

**Inclusion as Deliberative Agency:
The Selective Representation of Poor Women in
Debates and Documentaries about Reproductive Health**

Nicole Curato & Jonathan Corpus Ong

Abstract

Mass media play a double-edged role in promoting deliberative democracy: They enforce hierarchies in public discussion by prioritising the voice of particular groups, yet they remain the best, if not the only institution that can temper inequalities in deliberation, particularly in their capacity to grant ordinary people opportunities for voice in deliberative settings. We put forward two criteria that can assess media's capacity to enforce inclusiveness in public deliberation. A mediated deliberative system is inclusive if it (1) proactively gives visibility and voice to vulnerable groups to be seen and heard on their terms; and (2) allows those with less power to act as "deliberative agents" capable of facing their interlocutors, articulating, defending and considering one's views. We provide empirical context to this argument through the case of the Reproductive Health debates in the Philippines, as they played out in two different television genres that differently accentuate deliberative agency.

Keywords

Deliberative democracy, representation, media ethics, media and minorities, health communication, debate, talk show, documentary

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This article aims to put into dialogue deliberation studies and media studies in the normative evaluation of a specific case of mass mediated public deliberation. Whereas deliberation theory has robust conceptualizations and empirical measures for inclusiveness, particularly in the works of Dryzek (2010) and Bächtiger and colleagues (2010), the literature on media power and voice in media studies (e.g., Couldry 2010; Silverstone 2007) potentially offers a more expansive critique and appreciation of the conduct of political talk and citizen participation when scaled up at the level of national discussion. This move enables us to empirically explore the interrelationships between the public representation of diverse discourses on one hand and diverse citizens on the other hand, and reflect on the normative requirements we might impose on a mass mediated deliberative environment based on evaluative criteria and measures in both deliberation studies and media studies literatures.

This article considers the particular case of mediated health debates in the Philippines around the Reproductive Health Bill—a bill that seeks to provide universal access to contraceptives, maternal healthcare and age-appropriate sexuality education. The debates leading up to the passage of the bill in 2012 demonstrates an inclusive public space to the extent that it played host to various discourses that are supportive, critical and ambivalent of the bill. However, when we examined the media genre that gives voice to these different views, we noticed a segregation of voices. Poor women—the citizens most affected by this legislation—have appeared in genres that are monologic such as documentaries but are absent in genres of debate and talk shows that allow them to speak spontaneously on live television, directly dialogue with interlocutors, and perform subjectivities as both rational citizen-participant and emotionally involved “ordinary person.” In this context, we argue that the deliberative system gave poor women an opportunity to exercise “narrative agency” or spaces for self-characterisation through their vivid exposition of personal experience, consistent with global represen-

tations of the working-class in hyperemotional and variably exploitative genres of talk and reality television (Wood and Skeggs 2009). Though admittedly mass media's accentuation of poor women's "narrative agency" may have had a positive impact on the deliberative system, this falls short of the standard of "deliberative agency," which we argue is significant for substantive inclusion in the public sphere.

In developing this argument, we find it useful to adopt a more comprehensive conceptualization of media that acknowledges its ambivalent, rather than unidirectional, relationship with deliberative practice in democratic settings. Contra deliberation theorists' reductionist approach to media as mere "connectors" of various actors of a deliberative system or "repositories" of divergent opinions which citizens tap on when they need to deliberate (Wessler 2008), we approach media as a contested cacophonous space capable of playing host to different voices, genres and styles of speech that are variably productive towards deliberative practice. While its shortcomings are acknowledged quite extensively in both research on political communications (Coleman 2013) and deliberation studies (Mansbridge et al. 2012), we hold that media institutions are nevertheless well-placed, if not in the best position, to temper some inequalities in public deliberation. We find it necessary then to begin our discussion with a review of deliberation studies approaches to inclusiveness before proposing normative criteria on mass mediated deliberative practice, drawing from recent work on mediated voice and visibility. We then explore our case study on mediated health debates with a more expansive consideration on mass media's transformative, if complex and unpredictable, consequences to the deliberative system.

Inclusiveness in deliberation

In deliberation research, two principles underpin the concept of inclusiveness. The first is the all-affected principle where “all of those who are possibly affected by the decisions have equal chances to enter and take part” in deliberation (Habermas 1998, 305). The parameters of “those who are possibly affected” have been the subject of several theoretical debates and will not be discussed here (see Näsström 2011). For the purposes of this discussion, it suffices to underscore that inclusiveness is not only about gaining formal entry to deliberative forums but also about having the opportunity to get a full hearing of one’s views, a chance to reflect and gain better understanding of each participant’s preferences and influence the outcomes of discussion. This definition gives deliberation its democratic character, as it conceptualises deliberation “by the people” instead of deliberation “for the people.”

