives and not those you concoct in the quiet of your basement?

This response is typical of participants who feel that their opponents have assumed too much about their position based on the statements they make in the Dialogue. Another participant, who initiates a thread entitled "Canada not OK," states:

Canada Not OK. At this point, you will probably already be sharpening your knives in anticipation of a revolting monologue emanating from a David Frum clone -frothing at the mouth with republican idealism. Well, I'm anything but a republican ideologue, so put your knives away- at least for now. My purpose here is to counter the posting "USA NOT OK" ...

This participant recognizes that others may make assumptions based on the name of her/his thread, and makes a pre-emptive statement to warn others to instead read the posting and judge it according to its content, not the position its title may suggest.

Many of the most successful interactions, when success is defined as finding common ground with respect to a mutual problem, on the Dialogue website occur when participants are able to see beyond what they perceive to be the falsehoods or inconsistencies in another's position, and to combine parts of their own position with that of their opponent's, to create a mutually satisfactory option. This follows from focusing on interests and not positions. Inventing options for mutual gains requires participants to

look for the value or substance in what others say, even if it appears that their post contains no significant ideas. A good example of this technique occurs in a thread where one participant, pdoyle, initiates the conversation by suggesting that terrorism would only be exacerbated by military action. Subsequent participants in the thread apply this statement to the Iraq conflict, and vigorously disagree with pdoyle, suggesting that Western nations haven't learned from the events of the Second World War, and stating that Canada should join the "coalition of the willing" that is in favour of invading Iraq. One respondent, augustinetang, states:

We paid a huge price for the second world war that had wasted million of people. Should we be able to stop the aggression of Hitler at the very beginning, the loss of so many lives could be avoided ... We cannot selfishly sit around, do nothing and even pull the legs of our friendly American neighbours in order to please the lunatic terrorists, in return for short term peace.

Pdoyle responds to this post by acknowledging what s/he feels to be the truth of this position, while still insisting that military action is not the only way to fight terrorists:

If we can't sit around that's fine. We should fight terrorists. Also fine. How do we go about it, exactly? I've read a great deal about the IRA and they liked nothing better than for Thatcher to 'fight' or 'become tough'. This would result in a ground swell of support ... In short, fighting these creatures using traditional means only strengthens them. What we need is an articulate way to distance/alienate them from the civilian populations they rely upon.

Pdoyle has affirmed augustinetang's insistence that terrorists must be fought, but s/he maintains her/his own position that military action is not the ideal way to do this. Pdoyle ends this post with a suggestion of how to move forward with the discussion, and in fact the two participants do go on to discuss how best terrorists can be cut off from potentially sympathetic civilian populations.

Often, two participants in the Dialogue became entrenched in mutually exclusive positions, and did not make any progress towards understanding or compromise, until a third participant stepped in and stressed the need to make opposing positions work together. In a thread that covers whether Canada should engage in military action in Iraq, two participants, marl and OJ, disagree vehemently over the issue. Instead of focusing on the matter at hand, they begin to accuse each other of anti-Americanism and war mongering, respectively. The discussion no longer addresses the Iraq question, as each participant brings up historical examples to support her/his own position. Finally, a third participant, identified as teststuart, asks:

So how does Canada fit into this? Should Canada support the UN position of diplomacy, or the American foreign policy of brinksmanship? I think both marl and OJ present valid perspectives. I feel the need to understand how to make those positions work together, and then how to build a nation on the principles that allow us to cooperate.

Teststuart doesn't exactly come up with a solution that will please both marl and OJ, but

his statement does serve to bring the discussion back on topic and directed towards a compromise. In the next post, OJ states that Canada should “go right down the middle,” supporting the UN but going to war if necessary. Marl and OJ continue to debate the point, but their comments remain on topic and directed towards discerning when military action might become necessary. The conversation also broadens to discuss Canada’s foreign policy stances generally, instead of only relating to Iraq. This shift responds to teststuart’s comment about Canada’s role in foreign policy, and the importance of cooperation as an integral part of our nationhood.

These examples show how most Dialogue participants were committed to keeping the conversation oriented towards mutual understanding, and ultimately agreement. Even though discussions frequently moved off-topic and did not have recognizable outcomes attached to them, participants remained dedicated to a public narrative in which respect for others’ ideas and positions was maintained. As one participant stated,

[We] need to learn to seek the nuggets of truth that are hidden in the posts we ... read (especially those we disagree with) & then add new insights from our own unique aggregate of experience. This eDialogue will have contributed much to world peace if we show the world that we are not interested in beating each other (up or down) but, instead, learn how to benefit from each unique viewpoint & seek the common ground (that must surely be there somewhere).

Our differences need to be used to enrich our solutions. Let's not try to defeat those who differ. Let's see them for what they truly are: an invaluable resource for expanding our own (so very limited) experiential base.

This participant, like others, recognizes the pragmatic and philosophical necessity of combining aspects from each participant's position in hopes of finding some "common ground." This negotiation technique echoes Keane's (2003) notion of alterity, which he describes as "the need to think against common sense views of clashes and conflicts among groups, to see instead that the self and other, the external and the internal, may well not be opposites, but that they are often enough *always inside one another*" [italics in original] (p.182).

Another negotiating technique successfully employed by Dialogue participants is the simultaneous confirmation and disconfirmation of an opponent's statement. This technique promotes civil speech because it allows the critical participant to suggest a new option in the discussion, while allowing the criticized participant to save face. Responses that begin with statements like "I understand your position, but I must respond ..." or "I agree with your basic argument, although I see faults in some of your examples ..." tended to be much more favorably received in the Dialogue than posts that only attacked and disconfirmed the content of other participant's statements. This technique fits into the quality of restraint, which is associated with civility by many theorists (Kingwell,

1995; Smith, 2002). Dialogue participants generally did refrain from being as critical as they could have, but there are a small number of threads that totally descend into minute criticisms and *ad hominem* attacks. Once one participant shows a lack of restraint, others follow, and “the gloves come off.” In one thread that criticizes American foreign policy, a contributor identified as Fleabag mocks another participant, Waterloo, for referring to the government of Panama as “the Panamese government.” Fleabag states, “After re-reading this post, and noting the glaring examples of pure ignorance of the world at large, such as your reference to the ‘Panamese’, I can only conclude that you are G.W. Bush himself.” For Waterloo, who is highly critical of the American President, this is a great insult. S/he responds, “my most sincere apologies for misnaming a group of people. I guess that completely discredits the argument, since it was such a crucial part to it. Perhaps I should start pointing out type-os and the like?” This statement makes reference to the fact that Fleabag makes many spelling errors in her/his posts. At this point in the debate, a moderator posts a message cautioning each participant that their posts are becoming off-topic and uncivil, and that although the moderators do not wish to reject posts, they will do so if the insults escalate. This example is typical of situations where contributors exhibit a lack of restraint in their dealings with each other.

The use of negotiation techniques, which carry over from general discourse practices used in offline as well as online political discussions, significantly enhanced civil speech on the Foreign Policy Dialogue. A commitment towards understanding

requires participants to realize that meanings are open to negotiation, and negotiation techniques become central to discovering common goals and interests in the midst of seemingly opposing opinions. When participants focused on their opponents' interests, they refrained from making potentially offensive assumptions about others, assumptions that could have provoked anger and prevented debate. Other negotiation techniques included finding options that satisfied people with disparate opinions, and softening criticism of another's position by agreeing with or acknowledging at least part of her/his contribution. A commitment to restraint and negotiation focuses on additive change and constructive participation, and is central to civil speech.

*Interaction with Moderators/facilitators:*

Another research question of this study, besides whether participants' speech practices have an impact on civil speech, asks whether the moderators and the civil rules have an impact on the civility of online discourse. To answer this question, instances where the moderators entered the discussion forums were coded, as were the occasions where participants made specific reference to the moderators or the civil rules. The aim of the Dialogue's design and administration team was to make the presence of the moderators felt on the Dialogue in a clear, yet unimposing and transparent fashion. As previously discussed, participants were required to read and agree to abide by the civil

rules before they could participate in the Dialogue. The civil rules make the presence of the moderators clear, so all participants (assuming that they actually read the civil rules) know that posts to the Dialogue are read and approved by moderators. The moderators' status as non-aligned civil society partners is explained on the website's FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) page:

Our moderators are members of the general public. They are not government employees or civil servants, and they do not speak for the Minister or the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade. Their role is to facilitate this Dialogue on Foreign Policy, and to ensure that this Web site space is a civil public place where citizens with diverse opinions and communication skills feel welcome to engage in these important deliberations within the reasonable limits of expression of a free and democratic society (as captured in the Civil Rules).

