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Abstract
Political dialogue among citizens offers numerous potential contributions to American politics, but attainment of these benefits hinges largely on the extent to which conversations cross lines of political difference. In what contexts are cross-cutting interactions most likely to thrive? Using data from five surveys, we find consistent evidence that the workplace is the social context best positioned to facilitate cross-cutting political discourse. Political discussion in the workplace involves a large number of discussants, and it involves greater exposure to people of dissimilar perspectives than does discussion in contexts such as the family, the neighborhood, or the voluntary association. We next consider whether workplace-based interactions are capable of producing beneficial effects. Despite the notoriously weak nature of work-based social ties, we find evidence that workplace-based exposure to differing political views increases people's knowledge of rationales for political perspectives other than their own and also fosters political tolerance.

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The Workplace as a Context for Cross-Cutting Political Discourse

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Political dialogue among citizens offers numerous potential contributions to American politics, but attainment of these benefits hinges largely on the extent to which conversations cross lines of political difference. In what contexts are cross-cutting interactions most likely to thrive? Using data from five surveys, we find consistent evidence that the workplace is the social context best positioned to facilitate cross-cutting political discourse. Political discussion in the workplace involves a large number of discussants, and it involves greater exposure to people of dissimilar perspectives than does discussion in contexts such as the family, the neighborhood, or the voluntary association. We next consider whether workplace-based interactions are capable of producing beneficial effects. Despite the notoriously weak nature of work-based social ties, we find evidence that workplace-based exposure to differing political views increases people's knowledge of rationales for political perspectives other than their own and also fosters political tolerance.

Observers of American culture often lament the disappearance of social contexts in which political discussion transpires. The street corner and public park conjure up nostalgic images of citizens exchanging views in the course of their everyday lives and learning about differences of opinion within their communities. Such encounters with people of dissimilar viewpoints are widely believed to serve an important function in democratic societies. So where is it that political discussion of this kind takes place? Our findings suggest that in the contemporary United States, conversations across lines of political difference occur with the greatest regularity in the workplace. Moreover, there are beneficial societal consequences that flow from the cross-cutting conversation engendered by participation in the workforce.[1] In the sections that follow, we first present the theoretical rationale for why the workplace may encourage cross-cutting conversations about politics. We follow this discussion with empirical evidence of the distinctiveness of the American workplace as a context for political discussion. Finally, we document some beneficial effects of workplace-based political discussion.

Contexts for Cross-Cutting Conversation

"It is hardly possible," John Stuart Mill observed, "to overstate the value . . . of placing human beings in contact with other persons dissimilar to themselves, and with modes of thought and action unlike those with which they are familiar" (Mill 1848, 594). Although Mill wrote over a century ago, observers of contemporary American political culture are similarly concerned about the extent to which citizens control what they see and hear, and with whom they associate, reducing opportunities for cross-cutting conversation (e.g., Sunstein 2001). Many believe that face-to-face exposure to differing views may be waning. Activities that once required face-to-face interaction can now be accomplished by other means, from banking via automatic teller to shopping over the internet. These new modes of activity produce fewer chance encounters in the course of day-to-day life, the very kinds of encounters most likely to expose people to those unlike themselves.

[1]Our focus in this article is on the workplace as a context for cross-cutting discourse and especially on the *political* consequences of exposure to *political* diversity. The potential political significance of the workplace is surely not limited to the effects considered here. For instance, exposure to social or demographic diversity at work brings a different array of consequences (see Pettigrew and Tropp, 2000).

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For a social context to foster cross-cutting political discussion, three requirements must be met. First, and most obviously, the context must supply potential discussion partners. Second, these discussants must converse, particularly about politics. Chance meetings take place in the movie theater and the concert hall, for example, but these fleeting encounters rarely give rise to political discussion. Third, when conversations about politics do take place, to be especially valuable they must, as Mill argued, cross lines of difference. Discussion partners must hold differing views and be willing and able to communicate those differences to one another.

In the early 1900s, John Dewey (1927, 212) argued that "ties formed by sharing in common work" were unique among human relationships in many respects. Several features of work-based social interactions may give the workplace advantages as a context for cross-cutting conversation relative to contexts such as the voluntary association, the neighborhood, and the church. People spend relatively few hours in the presence of others in these alternate contexts. When political discussion does transpire in these other contexts, it may fail to cross lines of difference. Homogeneity in the voluntary association, church, or neighborhood may occur due either to the impact of self-selection on entry into the context, or as a result of conformity or persuasion within those social contexts, or from norms against the expression of dissent. In addition, because one's presence in contexts such as churches and associations is voluntary, the capacity to avoid exposure to dissonant political views—to change the subject, to speak with someone else, or to just walk away—is considerable.