The problem of scale, however, makes it difficult, if not impossible, to make collective decisions based on the deliberation of all-affected citizens (Manin 1987, 352) in a single deliberative forum. In large complex societies, deliberative democracy is better conceptualised in systemic terms, where deliberation occurs in different but ideally interconnected sites (Dryzek 2010; Mansbridge et al. 2012). Some take the form of formally convened “mini-publics” or forums designed to approximate the dynamic of public deliberation but with a manageable size composed of usually purposively selected participants. Others are rather informal such as networked deliberation among transnational advocacy groups and engaged discussions online (Dryzek 2010, 11). To be consequential, discourses circulating in public spaces must be meaningfully connected to sites of decision-making. In the context of a deliberative system, the principle of diversity suffices. A deliberative system is inclusive if it plays host to a wide range of contesting discourses, gives voice to multiple interests and welcomes competing claims (Mansbridge et al. 2012; Dryzek 2010). This is distinguished from deliberative systems where flows of information are tightly controlled by particular institu-

tions as in the case of totalitarian states or unreflective systems where hegemonic ideas for the most part remain unquestioned such as the global financial system before the crisis (Dryzek 2010).

While the systemic view of deliberative democracy responds to the issue of scale, the normative conceptualisation of inclusiveness can be further nuanced in the context of a mediated deliberative system. Today, it is only media institutions that have the capacity to scale up the dissemination and engagement among competing discourses (Coleman 2013). Media provide structures for large-scale deliberation to occur by on one hand being sources of political information through genres of news and documentary and on the other hand being platforms in themselves for discussion and participation through talk and debate shows that claim to represent “the public” (Coleman 2013). Even deliberative democrats that have been critical of media’s role in public deliberation would find it difficult to envision alternative mechanisms that can create a shared deliberative system among geographically and symbolically distant groups and establish communicative relationships among parties who might otherwise be strangers. Therefore, we consider it relevant to give sufficient attention to the mediated character of large-scale public deliberation and theorise inclusiveness in the context of what admittedly is an imperfect media environment.¹

Inclusiveness as redistribution of symbolic power

Media play an ambivalent role in a deliberative system. On one hand, the institution that has the unique capacity to scale up public deliberation is also the same institution that creates and

¹ This piece focuses on mediated deliberative system but the normative requirements we put forward may also be considered when designing mini-publics or evaluating institutionalised sites of deliberation.

perpetuates hierarchies in discourse. While recent theoretical and empirical literature on deliberation (see Bächtiger et al. 2010) have been responsive to the critiques of Young (2001), Sanders (1997) and others about deliberation's tendency to privilege particular forms of speech, these critiques still find resonance in the context of a mediated deliberative environment.

Empirical studies have demonstrated the power of media framing in perpetuating status inequalities, particularly, using Sanders' terms, "those who are already underrepresented in formal political institutions... namely women, racial minorities, especially Blacks, and poorer people" (Sanders 1997, 349; in media studies: see Couldry 2010 chapter 6 and Livingstone 2007 chapter 2). Some also critiqued the privileged role of experts in setting the terms of public debate and speaking on behalf of less articulate constituents directly affected by issues under discussion (Livingstone and Lunt 1994). Indeed, the ability to communicate through media is "unevenly present among members of society" (Young 2001, 680) just as the systematic exclusion of minority groups from mainstream visibility can be described as inflicting "hidden injuries of media power" (Couldry 2001). Even if mediated deliberative systems can host a wide range of contesting discourses, media representations shape the credibility and resonance of these views. There is a danger that media can project a sense of inclusion given that various voices have been heard while "insidious prejudices" are perpetrated by exposing speakers' conduct that fail to fit dominant frames of communication (Kadlec 2007, 123).

This depiction of "big bad corporate media" has been popular in the literature on deliberative theory. Deliberative democrats have been vocal in their criticism of media as "distorting" conditions for rational discourse, particularly its tendency to simplify and sensationalise complex issues for the sake of ratings and profit. As Habermas concludes, we are "con-

fronted with prima facie evidence that the kind of political communication we know from our so-called media society goes against the grain of the normative requirements of deliberative politics” (Habermas 2006, 420).

We acknowledge the reasons for deliberative democrats’ pessimism in viewing media as playing a dysfunctional role in public deliberation. However, we also recognise that deliberative theory would be remiss in failing to conceptualise media’s unique potential in making the deliberative system more inclusive. While media cannot redistribute economic capital necessary for underprivileged groups to access deliberative forums (see Young 2001), it can potentially redistribute “symbolic capital”—the esteem and status accorded to fellow citizens as peers in social life (Fraser 1990). Media can accord vulnerable others such status and facilitate meta-consensus by lending legitimacy to often undermined discourses. For these reasons, we consider it important to contextualise normative requirements for media to be an agent of inclusiveness in a deliberative system.

Criterion 1: Recognition through presence and visibility

First, an imperfect deliberative system needs media to proactively give visibility to vulnerable groups and give those with less power “the opportunity to be seen and heard on their terms” (Silverstone 2007, 139). This responds to the issue of substantive rather than tokenistic access. Media can facilitate the process of recognition by extending hospitality to those that have been rendered invisible by geographic distance and cultural inequalities. Making marginalised groups’ problems “felt” through media’s aesthetic/emotive characteristics allow audiences to imagine distant others’ experiences and consider their plight as worthy of reflection and engagement. This helps establish excluded groups’ political membership by letting

them in the circle of those entitled to recognition (Fraser 2007, 313–314). For others this is a necessary demonstration of media’s “substantive responsibility” to vulnerable others—the non-reciprocal responsibility between those who have power to those who have none (Silverstone 2007).