In addition to these explanations, moderators also made their presence known right within the Dialogue discussions. In order to provide succinct digests of the discussion taking place on the Dialogue website, some moderators were also trained as scribes. The role of scribes was to summarize the content of each discussion forum every week, thereby offering a brief summary of the discussion for new or busy participants. The text of the summaries explained that a civil society moderator compiled them. This technique is well established within the best practices literature around e-consultations as a good way to provide websites with a sense of rhythm, and to increase the visibility of moderators

(Coleman and Gøtze, 2001, p.33). Besides the weekly summaries, moderators entered the discussions in order to try to refocus or redirect threads that were veering off topic, or to warn participants that their dialogue was pushing the boundaries of the civil rules.

One example of this kind of direct intervention occurred when a moderator publicly warned a contributor identified as Liam to avoid *ad hominem* attacks on other participants. The thread concerned was called "Iraq," and in it, participants discussed the reaction of the Canadian government to the U.S.-led war on Iraq. The thread's topic then broadened to address wider issues of U.S.-Canada relations and cultural differences. These issues were contentious ones that consistently provoked strong emotional reactions and disagreements between participants. The discussion had developed over the course of one day, and fifteen posts were already in the thread. Then Liam, a contributor who had not yet added to this thread, writes:

So that's it, we get to bitch on some web site but not vote? I read some posts on the web site and my conclusion is that the contributors haven't got a clue about what's happening in the real world. ... [Canadians] have been a bunch of uncooperative, whiney, bleeding hearts. Canadian's worry so much about not being like Americans they have forgotten how to be Canadian's. The true north strong and free. Q. I have no muscle, no backbone, and exhibit parasitic behavior. What am I[?]

Liam's post does not exactly violate civil rules, but it does come close to promulgating hatred and obscenity. So while the moderator did not reject the post, she did post her own message directly beneath Liam's:

Please make an effort to avoid insulting your fellow contributors to this process either as a group or individually. If you take issue with specific ideas or messages, the dialogue will benefit from your putting forward such points. Critiquing other contributors with insulting blanket generalizations does not advance the debate and has the potential to undermine this process by starting a flame out war. This in turn will lead to posts being rejected by the moderators. Please refer to the civil rules for further details and keep in mind that the intention of this forum and the process is to stimulate a space where all Canadians can put forth and discuss their opinions.

This comment did not dissuade others; nine other messages were posted to this thread before it died out. Only one of the messages addresses the moderator's post. This message is posted directly after the moderator's warning message, and states simply, "Good." The other messages pick up on the previous conversation where it left off, maintaining a feisty, combative, yet civil tone throughout. This example is typical of instances where moderators interjected into discussions in order to remind participants of the civil rules. Generally, posts from moderators were not remarked upon, and conversation went on. In the above case, Liam did not re-enter the debate, but this is not typical. There is no evidence that the chastised participants were consistently dissuaded

from re-entering the debate.

The moderators were not free from criticism during the whole course of the Dialogue's run. The criticism they faced, however, was not what was expected at the outset of the project. Many theorists who study online communication have noted that the prevailing norms of interaction on the Internet tend to be premised around free speech and libertarianism (Docter and Dutton, 1998; Herring, 1999). This observation led the moderators to suspect that participants would criticize moderators for suppressing free speech. However, only one participant even suggested such a criticism, writing "if I was afraid to speak my mind in this forum, or felt that I had to curtail my opinions so that they suited this [a government funded forum]...well, that would be unacceptable, to say the least. That's probably why I find the idea of a 'moderator' to be quite odd." The majority of criticisms directed towards the moderators were to protest that the civil rules were not being enforced rigorously enough. An entire discussion thread, entitled "The answers are not serious!!" was started to complain about the perceived low quality of some of the answer sections and discussion forums. One participant felt that the discussion forums should focus on Canadian foreign policy specifically, instead of dealing with current events such as the Iraq war, a topic that obviously relates to Canadian foreign policy but does not exactly fit the mandate of the site. The participant writes:

The latest answers to the questions (not talking about the discussion groups!) on foreign policy are being invaded by people who are against and for the war

on Iraq! Maybe the moderators should clearly state that the answers to the questions are on foreign policy as a whole, and not the current world events.

Another post states:

But there is a more serious problem here (that i hope the moderators will take into account!) - I'm seeing more and more people discussing Canadian foreign policy while they are not even Canadian! I think they did a mistake in not asking us for a kind of 'proof' of citizenship when we registered! (Our Social Insurance Number? Our city, etc?)

Although it is not clear how this participant arrived at this conclusion, the post refers to the registration process, which does not require potential participants to divulge their SIN or city of residence. There are a number of other similar posts, all of which criticize the moderators for approving posts that are perceived to be off-topic or "not serious." This suggests that participants accepted and welcomed the presence of the moderators, and perceived their presence as being vital to a productive discussion.

The night that the Dialogue website closed, many of the site's "regulars" logged on to say good-bye to fellow participants. A number of them also posted thank-you notes to the moderators. One states: "I do appreciate all the work you have done, particularly updating this website on weekends and at odd hours." Another reads:

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the instigators and moderators of this forum, and DFAIT, for their excellent dialogue paper, the forum, and most

of all, for providing the opportunity of public participation regarding foreign policy.

These examples show that participants were distinctly aware of the moderators' presence, and that they regarded them as a separate entity from the Department of Foreign Affairs and/or the federal government.

The Foreign Policy Dialogue moderators maintained a highly visible presence on the site, through explicit mention of their presence in the Civil Rules and in the FAQs. They also provided weekly summaries, and occasionally intervened in the discussion in order to refocus the conversation, warn participants of borderline unacceptable speech acts, and encourage citizens to participate. Citizen participants in the Dialogue did not resent the presence of the moderators; on the contrary, they welcomed the facilitation and sometimes even criticized the moderators for not being involved enough. Thus, these results contradict previous assertions that online discussants value uncensored dialogue above all else. However, the transparency of the moderation process and the moderators' status as non-aligned civil society representatives were probably significant factors contributing to their popularity.

Although it is evident that most participants felt the moderators' presence very clearly, it is difficult to prove whether or not the moderators and the civil rules had a major influence on the development of discourse norms in the Foreign Policy Dialogue.

The civil rules themselves do not require civil speech that is oriented towards understanding and consensus-building; however, they do make some basic provisions for civility and respect. Participants knew that their words would be moderated, and therefore that to attempt to post uncivil comments would be a waste of time. Generally, though, the qualities I have described above, including reputation-building, negotiation techniques, and building trust, emerged amongst the participants themselves, without facilitation from moderators. Whether these qualities would have emerged in a free-form, unmoderated forum is debatable. However, the experience of most e-consultation facilitators suggests that unmoderated forums are negatively impacted by flame wars, rude comments, and the marginalization of participants who are not comfortable with an aggressive, libertarian discourse style (Benson, 1996; Coleman and Gøetze, 2001; Docter and Dutton, 1998). The presence of the moderators and the civil rules provide feedback, sources of information, and structure around the conversation. These features, while not ensuring civility, do provide an important cultural-democratic function that facilitates the connection between citizens, and between citizens and government. If the Dialogue had not been moderated, norms of civil discourse may have been present, but it is likely that they would be overwhelmed by aggressive and inflammatory discourse.

This study reveals that the majority of posts submitted to the Foreign Policy Dialogue abide by the civil rules. In addition to complying with the civil rules, as they had agreed to do when registering on the site, participants developed additional norms of

discourse that did contribute to civil dialogue oriented towards understanding and a respect for difference. Establishing an online reputation through evidence-based discussion, the demonstration of “listening” skills, and disclosing personal details was one of the ways that participants grew to trust and respect each other's opinions, and to accept others' posts at face value. Participants also used negotiation techniques such as focusing on each other's interests, inventing options for mutual gain, and showing restraint to avoid inflammatory verbal attacks and enhance cooperation and constructive criticism. Thus, the evidence from this study contradicts the claim that Internet-based discussion is necessarily rude and prone to flame wars. Most threads maintained a civil, although sometimes heated, tone. The dialogue participants placed a great deal of value on being able to engage in democratic debates and on constructing solid and well-thought-out arguments. During the debate, participants often invoked Canadian culture and principles that uphold diversity in discussion, peacekeeping, tolerance, and other democratic ideals. These principles were praised both in relation to foreign policy issues and in relation to the discussion that was underway, showing that the participants saw a link between their own discourse practices and the larger context of Canadian values and policies. While participants obviously found the experience of honing their debating skills, demonstrating their knowledge on political subjects, and interacting with others pleasurable, there was also a sense of “civic duty” expressed by some posts to the Dialogue. Frequent participants often made reference to the responsibility they had as citizens to provide “intelligent” or “worthwhile” advice to the government, and norms of

civil discourse may have emerged because of this feeling of responsibility. This sense of commitment to a larger purpose distinguishes the Foreign Policy Dialogue from other online discussion spaces that are not tied to a government policy exercise, such as UseNet groups or discussion forums associated with online news services. The feeling that their contributions to the Dialogue were part of an important national consultation may have been a factor in the participants' generally civil discourse.