For each of the alternate contexts, there are reasons to believe its capacity for fostering cross-cutting exchange is limited. For instance, an increasing number of residential communities promote self-selection on the basis of shared values and lifestyles, thus limiting exposure to dissimilar political views among one's neighbors (e.g., Blakely and Snyder 1997; Frey 1995). Levels of political homogeneity within churches tend to be the same as within neighborhoods, and the political climates of the neighborhood and the church are most often mutually reinforcing (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995). Politically consequential social interaction does occur within places of worship, but the capacity of the church to sustain *cross-cutting* political discourse is more questionable because one effect of interaction within the church is increasing attitudinal homogeneity.

It is easy to see potential limitations of other social contexts, but does the workplace possess any unique advantages? Unfortunately, the workplace is the least studied social context in terms of its potential impact on political behavior (e.g., Books and Prysby 1991; Huckfeldt et al. 1995; Lafferty 1989; Putnam 2000), and no past research has directly examined the attributes of the workplace as a context for cross-cutting political discourse. Nonetheless, indirect suggestions of potential benefits of the workplace can be identified in many previous studies.

First, interpersonal contact flourishes at work. Most American adults are employed, most workers spend more time on the job than in the neighborhood or in organizations, and virtually all jobs require contact with coworkers or customers. Studies of personal relationships point to the workplace as important for social interaction (Hodson 2004) and the formation of social networks (Fine 1986) and as a key source of social support in times of personal crisis (Adelman, Parks, and Albrecht 1987). Moreover, political discussion is enhanced by being in the labor force (Straits 1991), and political discussion is associated with working outside the home (Burstein 1972). Patterns of sociability increasingly center on workplace connections (Poarch 1997), and people report knowing people at work better than people in their own neighborhoods (Wuthnow 1999).

In addition, the balkanizing influence of self-selection cannot operate in the workplace to the same extent as in residential selection, group membership, or church attendance. Most people work out of necessity rather than by choice, and workers generally cannot choose their coworkers and customers in the same manner that they can pick a neighborhood or a church. As Neuberger observes, in the workplace, "Encounters and relationships are unavoidable: it is impossible to simply 'keep out of the way' of certain people even if they have not selected each other" (1996, 272; see also Auhagen and von Salisch 1996; Campbell, Marsden, and Hurlbert 1986; Derlega and Winstead 1986). Further, the degree of demographic diversity in the workplace exceeds that of most residential areas, making it a more likely context for encountering dissimilar others.

Moreover, politics is a quintessentially "public" conversational topic, much like sports and popular television programs, making it well suited to nonintimate conversations among coworkers. Based on face-to-face interviews with 200 middle-class Americans, Poarch concurs that work serves as an important social context for public dialogue: "When people brought up stories from their work, it was most often in the context of discussing experiences or conversations which informed their ideas about public issues

and the common good (rather than private matters)" (1997, 181).

Beyond these characteristics, a number of contemporary trends in workplace organization may be encouraging more conversations among those of differing perspectives. Emphasis on cultivating "human capital," coupled with new methods of organizing production and managing workers, may function to erase boundaries that once insulated workers from those with backgrounds unlike their own (Cohen and Prusak 2001; Whitman 1999). Management styles have moved away from the hierarchical Taylorist model, and now put greater emphasis on interaction and communication between individuals working together in nonhierarchical teams (Chilton and Weidenbaum 1994, Louis and Yan 1996; Peters 1992). The American workplace also has become more tolerant of various personal characteristics and lifestyles, and this has been reflected in policies addressing promotions, benefits, and dress codes (Whitman 1999). As Thomas advises, "The thrust of today's nonhierarchical, flexible, collaborative management requires a ten- or twenty-fold increase in our tolerance for individuality" (1990, 112).