Proactively giving voice to traditionally excluded others may indeed conflict with the democratic virtue of equality—giving everyone the same level of access to a particular forum—but such form of extended privilege is necessary to rectify the symbolic injustice in how resources of narrativity and representation are concentrated to particular groups and not others (Couldry 2010). For media scholars, the quantity and quality of ethnic minority media within national media systems (i.e., Canada’s Aboriginal People’s Television Network, UK’s foreign language BBC Radio channels, etc.) are positive developments by which minority cultures are afforded formal, “mediatized recognition” by majority cultures (Cottle 2006). Drawing on Edward Said’s notion of the contrapuntal, Silverstone (2007; chapter 3) approaches the existence of minority media within national cultures as being an essential element to social and cultural harmony, such that the amplification of cultural others’ voice, or narrative agency, is not only an enactment of multicultural dialogue, but a fulfilment of majority cultures’ political and moral responsibility towards minorities.

Criterion 2: Deliberative agency and parity in participation

Rendering vulnerable groups visible in a deliberative system, however, is only the first step in enforcing inclusiveness in a mediated discursive context. The deliberative quality of visibility and representation afforded to those already touched by the “glamour of mediation” (Couldry 2001) warrants further consideration. Media representation is equally fraught in the opposite

extreme of invisibility: while invisibility suggests a moral stance of indifference by majority cultures, over-visibility in media may suggest more direct forms of sanctioning in wider culture through demonization or dehumanization. For instance, Wood and Skeggs (2009) have critiqued the “overrepresentation” of the working-class in reality television, which they discuss as the calculated and exploitative practice of skewing the class background of such shows’ participants, who are then made to spectacularly display excessive and vulgar aspects of themselves for audience entertainment. Media scholars are pessimistic about the genre’s ability to convey ideas that can enrich public deliberation, though on occasion they are recognized to offer vulnerable groups that ability to negotiate the “common” public normativities accepted by society (see Wood and Skeggs 2009).

Indeed, genre plays a major role in structuring ordinary people’s political participation as it affects the status of authenticity to ordinary people represented. For instance, creative non-fiction essays or life histories in documentaries are generally positively received for their use of ordinary people testimonials than the “exploitative” formats of reality television. These formats can give marginalised voices what we call “narrative agency” or the ability to tell one’s story using one’s own voice with significantly fewer external constraints imposed by media producers. As deliberative democrats have argued, these forms of discourse are useful particularly in deliberative systems whose goals are to facilitate social learning, understanding and empathy. Palestinian woman Rafeef Ziadah’s poem that has gone viral on YouTube (sternchenproductions 2011) is a good illustration of how poetry can help distant others make sense of Palestinians’ feelings when they get asked insulting questions, such as “don’t you think it would all be fine if you just stopped teaching your children to hate?” Ziadah’s artistic speech style creates a compelling narrative for audiences to understand the complexities and emotive characteristics of hatred entwined in the everyday lives of Palestinians.

We argue, however, that an inclusive mediated deliberative system does not only portray participants' "narrative agency." It should also portray vulnerable others as "deliberative agents"—citizens capable of articulating, defending and revising one's views. Formally structured public debates appear to be the obvious platform to cultivate deliberative agency though we admit there are other creative formats that can foster the status of vulnerable others as peers in public deliberation. Some talk shows and documentaries infuse elements of "epistemic interviewing" which challenge respondents to justify their opinions instead of purely focusing on their personal stories (Curato 2012). This approach is instrumental in building the status of vulnerable others as active, civic-minded and rational agents able to locate their personal circumstances in relation to broader societal issues and abstract ideals. It also upholds deliberative theory's notion of respect. To engage others' views is to recognise their status as peers; refusal to do so is to treat the other as if she is "incapable of responding to reasons, as irrational and to disregard her status as a fellow citizen" (Rostbøll 2008, 202–203).

Ultimately, the aim of promoting vulnerable others' deliberative agency is to uphold parity of participation. This not only involves allowing them to speak in their own voice (Fraser 1990) but also giving them the chance to put forward their views and engage discourses circulating in the deliberative system. This, we suggest, grants marginalised groups the status as a full member of society by highlighting their capability of participating on a par with other members of society (Fraser 2007). We illustrate the implications of these normative proposals in our case study below.

Case Study: The Reproductive Health Debate

We contextualise our proposed normative requirements through the Philippine's experience in the Reproductive Health Debate. The debate is about the bill "Reproductive Health and Population Development Act", which, as a matter of compromise, later evolved to be called the "Responsible Parenthood Bill." Its main aim is for government to promote universal access to all modern, legal and medically safe methods of family planning as well as maternal health care and age-appropriate sexuality education. The bill was enacted last 19 December 2012.

Different versions of this bill have been debated since 1967 when the Philippines signed the "Declaration on Population" which addresses "the population problem" in long-term economic planning (see Ayala and Caradon 1968). Today, the Philippines' fertility rate at 3.3 is higher compared to its Southeast Asian neighbours, with Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia at 1.6, 2.6 and 2.6, respectively (UNFPA 2008, 8). Some pundits have described the Philippines as having a "pro-natalist" orientation, as the dominant religion of Catholicism has declared the use of modern contraception as contradictory to its religious tenets. As of 2003, only 33% of married women used modern contraceptives (Connell, Cisek and Robertson 2005, 9). The average family size is six.