*Civility: is it enough?*

The designers and facilitators of the Foreign Policy Dialogue recognized civility as an important quality to require and promote within the context of an online policy consultation. Participants also worked to maintain civil dialogue through their compliance with the civil rules, and the development and maintenance of their own civil norms. The kind of dialogue exhibited in the Foreign Policy Dialogue does, for the most part, fulfill Habermas' requirement that within the public sphere, the recognition of "the better argument" rests upon a "lifeworld" of shared meaning developed through discussion (Habermas 1996). However, the meanings shared by Dialogue participants were developed in public through dialogue: participants did not come to the discussion with lifeworlds that were already shared. The shared meanings that were developed by Dialogue participants included an insistence on evidence-based discussion, a regard for a stable identity and a trustworthy reputation, and a commitment to negotiation within discussion.

The discourse also followed Kingwell's more pragmatic definition of civility as a context-dependent orientation towards understanding and a respect for difference. Although the civil rules made some basic provisions for civility, the practices that came to create a more nuanced dialogue framework were developed amongst the people involved, as they negotiated shared meaning and discourse conventions that the majority of participants could accept. Within the Foreign Policy Dialogue, widely divergent views were accepted and integrated into a larger debate when participants adhered to civil rules and norms. In this way, participants were able to address a wide variety of interests and concerns related to Canada's foreign policy, and begin to come up with solutions to mutual problems. Thus, civil speech appears to have allowed a plurality of participants to converse on relatively equal terms about issues of mutual importance. However, Fraser (1989) points out that no public sphere is culturally neutral, and therefore there is a danger that "expressive norms of one cultural group" (p.17) might be privileged over others when diverse participants attempt to interact in a large public sphere.

This research cannot fully address the question of whether the norms of discourse that developed on the Foreign Policy Dialogue proved to be marginalizing for certain groups. I do not have consistent information about the demographics (gender, ethnic background, occupation, income, education) of most of the participants. However, the participant who identified as Yvon Lattrappé, with her/his uncharacteristic discourse style

and unwillingness or inability to conform to civil norms, is an interesting study of an individual who did not “fit” within the norms established by the majority of participants. Because s/he hardly ever got a response from another participant, Lattrappé's experience with the Dialogue could be described as marginalizing. One of the goals of civility is to “allow human uniqueness and unpredictability” (Papacharissi, 2004, p.266), so the civil norms that developed on the Foreign Policy Dialogue were not entirely successful, or did not take into account the way all participants approach an online policy consultation. Instead of viewing the Dialogue as a site where s/he could propose policy suggestions and debate important issues with others, Lattrappé perhaps viewed the discussions as an occasion to perform virtuosic displays of political comedy, and did not care to build trust, negotiate, or perform any of the other group norms. Thus, setting a standard of civility may not be appropriate for all participants, because “a description and critique presupposing that all political talk should aspire to a rhetorical ideal may fail to take into account the way the discourse and its motives appear to participants” (Benson, 1996, p.374). In this case, the fact that Lattrappé did not find an appreciative audience for her/his rhetorical performances was not a deterrent and s/he continued to be a prolific contributor to the Dialogue. Thus, civil norms were not so much marginalizing for Lattrappé as irrelevant.

Gender is another factor that is often cited as a barrier to equality in online interaction. I did not code for gender, but I did examine the information that participants

provided when they registered to participate in the Foreign Policy Dialogue. Based on the first name given in their registration, 12% of participants were female, 41% were male, and the remaining 47% were of indeterminate gender.<sup>5</sup> Beyond this information, details about each participant can only be known through the facts they make available within the discussion forums. Of the five participants who made their gender known in the forums, four of these were men. Six people also identified their occupation, and the majority of them held professional jobs. This information is concurrent with Internet user statistics, which reveal that young men with high levels of education are dominant online (Statistics Canada, 2003). Herring (1993) has empirically shown how most online discussion and interaction differ between men and women. Computer-mediated conversation tends to be dominated by a masculine, agonistic style. Women post less and shorter messages than do men, they are more likely to make queries than to address issues, and they are less likely to make strong assertions, promote themselves, challenge others, or assert themselves authoritatively. Women are also more prone to “lurk” in online environments, meaning that they monitor the discussion but do not make a contribution. Empirical work has been done showing that racially-marginalized groups also face significant barriers to full participation online (Lekhti, 2000). Thus, social and cultural differences and inequalities found within offline discourse are reflected in online discourse, and these trends were likely present in the Foreign Policy Dialogue as well.

---

<sup>5</sup>Gender of participants in the Foreign Policy Dialogue was determined on the basis of the first name given in the registration form. In cases where names were not provided, where nicknames were used, or when names were unrevealing as to gender, participants were classified as “gender indeterminate.”

However, it is the very practice of discussion that can transform social structures such as the public sphere and expand civil discussion within these structures. To promote this, deliberative practices must be extended and supported by government and public interests. Sensitive and constructive facilitation is needed to improve discussion forums and to encourage more people to take part in online discourse.

Civil speech goes far to ensure respectful and purposive debate among citizens with diverse views. In the case of the Foreign Policy Dialogue, the civil rules provided a minimum standard for speech, and cleared a space for participants to develop more nuanced and specific civil norms in the course of their discussions. These participant-driven norms helped people to resolve political differences and find solutions to common problems, and fulfill the definition of civility as an orientation towards agreement. However, civil speech alone cannot ensure a completely open or equal space for discussion. Just as some groups, including women and ethnic and racial minorities, are excluded off-line, so too are online discourse practices likely to be marginalizing for some participants. Although the scope of this study does not include analyzing specific discourse features that proved marginalizing for certain groups, it is likely that some participants found the discussion style of the Foreign Policy Dialogue to be alienating or exclusive. Thus, attention to issues of inclusiveness and plurality must continue to be a priority for online consultation administrators, moderators and participants.

## *Influence on Government*

The analysis of the results of this study so far has addressed the first two research questions of this study. Civility is enforced and maintained consistently by participants in the Foreign Policy Dialogue's online discussion forums through several different discourse norms. Participants are aware of the presence of the civil rules and the moderators, and although these factors did not have a direct impact on the way that civil norms were developed and enforced, it is likely that without them, the discourse would have been far less civil. The existence of the civil rules and the reality of moderated discussion seem to have provided an environment where civil speech could flourish. This analysis has shown the ways in which civil norms of discourse promote mutual understanding and constructive discussion between individuals with very different political views. But does this kind of civility provide for another, equally important function of a public sphere, namely its influence on government? To answer this question, it is useful to examine some helpful distinctions made by public sphere theorists about different types of public spheres. Rodger (1985) uses Touraine's "actionist sociology" to distinguish between two levels of the public sphere: the pre-institutional level, and the institutional level. At the pre-institutional level of the public sphere, individuals attempt to establish a group identity through the communication of beliefs and priorities. Touraine (1981) characterizes this level as a social struggle for groups to constitute themselves as entities with common interests and goals. At the institutional

level, groups that have already established their priorities can engage in political action by directly confronting the state. This distinction between the two levels of public sphere effectively problematizes Habermas' sluice theory, whereby public spheres can influence the state. Habermas begins his analysis from the position of viewing the public sphere as a body which has already been created and solidified by a group of individuals with common beliefs, while Touraine identifies the creation of the public sphere as a social endeavor. Thus, although it is at the institutional level that public spheres are able to influence state policy, the preinstitutional level is vital not only for agreeing on common strategies, but for constituting the common meaning that is necessary for a coherent public sphere. It is clear that participants in the Foreign Policy Dialogue were operating within a preinstitutional public sphere. Unlike lobby groups or established community organizations, the participants in the Foreign Policy Dialogue were (or appeared to be) complete strangers at the outset of the consultation. Thus, they had to go through all of the discursive steps of establishing identity, trust, and reputation, as well as finding common understandings through dialogue. This process is very important, but in the context of an online policy consultation, is it enough? For democracy to be served, deliberative input must bear some relationship to decisions actually made and policies actually put into place. But if the net result of deliberative discussion in a forum such as the Foreign Policy Dialogue is scattered clusters of priorities and opinions, then it is very difficult for policymakers to effectively integrate citizen input into the policymaking process. This fact became very clear to the moderators of the Foreign Policy Dialogue,

me included, as we attempted to summarize the results of the online Dialogue in a report that was presented to DFAIT (Jeffrey et al, 2003).