Research in political science has demonstrated the political significance of social interaction, and research in sociology has identified the workplace as a unique context for social activity, but few scholars have linked these perspectives (but see Lipset, Trow, and Coleman 1956 for an early exception). Nonetheless, a few studies involving subnational samples have hinted at the workplace's importance for political discussion. Finifter (1974) studied social influence in work groups at Michigan auto plants. She found that auto workers talked about politics much more at work than in any other context, including among nonwork friends, in voluntary groups, among neighbors, and with relatives.[2] Likewise, in a survey asking Ohioans about their discussions of the 1988 campaign, Beck (1991) found they were most likely to have such discussions with spouses and coworkers and least likely with neighbors (cf. Wyatt, Katz, and Kim 2000; Wyatt et al. 1996). Banaszak and Leighley (1991) found that the work-related social context had a significant impact on women's attitudes toward the women's movement, changes in attitudes that were not transmitted through neighborhoods. In a study of three American communities and three British communities, Conover, Searing, and Crewe (2002) noted that public discussions of politics were most common at work and in neighborhoods. Mutz and Martin (2001) found that the workplace involved greater political diversity on average than voluntary associations. And finally, Huckfeldt and colleagues (1995) report a significant positive coefficient for discussants who are coworkers in their regression equation predicting the frequency of discussion within network dyads.

Viewed collectively, the research examined here offers a strong case regarding the potential of the workplace to foster cross-cutting political discourse. Nonetheless, some have treated this hypothesis with skepticism, because they assume that politics is basically "off limits" as a topic of conversation at work. As Rosenberg noted in the 1950s, talking about politics can pose threats to an individual's occupational success:

> The man engaged in commerce cannot afford to alienate *either* Democrats or Republicans; in this sense business is not merely apolitical but anti-political. Similarly an employer may be reluctant to alienate his workers, and a worker may be unwilling to jeopardize his job, in defense of his political principles. These factors may be extremely significant deterrents to the free expression of political ideas. (1954–55, 353)

Consistent with this view, some argue that we should not expect much from the workplace in fostering public discourse. For example, citing evidence of decreasing job security, Putnam dismisses the possibility that "water cooler" discussions of public affairs could serve as the equivalent of a "town square" for political conversation (2000, 92). Our review suggests that this dismissal may be premature. Likewise, recent research by Hodson (2004) establishes that rich social lives abound at work and that social interaction is not dampened by workers' concerns over job security. To what extent those interactions involve political discussion remains to be seen.

Our interest in the capacity of the workplace to serve as a context for cross-cutting political conversation presupposes that such conversations are of value.

[2]Finifter also reports that political deviants in the workplace she studied (i.e., Republicans) tended to choose friends within their work groups who shared their partisan attitudes, thus selectivity was found even at work. This result does not undercut our argument that the workplace, *viewed relative to other social contexts*, fosters exposure to diverse perspectives. Regardless of self-selection based on political similarity, most workers still engage in prolonged interaction with casual acquaintances. Also, the effect Finifter identified took place among workers who were an extreme minority in a highly politicized context—Republicans in 1960s Detroit auto factories. In a study with data from more politically heterogeneous work sites, Mondak and Mutz (2001) found no evidence that workers select discussion partners on the basis of shared partisanship. Instead, the partisanship of discussion partners was related to the partisan composition of the work site as a whole, a finding consistent with Huckfeldt and Sprague's (1995) claim that the choice of a discussion partner is partly the result of a stochastic process.

One often-proposed consequence is a greater awareness of the bases for other viewpoints. If people's horizons narrow through strictly like-minded interactions, polarization and extremism may result from a lack of understanding of multiple political perspectives (Sunstein 2001). Contact with people of differing views is also seen as essential to the perception of a legitimate opposition (Benhabib 1996) and to political tolerance. Borhek's theory of incongruent experience posits that tolerance is "the result of experiences which are characterized by heterogeneity of ideas or direct or vicarious exposure to other ways of life and other ways of defining situations" (1965, 89). This theory leads him to the hypothesis that social exposure to incongruent views will be positively related to political tolerance.

Evidence documenting benefits from exposure to incongruent ideas remains relatively thin, particularly evidence specific to the possible consequences of workplace-based political conversation. Nonetheless, workplace-based interactions have been used by some as a post hoc explanation for why certain demographic groups are more tolerant than others. For example, Nunn, Crockett, and Williams speculate that men are more tolerant than women because of differences in the extent of work-life experience: "Practically all men work outside the home and thus are more likely than women to be exposed to the sorts of diversity that enhance tolerance in the course of their day to day lives" (1978, 115; see also Stouffer 1955). Likewise, Rose (1952) suggested that interaction among members of a union contributed to more positive attitudes toward minority groups. Unfortunately, the hypothesis linking social contact in the workplace to political tolerance through cross-cutting interactions has yet to be tested using multivariate analyses. Further, some claims regarding work and tolerance suggest that workplace interactions should *decrease* political tolerance because of the workplace's hierarchical, authoritarian organizational structure (e.g., Korman 1971; Sutton and Porter 1968). Still others have argued that workplace-based discourse is unlikely to result in either positive or negative effects due simply to the weak nature of these social ties (Putnam 2000).