The polls, however, depict a different picture. In an opinion survey conducted at the height of the debate, 68% of Filipinos "favour giving couples access to all legal means of family planning from public health services" (Social Weather Stations 2011) while 71% are in favour of passing the bill (Social Weather Stations 2008). Seventy six percent also agree that "there should be a law that requires government to teach family planning to the youth" (Social Weather Stations 2008).

While poll numbers indicate public support for the bill, debates leading up to its passage have been contentious. We analyse the conduct of this debate based on the normative

requirements discussed above and examine the extent to which Reproductive Health Debates have upheld the principle of inclusiveness in the mediated deliberative system.

Criterion 1: Range of contesting discourses

We first analyse the range of contesting discourses in the mediated public space. We have observed that a wide variety of substantive and complex discourses were put on the table for public deliberation.² Using Dryzek's coding frame for political discourse analysis, we considered some of these components in our interpretive coding: (a) ontology of discourse or the entities recognised or constructed; (b) assumptions about natural relationships (e.g. cooperation, conflict, hierarchy, equality); (c) actors or agents (e.g. citizens, social classes) and their motives (e.g. material gain, survival, virtues); and (d) key metaphors and rhetorical devices (Dryzek 2005, 17–19).

For the purposes of this section, we provide a summary of resonant discourses in the mediated deliberative system. These discourses are not necessarily identified to groups of individuals sharing the same descriptive characteristics such as class, gender or religious beliefs but indicate shared frames of understanding that guide thought and action among a disparate

² The methodology for this section is as follows: First, we made an inventory of current affairs television programs produced by the two largest networks in the Philippines that featured the Reproductive Health Bill. Content of these programs are analysed using interpretive qualitative coding as explained above. Second, we drew a random sample of opinion columns in major broadsheets and reputable online news media from the time the bill was filed (February 2011) until it was passed (December 2012). We began with an initial sample of twenty articles until we reached data saturation at 42. These texts are coded in the same manner. We informally validated our data set with discourses in social media (e.g. Facebook posts, some Tweets) to check if there are resonant ideas not captured in traditional media. This was not the case.

group of people (see Stevenson and Dryzek 2012, 191). Among the resonant discourses articulated in the mediated public space include:

- *Positivism*. This discourse foregrounds the link between scientific and economic facts to support the bill. Scientific indicators are used to declare that population management is key to economic and human development, especially among very poor women.
- *Population as resource*. A big population is a “blessing.” Similar to the positivist discourse, scientific economic data are used to argue economic benefits of growing population, often drawing on the examples of China, India and the impact of ten million migrant Filipinos in the global economy. Arguments are often framed as “weighing” of priorities. “Rather than investing in contraceptives, government must invest in human capacity building,” is an example of this frame.
- *Liberal feminism*. The bill is a women’s issue. All couples should have access to information and reproductive health services that best suits their values and belief systems. It is government’s duty to enforce these rights. Individual rights are paramount and must be subject to the intervention of neither the church nor state. Rhetorical devices commonly involve calling out the Catholic Church hierarchy for intervention, e.g. “get your rosaries out of my ovaries” or a negotiation of identity politics, e.g. “I am Catholic. I am for the RH Bill.”
- *Socialist feminism*. The bill is important to uphold women’s rights. However, poor women’s wombs are not to blame for economic underdevelopment but the government’s refusal to establish an equitable and just economic program that redistributes wealth and supports public services. Vigilance is important to ensure that

the bill does not privilege foreign funding bodies and big pharmaceutical companies.

- *Natalist Catholicism.* The premise is that all human life is sacred. Contraception is abortion, hence constitutive of a sin based on Roman Catholic teachings. The Philippines is primarily a Catholic country, requiring the government to respond to the values and culture of its people. Commonly used rhetorical styles are appeals to conscience and guilt, such as sending statues of the Virgin Mary to legislators supportive of the bill.
- *Bureaucratic scepticism.* Government resources are scarce and national budget allocation is a zero-sum enterprise. Legislators must be prudent in allocating budget to “non-essential” health products. Rhetorical devices include dichotomising priorities, such as “books or condoms?”

This list demonstrates the inclusiveness of discourses in public deliberation. There was not only a wide range of contesting discourses but also a certain level of complexity to the discussion. For example, Akbayan!, a centre-left feminist party who co-sponsored the bill subscribes to the discourses of positivism and gender-based liberalism. On the other hand, Gabriela, a left-wing feminist party/social movement subscribes to gender-based socialism, together with some right-wing lawmakers (often from a conservative military background critical of the left) who are wary of foreign funders influencing legislation.