Summarizing the contents of the online discussion forums was the most difficult task for the analyst team, which coded each message in order to identify participants' opinions, values, priorities, and policy-relevant advice. Besides the forums, we also analyzed the answer section, where participants directly responded to thirteen questions relating to the policy paper. The answer section was much easier to analyze in policy-relevant terms, for people tended to address specific issues that the government raised, and did so in a clear and straightforward manner. Easiest of all to distill and summarize were the citizen briefs, which were documents submitted by citizen, lobby, and special interest groups. These groups represent strong public spheres that have already negotiated common meanings and goals offline, and thus were able to focus all of their energies on developing relevant policy advice. Many of them were also well-briefed on how to express their points in language that can be easily understood by policymakers. In contrast, the majority of the discussion forums are concerned with negotiating meaning, developing shared priorities, and identifying common values. Hardly any time was spent attempting to summarize and articulate those shared goals. As a result, it was difficult for the analysts to report on the net results of the discussion forums. The "Report to Canadians" paper that was produced by DFAIT to summarize the results of the consultation and to indicate how they would be incorporated into the policy process does

mention the online discussion forums, but hardly draws upon them at all in its discussion of the policy advice given to DFAIT from citizens. Thus, it appears that while civil discourse among citizens does increase the likelihood that people will be receptive to each other's views, and will be respectful of different political opinions, civil dialogue alone does not ensure effective communication between citizens and government. In order for an online policy discussion to fulfill the public sphere's goal of a strong influence on government, the weak ties and tenuous positions taken by Dialogue participants must be strengthened and focused.

In order to increase the impact of the public sphere on government in the context of consultations like the Foreign Policy Dialogue, online forum users must learn how to strengthen the spheres in which they operate, so that they can attain the strong capacities of a public sphere that can effectively transmit its messages to government. This strengthening might come about naturally over time. However, in the context of a time-sensitive policy consultation, it could also be achieved through increased involvement of civil society moderators, and/or of expert participants such as politicians or bureaucrats. Although the best practices literature around electronic consultation advocates significant government involvement in the consultation process (Clift, 2002), this involvement may conflict with the purpose of the public sphere as separate from the state. I will now examine some of the ways in which facilitators and experts could have helped citizen participants to communicate their views more effectively to government. The goal here

is not to influence the outcome of citizen deliberation or to ensure that citizen deliberation follows government priorities, but to cultivate a critical, thoughtful deliberative political culture within citizen groups that are able to articulate their goals and priorities to government.

One of the questions articulated at the outset of this study asked whether or not civil dialogue in an online policy consultation allowed citizens to communicate their public opinions to the government in an effective and meaningful manner. Although this study has shown that civil speech does allow citizens to communicate effectively among themselves, it is clear that civil speech alone cannot ensure that a public sphere online will be able to transmit their message to government decision-makers. Because a great deal of social struggle is involved in the creation of a strong and effective public sphere, participants in the Foreign Policy Dialogue did not reach the institutional or strong public sphere stage, where they would be able engage in direct political action. In the context of an online public policy consultation, participants may require facilitation to accelerate this process.

## Lessons Learned

It is clear from other experiments with online dialogue and from perusing the myriad of discussions that take place offline and online, that strong public positions on policy issues do not just happen. They require facilitation. The role of civil society moderators in the Foreign Policy Dialogue was a step in this direction, but facilitation of online policy consultations can become much more involved. Although the moderators of the Foreign Policy Dialogue played a significant role in the consultation process, there are many ways in which consultation moderators or facilitators can take a much more active role. Active facilitation requires participation from experts who are knowledgeable about the subject under discussion and who are skilled at leading results-oriented discussion. Facilitators can take on a number of roles, some of which have been described by White (2001):

1. **The social host:** The social host acts in a similar way as would a host in a face-to-face setting such as a dinner party. The social host facilitator helps to create an environment where people feel comfortable participating, by encouraging new or lurking participants to speak up, by stimulating conversation, and by resolving conflict or counseling disruptive participants.
2. **The project manager:** This type of facilitator makes sure that the online group pays attention and adheres to timelines, focus, task lists, process, and commitments. The project manager must be able to summarize and process information produced by the group in order to present it back to them in an effort

to move the process along to its intended conclusion.

3. The community of practice (CoP) facilitator: Since CoPs share and build knowledge around a practice, the role of this facilitator is to focus on sociability and relationship issues including building identity and reputation, finding agreements, and developing a sense of group accountability. The CoP facilitator must be able to articulate and make visible agreements, watch and nurture group dynamics, and facilitate productive group behaviours.
4. The cybrarian: Cybrarians are experts on the topics key to any consultation. They help participants find relevant information and stimulate participant interaction by introducing to new and relevant information.
5. The help desk: This is a basic facilitation function that helps with simple pointers related to the website rules or goals, or with technical difficulties.
6. The referee: This role involves bringing attention to and/or enforcing community norms, rules, and procedures. Referees do not typically have a large facilitative impact on the group.
7. The janitor: The janitor tidies up forgotten or abandoned threads by freezing or archiving, redirects people to discussion threads if they have gone off-track, and generally cleans up the site.

The moderators on the Foreign Policy Dialogue performed functions from the project manager, help desk, referee, and janitor roles. They occasionally warned participants to

stay on-topic or adhere to the civil rules, they constantly provided technical and administrative help to participants through e-mail, and they helped to maintain the site. From time to time, they also encouraged participants to provide policy-relevant advice and advised them on what type of information the government was interested in hearing.

However, the Foreign Policy Dialogue moderators did not have a large facilitative influence on the Dialogue process. In order to move the deliberations along and to help participants more clearly articulate their shared priorities, Dialogue moderators would have needed to adopt more of the roles associated with the CoP facilitator and the cybrarian. Thus, the moderator would focus on issues relating to social interaction, as well as attempting to provide useful outside information. As this study has shown, participants themselves were quite effective in facilitating a community of practice themselves, in terms of watching and nurturing group dynamics. However, moderators could enhance online practices by deliberately facilitating behaviours that lead to the discovery and articulation of shared values and priorities. For example, in threads where two or more participants took entrenched and opposing positions on a given issue, Dialogue moderators could step in to attempt to find some common ground, and to encourage participants to work at finding a mutually-agreeable position instead of merely arguing. Moderators could also engage in interactive analyses of popular discussion threads, in order to distill and focus the results of wide-ranging discussion. Moderators on the Foreign Policy Dialogue did write weekly summaries of each discussion forum,

but these summaries did not invite comment or discussion from participants. Instead of simply providing a concise digest of forum activity, these summaries could have served as a springboard to further discussion and a clear articulation of the messages that participants wished to transmit to government. Moderators could also have performed more of the role of a cybrarian, providing links to relevant outside information that could help shed light on current topics of discussion. They could draw on Canadian government documents that might help link the participants' concerns to foreign policy development. In this way, the moderators would have been much more involved in the Dialogue process, with the goal of helping participants have a meaningful impact on government policy. Increased facilitation from moderators might also have reminded participants that the discussion forums were meant to be a site of purposive discussion that could have a meaningful impact on foreign policy development. However, this would have required volunteer moderators to expend significantly more time and resources to the project. In addition, it is unclear whether or not the government partners in the project would have been supportive of an increased role for civil society moderators. In this case, careful negotiations of the moderators' role would have had to be made between government and civil society. Edwards (2004) has pointed out that moderators of online policy consultations can be seen as "democratic intermediaries" whose behavior and practices must be monitored to avoid bias or excessive mediation. Although non-partisan, the civil society moderators could have run into problems of real or perceived bias had they become more active in the forums by providing information or

mediating the discussion.

One of the most troublesome aspects of online political discussion is, for some skeptics, its lack of engagement with the complex realities of actual policymaking.

Axford (2001) states:

Deliberative forums often run the danger of being exercises in group therapy unless they are tied to practical considerations and outputs. As group exercises in communicative rationality they may be useful for promoting a rather abstract form of political competence. But the quality of participation they permit is a function of the degree to which they promote purposive rationality by getting citizens involved in the policy process on hard issues. (p.16)

Although I have already shown how a preoccupation with rationality can be damaging for discussion within public spheres, Axford's point that online debate often fails to really engage with specific policy issues is still valid. Even though the Foreign Policy Dialogue's goal was to collect Canadians' advice on long term foreign policy goals, participants in the forums were often more concerned with pressing current issues. While participants were often able to connect these immediate concerns with more general policy choices, this was not always the case. And participants did often show themselves to be ignorant of the complex processes that lead to policy formation. To familiarize participants in online consultations with the policymaking process, and to help them connect current political events to concrete policy choices, many experts advise that the

input of political and policy experts is needed (Coleman and Gøetze, 2001; Clift, 2002). Clift (2002) suggests that before an online consultation begins, a system must be established that ensures political participation in a timely and comprehensive manner. He notes that designers of online consultations must teach politicians new behaviours, and that one of these behaviours is using new technologies to communicate with citizens on a frequent basis. Failing involvement of high-level politicians, Clift argues that “civil servants must have prior approval to quickly respond to informational questions as well as the latitude to provide additional context including links to or excerpts of content from legally public reference documents” (¶38). This level of involvement was not planned for the Foreign Policy Dialogue project, and certainly, for a high-profile department such as Foreign Affairs, such involvement would require a great deal of planning and coordination. However, the best practices literature on electronic consultations suggests that the opportunities for relationship building and mutual learning increase dramatically when political experts are involved. Additionally, their presence helps maintain a clear sense of purpose and can contribute to participants' feeling of accomplishment at the end of the consultation. In the Foreign Policy Discussion forums, there is some evidence that participants would have welcomed involvement from politicians. A number of people actually addressed Minister Bill Graham or other high-level politicians in their posts, perhaps indicating that they thought that politicians would be reading their contributions individually. And a number of posts urge participants to focus less on high-level debates and more on specific and grounded policy issues. One participant identified as Vox, who

began a thread entitled “Beyond policies and ideals,” states: “I do not wish to dwell on debating moral ideals although they have value. Policies are only useful if they result in effective day-to-day decisions.” This participant went on to urge others to dwell less on specific current concerns such as the Iraq war and more on long term policy choices. However, the thread did not go on to fulfill this wish, and even Vox began to digress from the stated goal. Another participant asked: “is this a review of foreign policy as a whole, or a forum for pressure groups??” Thus, involvement from a government policymaker could have been a very effective way to help keep the discussion tied to specific policy issues. However, there are many structural barriers between the status quo and this level of participation. In a national consultation on matters of foreign policy, it may not be realistic or even advisable for government decision-makers to be heavily involved in day-to-day citizen discussion.

Besides the considerable institutional barriers facing government, there is also a possibility that Dialogue participants might have resented or mistrusted involvement from politicians. Perhaps some would agree with Axford (2001), who cautions that “in a democracy, the introduction of deliberative procedures ‘from above’ should always raise questions about the motivations of policymakers” (p.16). In addition, direct and active participation from government disrupts the public sphere's ideal autonomy from the state. In Habermas' bourgeois model, state authorities were not a part of the public sphere; on the contrary, they were in opposition to it. The press was an effective mediator and

intensifier of public opinion, and served as the mechanism to transmit public opinion to government (Habermas, 1991). However, in today's large democracies, the press is far too commercialized to perform this function, and the way the state and the media make issues public today undermines any attempt by the public sphere to critically engage with those issues. Habermas states:

At one time the process of making proceedings public was intended to subject persons or affairs to public reason, and to make political decisions subject to appeal before the court of public opinion. But often enough today the process of making public simply serves the arcane policies of special interests; in the form of "publicity" it wins public prestige for people or affairs, thus making them worthy of acclamation in a climate of nonpublic opinion. (2001, p.106)

From the perspective of today's public spheres, then, it is far better that civil society moderators, and not politicians, be the intermediary between citizens and government. A potentially antagonistic relationship mediated by civil society is preferable to a smooth interface between government and citizens, because it reduces the chances of the government distorting or dominating the discussion.

Besides increased involvement from civil society and/or government, there are a number of structural and technical options available to those designing online policy consultations. In their discussion of the Online Deliberative Discourse Research Project, researchers at the Berkman Centre for Internet and Society (2000) note a number of

techniques that can be used to add more purposive structure to threaded discussion forums such as the ones used in the Dialogue. Discussion forums can be threaded structurally, allowing participants to colour-code their messages indicating that they agree or disagree with an initial post, or automatically sub-grouping messages within a thread in accordance with the sub-topic they bring up. Participants can be given the power to “rate” others’ messages:

Rating possibilities we envision include determining whether a message is relevant, helpful, informative, or not, and whether or not it offers a new or otherwise significant position on an issue. Although a variety of scales will be used, the total number of measures used will be limited in order not to overburden raters. (Berkman Centre, 2000, section 3.2.1.2.)

Although allowing rating systems on complex and divisive issues could prove to be a source of divisiveness and conflict among users, it could also provide a means for participants to quickly and effectively hone in on the most important issues rising out of the discussion forums. Other technical suggestions to increase the purposive nature of the discussion include allowing participants to vote on key issues raised in the forum, improving the resource section of the site so that key educational resources be more immediately available to participants, and allowing participants to filter the content of the site so as to involve themselves only in the specific issues they are interested in. All of these technical features aim to focus the far-ranging deliberative discussions that take place on policy consultation sites, and to distill large reams of qualitative data into

concentrated opinions. However, while many of these features are working effectively on many Internet sites, they have not been widely tested in a policy consultation, and more research needs to be done to assess their appropriateness and effectiveness in this context.

The Dialogue was designed as a relatively long, wide-open, and loosely-structured asynchronous forum so as to provide maximum opportunities for participation. However, its length and openness may have impeded its ability to stay “on-topic” and to come up with specific policy suggestions for government. If participants had been given tighter deadlines and goals, they may have had more of an incentive to present focused policy advice and recommendations. The foreign policy issues under review could have been broken up into discrete sections, each of which could have been the site’s focus for a number of days. Each issue could have been presented with appropriate reference materials, and participants could be asked to discuss the issue, and then, perhaps with the aid of some of the technical tools described above, present their most significant policy advice at the end of a set time period. A more structured environment like this one would have required more facilitation and preparation, and it may not have appealed to the interests of some participants, but it may have encouraged a more effective line of communication between citizens and government.

Building a strong public sphere requires facilitation and encouragement,

especially in a time-limited online consultation. In the case of the Foreign Policy Dialogue, robust public opinions tied to specific policy goals could have been facilitated by increased involvement from civil society moderators or from government representatives. In addition, technical and structural issues around the design and implementation of the consultation could have provided more focused policy advice. There are a number of ways for moderators to become more involved in online discussion, from providing informational resources to mediating an especially intense debate. In addition, the involvement of government representatives can help ground online discussion in specific policy issues, as well as providing opportunities for citizens to learn about the policymaking process. However, government involvement in the public sphere is something to be wary of, since they have the power to skew the discussion in a manner that benefits their own goals. Thus, facilitation of democratic deliberation within an online public sphere is better performed by relatively autonomous civil society moderators.

## Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that the majority of online citizen discourse in the Foreign Policy Dialogue upheld norms of civil speech. The civil rules, which were established by civil society facilitators, set a standard level of acceptable conduct on the site, which was initiated by the Canadian government to engage citizens on matters relating to Canada's foreign policy. The civil rules, and the moderators who enforced them, maintained a subtle but persistent presence throughout the consultation, and it is unlikely that civil speech would have flourished in their absence. In addition to the civil rules, site participants developed more nuanced norms of civil conduct that helped maintain respectful and civil discussion oriented towards understanding. They became adept at negotiation, and they worked to build trust among the group. Some other findings of this study are noteworthy because they contradict commonly held understandings of how people interact online. In the Foreign Policy Dialogue, most participants did not habitually engage in rude flaming behaviours, appeared to use their real identities, and used these identities to create trustworthy online identities. These findings support the notion that the Internet can help foster the public sphere's goal to provide an inclusive and respectful site of debate on matters of public importance.

Another objective of this study was to determine whether civil dialogue in an online policy consultation allows citizens and government to interact in a meaningful way. Civil conversation allows participants to find mutually-acceptable solutions for

1

common problems, even if their political positions are very different. However, participants in the discussion forums of the Foreign Policy Dialogue were not able to effectively communicate these shared opinions to government. In a vast series of messages, most of which are concerned with creating trust and common meaning amongst participants, it was difficult for site analysts to pick out the public opinions that were articulated in the discussion forums. Creating the set of norms and shared understandings that allowed for civil discussion and public opinion-formation took a great deal of participants' time, and they did not focus on forcefully articulating their opinions to government. In the context of an online policy consultation, civil society moderators are well placed to facilitate this communication between citizens and government. From simply suggesting strategies that would enable participants to communicate more effectively with government, to becoming much more involved in the deliberation process itself, moderators of future online consultations can take a much more active role to achieve more effective communication between citizens and government. Without effective channels of communication, online deliberative discussion has no hope of making an impact on policymaking.