We take the complex relationships between personalities and discourses as indications of a vibrant public space. Reasoning took various directions to incorporate different perspectives and motivations for subscribing to a particular discourse. The range of views is also broad enough to prevent the concentration of discursive power to a single source or interest

group, although one could argue that the Catholic Bishop Conference of the Philippines (CBCP)—the so-called “Church hierarchy”—have gone on record through a pastoral letter declaring those supporting the bill as “invoking divine wrath on themselves” (CBCP 2012). This, in deliberative terms, can be considered a form of coercion as it threatens its members to think a certain way and disengage in public discussion. However, as evidenced by survey data present above, the extent to which this “threat” made an impact to public opinion may be limited. Several priests particularly those from the Jesuit order have also publicly articulated their support for the bill, which is an indication that discourses, even in the context of the Church hierarchy, is vibrantly contested.

This aside, discourses articulating different positions on multiple sub-issues have emerged, allowing the tone of public deliberation to develop from a simple pro- and anti-Reproductive Health bill to one that unpacks what the bill means, to whom it is for and what problem it intends to solve. It is also worth acknowledging that the study conducted by David et al. (2010), while using a different methodology, have also observed a wide variety of frames used, this time in the legislative debates on the bill.

Based on these observations, there is reasonable evidence to suggest that the deliberative system was inclusive to the extent that there was a wide range of contesting discourses.

Criterion 2.1: Recognition and visibility

The next normative test is to examine the extent to which the mediated deliberative system created spaces for vulnerable voices to be heard and understood on their terms and engage with others’ views as peers in social life. To examine the visibility and quality of recognition given to participants in the deliberative system, we created an inventory of television pro-

grams that featured the Reproductive Health Bill. We consider this as indication of media’s recognition of relevant voices that warrant inclusion in public discussion.

We examined twenty two programs broadcasted by the Philippines’ two largest television networks from 2011 to 2012—the period of legislative deliberations on the bill. These programs are classified in three genres: documentaries, talk shows and debates. We also categorised personalities that appeared on the program based on the role they foreground in their appearances or their claims to representation. We tally each appearance and compute the frequency of a group’s presence in relation to others (see Table 1). Out of fourteen documentaries we examined, for example, four percent of personalities that appeared are activists, one percent is representatives from the Roman Catholic Church, twelve percent are healthcare practitioners and so on.

Table 1: Percentage of appearances in current affairs programs

	Documentary (n=14)	Talk show (n=6)	Debate (n=2)
Activist	4%	12%	24.2%
Church representative	1%	6%	15.2%
Health workers	12%	18%	12.1%
Politicians	5%	41%	30.3%
Poor children	34%	18%	
Poor fathers	7%		
Poor mothers	36%	6%	
Others	1%		18.2%

Our findings affirm the observation in the previous section. Apart from diversity of discourses, there is also a considerable range of voices heard in these programs. The all-affected principle appears to have been upheld in so far as citizens most affected by the bill have been given the opportunity to publicly share their perspectives.

Documentaries, in particular, have been hospitable to discourses of poor families—the vulnerable others the bill wishes to protect. Everyday realities of poor families are vividly characterised not only through the articulation of testimonies but also through the aesthetic character of production, from capturing a family of twenty two's makeshift home in an urban slum to frail bodies of mothers that have given birth every year for the past two decades. This genre has allowed poor mothers to perform narrative agency—to articulate an account of their physical, emotional and economic struggles that deter them from living with dignity. Below is an excerpt from Liza, a mother of thirteen. Her testimony is characteristic of poor mothers' narratives in a number of documentaries.

They [local government of Manila] banned it [ligation] in hospitals. They do not perform ligation anymore. With my last [child], the thirteenth, I wanted to have a ligation. But they didn't do it [after I gave birth]. What happened was they sent me home [and] told me I should come back after a week. That's not possible. Once I'm home, I can't leave anymore (Liza, *Reporter's Notebook*, 24 March 2012).

Liza's narration marshals personal experience for argumentation, as her testimony above is primarily a sequential retelling of her ligation experience involving a conflict between her personal planning and rule-abiding doctors (as seen in the clauses, "I wanted"/"They didn't do it"/"What happened was"). It is crucial to identify too that first-hand concrete experience

confers to Liza the status of an authentic and trustworthy narrator—a lay expert not only on the subject matter of reproductive health but also poverty. Her narrative put forward the image of a mother who wanted to be in-charge of her body but was limited by her status as a public hospital patient whose options are restricted by a city ordinance and as a homemaker with immense responsibilities in the household, making it difficult to attend to her healthcare needs. Her emotional testimony and bodily display to the camera perform tasks of argumentation (presenting concrete consequences, convincing the sceptical viewer) and bringing attention to the implications of a city ordinance that banned litigation from hospitals.

Such stories in documentaries facilitate social learning by providing the experiential bases of women's claims to suffering and the problems the bill wishes to address. While it is methodologically challenging to directly measure the impact of narratives in documentaries to the circulation of discourses in the deliberative system, we can reasonably argue, as far as inclusiveness is concerned, that the mediated deliberative system has given space for poor women to influence public deliberation through their narrative agency. Documentaries have given vulnerable others the voice to connect with geographically and symbolically distant audiences—those who are differently situated but must understand the experiences of the other to practice reciprocity and reflection in public deliberation (Young 2001).

Criterion 2.2: Parity of participation and deliberative agency

While poor families have a strong presence in documentaries, their absence in talk shows and public debates as agentic interlocutors is rather glaring. These formats provided avenues for politicians, bishops, health workers and activists to engage each others' ideas, while poor

women remained in the margins, some of them as studio audiences. Only 6% of talk show guests are poor women; nil for public debates.