Thus, this study has provided an important first step for researchers and practitioners of online policy consultations. I have shown that, contrary to much research done on online discussion, Internet-based political conversation is not necessarily rude or divisive. The presence of moderators in the context of a government-initiated

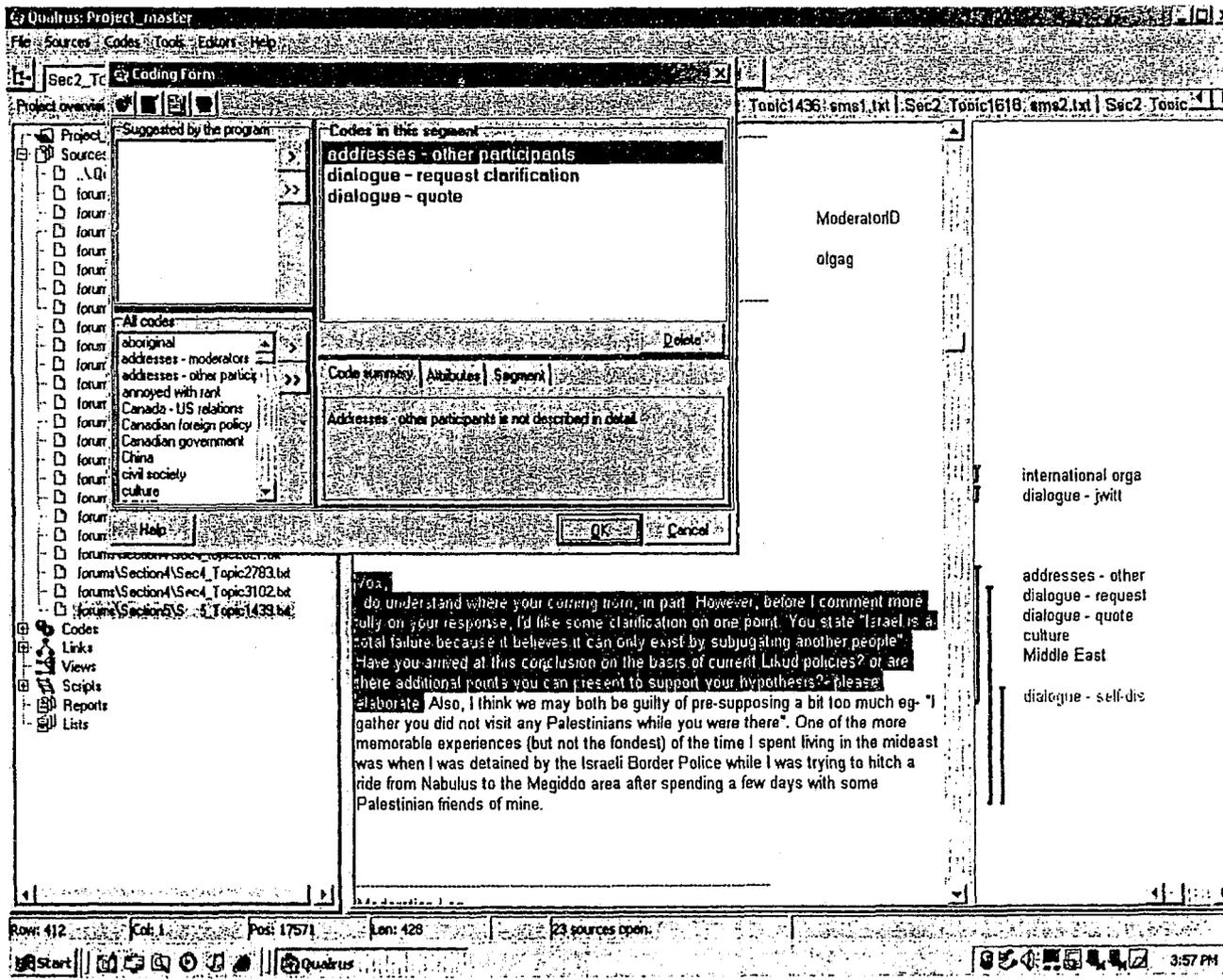
consultation provides an environment that is conducive to civil speech. I have also shown that civility, as an orientation towards understanding, is an essential component of contemporary public spheres. This emphasis on civility is more suited to today's civil society because it allows for the diversity and acceptance that are the goals of pluralistic democracies. While civility is a component essential to an online public sphere, it is not sufficient. In order to fulfill the public sphere's important function of transmitting public opinions to government, online consultations must be facilitated in a sensitive and productive manner. Further research should be done to analyze how moderators can become more involved in online discussions, and whether this involvement can achieve the goal of effective communication between citizens and government. If civil society is responsible for reporting on the results of the consultation, attention must be paid to how best to analyze and summarize the large amounts of qualitative data that result from a deliberative forum.

Further research should be done on who takes part in online consultations. The Internet is still a very exclusive technology, and its democratic potential as a public sphere will be limited until a wider range of citizens are able to participate. Norms of civil speech should also be accessible and acceptable to a diversity of participants, so it would be useful to survey consultation participants to obtain a demographic profile, and to find out how they perceive online consultations. Since statistics show that educated young men tend to be most active on the Internet, it would be helpful to know whether

this trend is reflected in online consultations, and to probe some of the reasons why other groups are hesitant or unable to participate. It is probable that online consultations such as the Foreign Policy Dialogue attract a number of 'lurkers' who read but do not participate, and examining the impact that consultations have on this group could also be useful.

In addition, this study has raised the question of whether government and policymakers will have to change their processes of governing in response to new online initiatives such as the Foreign Policy Dialogue. Within a representative model of democracy such as Canada's, governments may need to adjust the manner in which they allow citizens to engage in systems of governance. What is the mandate of civil servants, Ministers, and policymakers taking part in Internet consultations? How can coherent policies be put into place when so many people have a say in their development? As further experiments with online consultations are carried out, the pressures on government will increase, and careful research as to how a new relationship between citizens and government will be built is essential. Although most citizen feedback on the Foreign Policy Dialogue was very positive, cynical citizens will not be willing to participate in future consultations if they perceive that their efforts have not made a noticeable impact on concrete policy decisions. Governments cannot offer these consultations as mere experiments or gimmicks; they must be committed to integrating citizen input and being responsive to stakeholders.

Appendix 1: Qualrus Screenshot



Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Appendix 2: Discourse features hypothesized to indicate civil and uncivil speech

<i>Trust and Reputation</i>		<i>Negotiation Techniques</i>		<i>Interaction with Moderators</i>	
<b>Providing evidence to back up claims made</b>	Providing URL to media or informational website, book, or magazine	<b>Focusing on interests instead of positions</b>	Focus on interests: Focusing on the reasons <i>why</i> people have the opinions they do	<b>Moderator intervenes to improve civility level of speech</b>	Coded each instance of moderator intervention
	Providing quotations from experts		Focus on positions: Focusing only on <i>what</i> people say, and making assumptions based on this.		
	Providing personal evidence (e.g. "In my experience . . .")				
<b>Quoting</b>	Inserting another's words within double quotes or paraphrasing another's words	<b>Inventing options for mutual gain</b>	One participant combines parts of her/his own position with an opponent's to attempt to create a mutually-satisfactory position	<b>Participants address moderators directly</b>	To compliment or thank
<b>Providing personal experience</b>	Divulging "real life" information about oneself (e.g. Profession, place of residence, gender, political persuasion, etc.)		<b>Simultaneous confirmation and disconfirmation</b>		Discourse features such as: "I see what you're saying, but..." or "I agree with point A. However..."
		<b>Restraint</b>	Focus criticisms on the substance of another's argument instead of criticizing spelling, grammar, or the participant.	<b>Participants make reference to the civil rules</b>	

## Bibliography

- Alexrod, R. (1984). *The evolution of cooperation*. New York: Basic Books.
- Arnett, R. C., & Arneson, P. (1999). *Dialogic civility in a cynical age*. Albany: SUNY Press.
- Axford, B. (2001). The transformation of politics or anti-politics? In B. Axford & R. Huggins (Eds.), *New media and politics* (pp. 1-30). London: Sage.
- Barney, D. (2000). *Prometheus wired: The hope for democracy in the age of network technology*. Vancouver: UBC Press.
- Barret, H. (1991). *Rhetoric and civility: Human development, narcissism, and the good audience*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Bauer, M. (2000). Classical content analysis: A review. In M. Bauer & G. Gaskell (Eds.), *Qualitative researching with text, image and sound* (pp. 131-151). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Benson, T. W. (1996). Rhetoric, civility, and community: Political debate on computer bulletin boards. *Communication Quarterly*, 44(3), 359-378.
- Berkman Centre for Internet and Society. (2000). *Online deliberative discourse research project* [web page]. Harvard Law School. Retrieved January 30, 2003, from the World Wide Web: <http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/projects/deliberation/>
- Calhoun, C. (1992). *Habermas and the public sphere*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press.
- Calhoun, C. (1998). Community without propinquity revisited: Communications technology and the transformation of the urban public sphere. *Sociological Inquiry*, 68(3), 372-397.
- Carter, S. (1999). *Civility: Manners, morals, and the etiquette of democracy*. New York: Basic Books.
- Clift, S. (2002). *Online consultations and events - top ten tips for government and civic hosts* [web page]. Retrieved April 15, 2004, from the World Wide Web: <http://www.publicus.net/articles/consult.html>

- Coate, J. (1997). Cyberspace inkeeping: Building online community. In P. E. Agre & D. Schuler (Eds.), *Reinventing technology, rediscovering community: Critical explorations of computing as a social practice* (pp. 272). Greenwich, Conn.: Ablex Publishing.
- Cohen, J. (1997). Deliberation and democratic legitimacy. In J. Bohman & W. Rehg (Eds.), *Deliberative democracy: Essays on reason and politics*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Cohen, J. L. (1998). American civil society talk. *Report from the Institute for Philosophy and Public Policy*, 18(3).
- Coleman, S., & Götze, J. (2001). *Bowling together: Online public engagement in policy deliberation*. London England: Hansard Society.
- Computer Science and Telecommunications Board: National Research Council. (1994). *Rights and responsibilities of participants in networked communities*. Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press.
- Connery, B. (1997). Imho: Authority and egalitarian rhetoric in the virtual coffeehouse. In D. Porter (Ed.), *Internet culture* (pp. 161-181). London: Routledge.
- Cook, D. (2003). *What tomorrow holds: Exploring citizen engagement through e-participation* [web page]. Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat. Retrieved April 20, 2004, from the World Wide Web: [http://leadership.gc.ca/static/dayinthelife/e-government/what\\_tomorrow\\_holds\\_e.shtml](http://leadership.gc.ca/static/dayinthelife/e-government/what_tomorrow_holds_e.shtml)
- Canadian Policy Research Networks. (2000). *On-line engagement - new models and implications for government departments and officials*. Ottawa: Canadian Policy Research Networks.
- Cresswell, J. (1994). *Research design: Quantitative and qualitative approaches*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Crystal, D. (2001). *Language and the internet*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dahlberg, L. (2001). The internet and democratic discourse: Exploring the prospects of online deliberative forums extending the public sphere. *Information Communication and Society*, 4(4), 615-633.

- Dahlberg, L. (2001). Computer-mediated communication and the public sphere: A critical analysis. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*.
- Dahlberg, L. (2001). Extending the public sphere through cyberspace: The case of minnesota e-democracy. *First Monday*, 6(3).
- Danet, B. (1998). Text as mask: Gender, play, and performance on the internet. In S. G. Jones (Ed.), *Cybersociety 2.0: Revisiting computer-mediated communication and community* (pp. 129-158). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Dean, J. (2001). Cybersalons and civil society: Rethinking the public sphere in transnational technoculture. *Public Culture*, 13(2), 243-265.
- Dennett, D. (1986). Information, technology, and the virtues of ignorance. *Daedalus*, 115(3), 135-153.
- Department of Justice Canada. (1982, April 17, 1982). *The Canadian charter of rights and freedoms* [Internet]. Government of Canada. Retrieved December 14, 2003, from the World Wide Web: <http://laws.justice.gc.ca/en/charter/>
- Dibbell, J. (1998, December 23, 1993). A rape in cyberspace. *The Village Voice*.
- Docter, S., & Dutton, W. H. (1998). The first amendment online: Santa monica's public electronic network. In R. Tsagarousianou & D. Tambini & C. Bryan (Eds.), *Cyberdemocracy: Technology, cities and civic networks* (pp. 125-152). New York: Routledge.
- Docter, S., & Dutton, W. H. (1999). The social shaping of the democracy network (dnet). In B. N. Hague & B. Loader (Eds.), *Digital democracy: Discourse and decision making in the information age* (pp. 222-243). London: Routledge.
- Donath, J. S. (1999). Identity and deception in the virtual community. In M. A. Smith & P. Kollock (Eds.), *Communities in cyberspace* (pp. 29-59). London: Routledge.
- Downing, J. D. H. (1989). Computers for political change: Peacenet and public data access. *Journal of Communication*, 39(3), 154-162.
- Dutton, W. H. (1996). Network rules of order: Regulating speech in public electronic fora. *Media, Culture & Society*, 18(2), 269-290.
- Edwards, A. R. (2004). The moderator in government-initiated internet discussions:

- Facilitator or source of bias? In M. Malkia & A. Anttiroiko & R. Savolainen (Eds.), *Etransformation in governance: New directions in government and politics* (pp. 150-169). London: Idea Group.
- Elections Canada. (2002, January 4, 2002). *Federal general elections, by electors, ballots cast and voter participation* [Web page]. Statistics Canada. Retrieved April 12, 2004, from the World Wide Web: <http://www.statcan.ca/english/Pgdb/govt09c.htm>
- Fairclough, N. (1995). *Critical discourse analysis*. London: Longmans.
- Florio-Ruane, S. (1987). Sociolinguistics for educational researchers. *American Educational Research Journal*, 24(2), 185-197.
- Foreign Policy Dialogue. (2003). *A Dialogue on Foreign Policy* [website]. Retrieved April 4, 2003, from the World Wide Web: <http://www.foreign-policy-dialogue.ca>
- Fraser, N. (1993). Rethinking the public sphere: A contribution to the critique of actually existing democracy. In B. Robbins (Ed.), *The phantom public sphere* (pp. 1-32). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Gadamer, H. (1975). *Truth and method*. New York: Seabury.
- Gergen, K. J. (1991). *The saturated self: Dilemmas of identity in contemporary life*. New York: Basic Books.
- Gergen, K. J. (1996). Technology and the self: From the essential to the sublime. In D. Grodin & T. Lindrof (Eds.), *Constructing the self in a mediated world* (pp. 127-155). Thousand Oaks, Ca.: Sage Publications.
- Giddens, A. (1991). *Modernity and self-identity: Self and society in the late modern age*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Glazer, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Chicago: Aldine.
- Government of Canada. (2004, March 31, 2004). *Government online* [web page]. Government of Canada. Retrieved April 20, 2004, from the World Wide Web: [http://www.gol-ged.gc.ca/index\\_e.asp](http://www.gol-ged.gc.ca/index_e.asp)
- Graham, B. (2002, 2002-12-17). *About the ccfpd* [website]. Canadian Centre for Foreign

Policy Development. Retrieved December 6, 2003, from the World Wide Web:  
<http://www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca/cfp-pec/about/contact-en.asp>

Graham, B. (2002). *A dialogue on foreign policy*. Ottawa: Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade.

Gutstien, D. (1999). *E.Con: How the internet undermines democracy*. Toronto: Stoddart.

Habermas, J. (1987). *The theory of communicative action: The critique of functionalist reason*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Habermas, J. (1991). *The structural transformation of the public sphere* (T. Burger, Trans.). Cambridge: MIT Press.

Habermas, J. (1992). Further reflections on the public sphere (T. Burger, Trans.). In C. Calhoun (Ed.), *Habermas and the public sphere* (pp. 421-461). Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

Habermas, J. (1996). *Between facts and norms*. London: Polity Press.

Habermas, J. (2002). The public sphere: An encyclopedia article. In M. G. Durham & D. M. Kellner (Eds.), *Media and cultural studies: Keywords* (pp. 103-107). Oxford: Blackwell.

Hauser, G. (1999). *Vernacular voices: The rhetoric of publics and public spheres*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press.

Herring, S. C. (1993). Gender and democracy in computer-mediated communication. *Electronic Journal of Communication*, 3(2), 1-17.

Herring, S. C. (1996). Posting in a different voice: Gender and ethics in computer-mediated communication. In C. Ess (Ed.), *Philosophical approaches to computer-mediated communication*. Albany: State University of New York.

Herring, S. C. (1996). Two variants of an electronic message schema. In S. C. Herring (Ed.), *Computer-mediated communication: Linguistic, social and cross-cultural perspectives* (pp. 81-109). Philadelphia: John Benjamins North America.