There are two ways of interpreting this data. One is to say that different voices “naturally” find a comfortable home in different formats. Poor women themselves may want to develop their voice in a way that feels familiar and safe (Wilson and Washington 2007, 64). Hence, storytelling through documentaries may be the best way to bring out their voices. Talk shows and debates, on the other hand, can arguably be intimidating, which can compromise poor mothers’ confidence when dealing with more experienced and media-savvy public speakers. Similar to other contexts (see Wood & Skeggs 2009), Filipino talk shows such as “Face 2 Face” (a local version of a high-emotional talk show such as *Jerry Springer*) have typically portrayed poor people as confrontational to each other but, towards the end of the show, become recipients of expert and moral advice from priests and psychologists. However, empirical work on Filipino audiences and television studio participants contradict the idea that working class audiences lack media literacy and the ability to participate in local television programs. As Ong (2012) discovers, working class people with higher exposure to Filipino television content than middle-/upper-class people who prefer foreign (i.e., American) television programming actually know better the conventions of local genres, understand their humor (often regarded as “offensive” by middle-class critics and academics), and better anticipate the production requirements of appearing on (entertainment) television. Producers, however, nevertheless attempt to exercise strict control over the terms of mediated participation of working class participants, following too (middle-class) stereotypes about their bad behaviour and lack of education, and shaped by production contexts that cultivate adherence to safe and standardized formulae of recruiting and representing the poor over risk-taking (Ong 2014). Representing the poor in live media event television in this context is really too

much to ask for a media system that has traditionally offered highly gestural forms of mediated recognition.

That is why we propose here another interpretation for this undemocratic segregation of voices. Vulnerable others are *deliberately recruited* to appear in formats that are monologic—the type that focuses on narratives and self-characterisation—but excluded from formats that are dialogic. They are recruited in the taped genre of documentary where their appearance could be more heavily regulated through the power of the edit, rather than in the live format of the debate show from a broader social assumption about their lack of deliberative potentials and media skills. Our discomfort is based on the normative standard we discussed earlier. In order for a mediated deliberative system to be fully inclusive, vulnerable others must be given the opportunity to develop and exhibit their deliberative agency. We contend that a proper deliberative mediated environment must extend their hospitality for the appearance of ordinary people to extend *across* genres which variably reorganize citizens' practice of deliberative and narrative agency.

By saying this, we do not mean to declare public debates and talk shows as the only formats that uphold deliberative democratic norms. This is precisely one misimpression that a deliberative systems approach wishes to correct. Indeed, different genres, speech cultures and forms of communication can contribute to the contestation of discourses in the broader deliberative system. However, if the ideal of inclusiveness is to be meaningfully upheld, we argue that it is imperative for vulnerable others to enjoy parity of participation with their fellow democratic actors. Absence in formats that allow interlocutors to face each other, exchange ideas and make a case for their positions undermines vulnerable others' capacity to get a fair hearing of their views side by side with symbolic others' claims. It also deters vulnerable others from asserting their role as intentional public actors who can actively scrutinise the

process of policy formation and rectify disparities in discourse (see True and Mintrom 2001, 28). In a way, the relegation of vulnerable others to documentaries sends a message that “we will listen to you, we will consider your views, we will even speak for you, but we do not speak with you.” While documentaries are often regarded positively as an educational genre that facilitates deep engagement on an issue, their representation of the lifeworlds of poor others to an imagined audience of middle-class viewers at their worst might be regarded as “poverty porn” (Ong 2014). While we value the continuing representation of poor people in documentaries, we argue that a key responsibility of television producers is to cultivate ordinary people’s deliberative agency through their systematic recruitment and trust in their ability to convey ideas and arguments rather than personal stories.

Our data provides some indication of this observation. All affected parties identified in Table 1 have been represented in two major public debates, allowing guests to speak on behalf of their self-declared constituency. Image 1 illustrates this example.³ In both debates, 64 statements were made referring to the bill’s impact on women’s welfare. The distribution of these arguments was almost even between supporters and critics of the bill while arguments about women were articulated by women seventy one percent of the time. Below is an example of this statement:

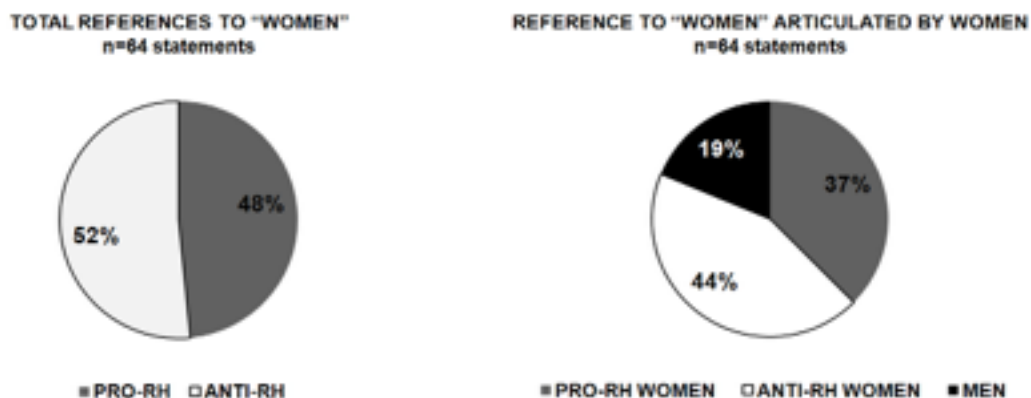
There are so many women out there who are not informed rightly about their choices. So if you do not pass this bill, they are not able to get a chance to have a choice, a very informed choice... So they have dignity. So they have control over their lives,