Herring, S. C. (1999). The rhetorical dynamics of gender harassment on-line. *The Information Society*, 15, 151-167.

- Herring, S. C. (2004). Computer-mediated discourse analysis: An approach to researching online behavior. In S. A. Barab & R. Kling & J. H. Gray (Eds.), *Designing for virtual communities in the service of learning*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Hill, K. A., & Hughes, J. E. (1998). *Cyberpolitics: Citizen activism in the age of the internet*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Institute on Governance. (1998). *A voice for all: Engaging citizens for change*. Ottawa: Institute on Governance.
- Jeffrey, L. (2001). Introducing the vital links project. In L. Jeffrey & I. Nayman (Eds.), *Vital links for a knowledge culture : Public access to new information and communication technologies*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing.
- Jeffrey, L. (2001). Epilogue: Towards a policy framework. In L. Jeffrey & I. Nayman (Eds.), *Vital links for a knowledge culture : Public access to new information and communication technologies*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing.
- Jeffrey, L. (2003). *Dialogue on foreign policy: Report on econsultation*. Toronto: Electronic Commons.
- Jeffrey, L. et al. (2003). *Civil Society Report on the Web-based Foreign Policy Dialogue/Dialogue politique étranger*. Unpublished manuscript.
- Jordan, T. (1999). *Cyberpower: The culture and politics of cyberspace and the internet*. London: Routledge.
- Katz, J. (2001). *Here come the weblogs* [web page]. Slashdot. Retrieved Feb 1, 2003, from the World Wide Web: <http://slashdot.org/features/99/05/13/1832251.shtml>
- Keane, J. (2003). *Global civil society?* Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press.
- Kesler, C. (1992). Civility and citizenship in the american founding. In E. Banfield (Ed.), *Civility and citizenship* (pp. 57-74). New York: Professors World Peace Academy.
- Kim, A. J. (1998). *Timeless principles for building community – erecting the social scaffolding in web techniques*. Retrieved, from the World Wide Web: <http://kulesh.org/jotting/lessons.htm>

- Kingwell, M. (1995). *A civil tongue: Justice, dialogue and the politics of pluralism*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Kitchen, R. (1998). *Cyberspace: The world in the wires*. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons.
- Kollock, P. (1999). The economies of online cooperation. In P. Kollock & M. A. Smith (Eds.), *Communities in cyberspace*. London: Routledge.
- Kollock, P., & Smith, M. A. (1996). Managing the virtual commons: Cooperation and conflict in computer communities. In S. Herring (Ed.), *Computer-mediated communication: Linguistic, social, and cross-cultural perspectives* (pp. 109-128). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Lee, A. S. (1989). A scientific methodology for MIS case studies. *MIS Quarterly*, 1989, 33-50.
- Lekhti, R. (2000). The politics of african-american online. *Democratization*, 7(1), 150-172.
- Lessig, L. (1999). *Code and other laws of cyberspace*. New York: Basic Books.
- MacBride, S., & Roach, C. (1994). The new world information and communication order. In G. Gerbner & H. Mowlana & K. Nordenstreng (Eds.), *The global media debate: Its rise, fall, and renewal*. New jersey: Ablex publishing corporation, 1994: 1-9. (pp. 1-9). New Jersey: Ablex Publishing Corporation.
- Maltz, T. (1996). Customary law and power in internet communities. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 2(1).
- Margolis, M., & Resnick, D. (2000). *Politics as usual: The cyberspace "revolution"*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- McLean, I. (1989). *Democracy and the new technology*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Millard, W. (1997). I flamed freud. In D. Porter (Ed.), *Internet culture* (pp. 145-161). London: Routledge.
- Miller, D. (1992). Deliberative democracy and social choice. *Political Studies*, 40(special issue), 54-67.
- Mitra, A. (2001). Marginal voices in cyberspace. *New Media and Society*, 3(1), 29-48.

- Nevitte, N. (1996). *The decline of deference: Canadian value change in cross national perspective*. Toronto: Broadview.
- Norris, P. (2001). *Digital divide: Civic engagement, information poverty, and the internet worldwide*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2001). *Engaging citizens in policy-making: Information, consultation and public participation*. Paris: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.
- Ogden, M. R. (1998). Technologies of abstraction: Cyberdemocracy and the changing communications landscape. In C. A. Alexander & L. Pal (Eds.), *Digital democracy: Policy and politics in the wired world* (pp. 68-86). Don Mills: Oxford University Press.
- Ostrom, E. (1990). *Governing the commons: The evolution of institutions for collective action*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Papacharissi, Z. (2002). The virtual sphere: The internet as a public sphere. *New Media and Society*, 4(1), 9-27.
- Papacharissi, Z. (2004). Democracy online: Civility, politeness and the democratic potential of online political discussion groups. *New Media and Society*, 6(2), 259-263.
- Peters, J. D. (1993). Distrust of representation: Habermas on the public sphere. *Media, Culture & Society*, 15, 541-571.
- Poster, M. (2001). Cyber democracy: The internet and the public sphere. In S. Arnowitz (Ed.), *The information subject* (pp. 95-116). Amsterdam: G&B Arts.
- Powazek, D. M. (2001). *Design for community: The art of connecting real people in virtual places*. Indianapolis: New Riders Publishing.
- Rafaeli, S., & Sudweeks, F. (1997). Networked interactivity. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 2(4).
- Rheingold, H. (2000). *The virtual community: Homesteading on the electronic frontier*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

- Rodger, J. (1985). On the degeneration of the public sphere. *Political Studies*, 33, 203-217.
- Ronaghan, S. A. (2002). *Benching e-government: A global perspective --- assessing the UN member states*. New York: United Nations.
- Rouner, L. (2000). *Civility*. Boston: University of Notre Dame.
- Salter, L. (2003). Democracy, new social movements, and the internet: A Habermasian analysis. In M. McCaughey & M. D. Ayers (Eds.), *Cyberactivism: Online activism in theory and practice* (pp. 117-145). New York: Routledge.
- Schmidt, J. (1998). Civility, enlightenment, and society: Conceptual confusions and kantian remedies. *American Political Science Review*, 14(4), 1-13.
- Seabrook, J. (1994, June 6, 1994). My first flame. *The New Yorker*, 70, 70.
- Smith, P. D. (2002). *The virtue of civility in the practice of politics*. Lanham: University Press of America.
- Stake, R. E. (1994). Case studies. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 236-247). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Statistics Canada. (2003). *The daily: Household internet use survey* [online]. Retrieved March 2, 2004, from the World Wide Web: <http://www.statcan.ca/Daily/English/030918/d030918b.htm>
- Stone, A. R. (1991). Will the real body please stand up?: Boundary stories about virtual cultures. In M. Benedikt (Ed.), *Cyberspace: First steps* (pp. 81-118). Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1991). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Strauss, A. L. (1987). *Qualitative analysis for social scientists*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Street, J. (1999). Remote control? Politics, technology, and 'electronic democracy'. In H. Mackay & T. O'Sullivan (Eds.), *The media reader: Continuity and transformation* (pp. 385-397). London: Sage.

- Tanner, E. (2001). Chilean conversations: Internet forum participants debate Augusto Pinochet's detention. *Journal of Communication*, 5(2), 383-403.
- Tesch, R. (1990). *Qualitative research: Analysis types and software tools*. New York: Falmer.
- Trauth, E. M., & Jessup, L. M. (2000). Understanding computer-mediated discussions: Positivist and interpretive analyses of group support system use. *MIS Quarterly*, 24(1), 43-79.
- Turkle, S. (1994). Constructions and reconstructions of self in virtual reality: Playing in the muds. *Mind, Culture and Activity*, 1(1), 158-117.
- Turkle, S. (1995). *Life on the screen: Identity in the age of the internet*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Wallace, J. (1998). Interview with Dale Spender. *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, p.20.
- Walzer, M. (1985). *Spheres of justice*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- WebLab. (2000). *Changing the nature of online conversation: An evaluation of realitycheck.Com*: [Online publication]. Retrieved June 17, 2004 from the World Wide Web: <http://www.weblab.org/sgd/excerpt.pdf>
- White, N. (2001). *Facilitating and hosting a virtual community* [Online publication]. Retrieved May 3, 2004, from the World Wide Web: <http://www.fullcirc.com/community/communityfacilitation.htm>
- White, N., & Boettcher, S. (2000). *Hosts on hosting*. Retrieved January 28, 2003, from the World Wide Web: <http://www.fullcirc.com/community/hostsonhosts.htm>
- Whyte, A., & Macintosh, A. (2003). Analysis and evaluation of e-consultations. *e-Service Journal*, 2(1), 9-34.