³ The process of coding statements is as follows: A statement is coded each time a speaker makes an argument that explicitly makes a reference to an affected party. Statements making reference to two descriptors, e.g. “poor women,” are coded twice under “the poor” and “women.” For the sake of consistency, statements that have implied or unclear referents are not coded.

unlike what the CBCP wants, that they want to be the ones to dictate everything to us (Pia Magalona, *RH Bill: The Grand Debate*, 22 May 2011).

Delivered by a celebrity mother of eight children, the statement reacts against (male) bishops' tendency to "dictate" how women should control their fertility. She makes a case of about the importance of informed choice in ensuring women's dignity. The debate gave women the opportunity to confront and in the case of the bill's critics, to support bishops who, in the months leading up to legislative and public debates, have been issuing pastoral letters on how the bill corrupts the soul (CBCP 2011, 2012). In this format, speakers are represented as equal interlocutors governed by the same rules of time, turn-taking and rebuttal. The celebrity mother was given the opportunity to publicly confront the Catholic Church hierarchy by expressing her perceived injustice as recipient of a Church dictum.

Image 1: Who speaks for whom?

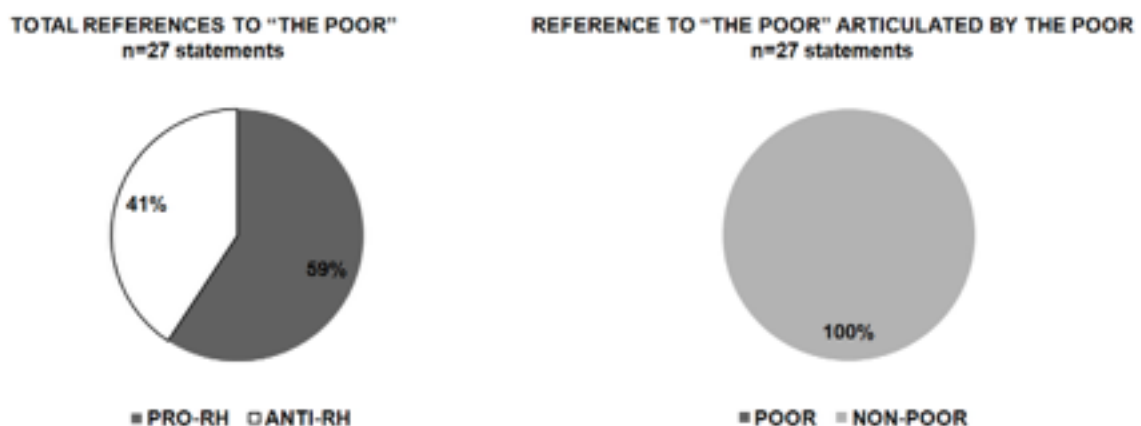


Contrast this to the treatment of arguments about the poor. In both debates, 27 statements explicitly referring to poor families were made, although this number may have been

higher considering some statements can be inferred to have poor families as main referent (e.g. “The bill is a poverty reduction strategy” or the earlier statement quoted). Image 2 illustrates that supporters of the bill tend to cite the welfare of “the poor” more than the bill’s critics. “Let’s give the poor a chance to enhance their standard of living” is an example of this statement (Congresswoman Janet Garin, *RH Bill: The Grand Debate*, 22 May 2011).

Unlike the case of women, none of the statements about the poor are made by poor people. Rather, in public debates, the poor were spoken for, not spoken with. The example of the celebrity mother presented earlier illustrates this observation. While her statement raises positive recognition of the dignity and humanity of poor women, it is consistent with traditional forms of celebrity advocacy which claims the humanity of the other as separate from that of the celebrity and her public (Chouliaraki 2013): “Women out there” who lack proper information need the bill to be passed *in order to have* dignity yet this situation is simultaneously recognized as affecting everyone (...”dictate everything to *us*”). Poor women’s invisibility in the debate required politically engaged celebrities to once again stand in for poor women.

Image 2: Who speaks for whom?



We consider these critical observations of public debates important for two reasons. First, it underscores missed opportunities for a deliberative system to redistribute symbolic resources to vulnerable others—to accord poor families the status as fellow interlocutors equally deserving of a public platform to share their views. Aside from debates featuring candidates for national elections, the Reproductive Health Debates was the first time in recent media history for television networks to produce a live primetime debate on a controversial public issue⁴. The RH Debate therefore was the rare media event focused on a substantial discussion of a public issue, and was widely promoted, replayed several times, and even uploaded in YouTube for extended viewership. These public debates could have been a good opportunity to foreground poor women’s civic selves and denaturalise institutionalised assumptions that poor people are objects of paternalistic legislation instead of intentional public actors worthy of taking part in shaping the nation’s destiny. Poor women could have been granted the status of citizens capable of practicing deliberative agency—that poor women are political citizens who can challenge and be challenged by health experts, bishops, politicians and feminists.

We do not discount the efforts of activists and politicians to provide discursive representation on behalf of poor families who were invisible in debates but we are wary about the exclusive character of these public debates. This is reminiscent of traditional critiques against the public sphere, the type that is exclusive to a relatively few elite participants who represent particular ideas in public talk as it occurs in mass media. Montanaro’s (2012) concept of

⁴ While the debate show format is not new on Philippine television, this genre is currently accessed only via cable television (accessed by middle- and upper-classes). The last regular debate program on free television ended broadcast in 2006, when *Debate with Mare at Pare* was replaced by lower cost entertainment programme imports.

“surrogate representation” is an apt description of this situation, where self-appointed representatives provided visibility for a usually disorganised constituency (such as poor women) and identified issues of injustice. While surrogate representation is preferable to no representation at all, Montanaro argues that this form of representation remains at the level of “pre-democratic.” The democratic potential of such representation is realised once marginalised constituencies become discursive agents themselves and grant authorization and enforce accountability from their surrogates (Montanaro 2012, 1104). In this light, it is crucial to foreground the responsibility of media producers in enabling ordinary people’s deliberative agency by democratizing participation in diverse media genres. Writing on the British context, Wood and Skeggs’ (2009) critique of overrepresentation of the working-class in the genre of reality tv is instructive here: media’s recruitment of particular participants

Second, these public debates of media event stature as well as the talk shows of ordinary television schedule may give us an impression of the conduct of broader public deliberations on the issue. Given that media events tend to mirror dynamics in non-mediated public interactions, we can cautiously infer that public deliberations on the Reproductive Health Bill have been largely exclusionary among elite circles of policymaking, NGO networks, advocacy groups and the academe. While poor women have asserted presence in protest actions and, indeed, expressed their voices in documentaries, the process of interrogating others’ views and exchanging reasons may have occurred within discursive enclaves. Poor women may figure in these deliberations as “case studies” or illustrations of arguments, not as fellow interlocutors deserving of symbolically privileged others’ persuasion and engagement. There is a danger that poor families are pigeonholed as useful for narration, and in the case of creative protest actions, agents in political spectacle designed to bring attention on an issue, but irrelevant in live, face-to-face discussion among peers.

Third, following our conceptualization of media as being comprised of a diversity of genres with variable relationships toward deliberative practice, our analysis of how both debate and documentary genres represent discourses and agents in the RH Bill speaks to the significance of genre as differently enabling of “deliberative agency”.

Debate programs’ particular structures of liveness, interactivity, and ceremony— accentuated by their status as media events—make way for significant enactments of deliberative practice, as seen in the spontaneous dialogue, cross-class and multisectoral discussion, and open invitation for public attention. While television has been unfairly blamed in the critique of political spectacle, we agree with Stephen Coleman that the genre of the live television debate is particularly crucial for its “civic mix between the substance of political argument and the dramatic effects and affects inherent to political disagreement, conflict, and resolution” (Coleman 2013, 30). The underrepresentation of poor women in debate and their overrepresentation in documentaries suggests a failure in hospitality and an unjust redistribution of deliberative agency in the public sphere.

This, perhaps, is the biggest irony of a debate that seeks to empower poor women— while poor mothers are encouraged to take control of their bodies, the conduct of deliberation has inadvertently controlled their voice.

Segregated deliberative system?

By presenting the case of Reproductive Health debates in the Philippines, we have provided an empirical illustration of different levels of inclusion necessary in a mediated deliberative system. We put forward two arguments. First, we made a case for contextualising normative requirements of a deliberative system to mass media. We discussed media’s unique capacity

to redistribute symbolic resources necessary for marginalised groups to engage in meaningful deliberation with their peers.

Second, we made a distinction between media's ability to facilitate narrative and deliberative agency. We argue for the importance of giving vulnerable others the opportunity to mobilise both forms of agency to secure inclusion in a complex and imperfect deliberative environment. As the case study illustrates, denying vulnerable others one form of agency restricts their potential to claim their status as interlocutors capable of facing their critics and defending their views. Without such opportunity to be present and shape what Bächtiger et al. (2010) refer to as "deliberative drifts", the deliberative system acquires a segregated character—the type that provides hospitable discursive space for vulnerable others in some genre but not others.

We acknowledge that this practice may be interpreted as division of deliberative labour. Giving marginalized groups the opportunity to express their voice in a comfortable and familiar format can deliver particular deliberative goods like empathy and social learning. However, we argue that without vulnerable others' active visibility in formats that are dialogic and justificatory in orientation—formats that are dynamic and interactive in exchanging reasons—these discussions end up as broadcast debates of enclaves composed of experts and privileged speakers acting as "surrogate representatives" which treat vulnerable others as sources of emotional narratives or case studies restricted through the power of the edit, and not as active agents who deserve to be spoken with and not just spoken for.

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