In the analyses that follow, we first examine whether conversations across lines of political difference do, in fact, flourish at work. We then explore the possibility that encountering disagreement in workplace discussion networks yields specific tangible benefits, with focus on two of the consequences addressed above, tolerance and awareness of the rationales for opposing issue positions.

Study Design

We draw on a 1996 national survey funded by the Spencer Foundation, Huckfeldt and Sprague's (1995) data on discussion networks in South Bend, Indiana in 1984, the U.S. component of the 1992 Cross National Election Project (CNEP), the 1985 and 1987 General Social Surveys (GSS), and the 2000 National Election Study (NES).[3] These data sets are useful for examining political discussion in the workplace because all include social network questions in which people are asked to identify others with whom they discuss politics or, in the case of the GSS, people with whom they discuss "important problems." This means that the measures described below reveal actual political discussion in the workplace and elsewhere, not merely the potential for such discussion to occur. Items used to identify discussants varied slightly from study to study, as did the categories used to identify the origins of these discussants and the extent to which their views were similar to or different from those of the respondent. Nonetheless, each of these studies tells a remarkably similar story.

Each survey included items exploring respondents' relationships with several discussion partners. These batteries varied in three important respects. First, three surveys identified up to three discussants per respondent, versus four discussants on the 2000 NES and five on the 1985 GSS and 1992 CNEP. Second, the GSS surveys prompted respondents to name individuals with whom they discussed "important problems," while the CNEP asked about people with whom they talked about "important matters" for the first four discussants and about a campaign discussant for the fifth, and the South Bend, Spencer, and NES surveys focused explicitly on *political* discussants. A third difference concerns the categories used to identify sources of discussants. Many of the categories refer to physical contexts such as the workplace, the neighborhood, groups, and the church. But in some of the surveys, additional categories are nebulous with respect to context, such as "met through relatives." Taking these minor differences into account, we looked for a consistent pattern regarding the hypothesis that the workplace is a vital source of the kind of political discussion argued to be most important.

These data made it possible to test our first hypothesis with three data sets that included all of the necessary measures for evaluating how much cross-

[3]An appendix in which coding of our key variables is described appears on the *Journal of Politics* web site, http://www.journalofpolitics.org.

cutting political conversation goes on in each context (South Bend, Spencer, and CNEP). Three additional data sets provide partial information, and thus are useful for establishing a consistent overall pattern (1985 GSS, 1987 GSS, 2000 NES). For purposes of testing our second hypothesis, that this kind of workplace-based political talk has consequences, the combination of independent and dependent variables available in the Spencer and GSS data made possible five independent tests of possible consequences.

We began testing our hypotheses by determining in which social contexts dyads are more likely to involve cross-cutting political discussion. Next, we combined these dyad-level measures to create indicators of the amount of cross-cutting political discussion each *respondent* encountered through work. We then used these individual-level measures to examine whether workplace-based cross-cutting discussion has any of the beneficial consequences typically attributed to cross-cutting conversations in more conventional contexts for political interaction.

Where Do Americans Encounter Cross-Cutting Political Views?

To address our first research question, Table 1 examines the prevalence of cross-cutting political discussion across social contexts, primarily using dyads as the unit of analysis. The far right column in Table 1 summarizes the average extent of individual-level cross-cutting political discussion at work relative to other social contexts. The indicators in the preceding columns detail the construction of the summary measure and provide insight into why the workplace stands out in this regard.

To address the hypothesis that the workplace is uniquely important for conversations involving differing political perspectives, we needed a measure combining information on the extent to which discussants represent a differing political perspective, the frequency of political discussions within each dyad, and the total number of dyads formed through that context. If workers converse with like-minded others who hold similar political views, then the capacity for these interactions to enrich democratic dialogue would be limited. Likewise if the frequency of political discussion is low, then the potential for such discussion to contribute toward a public sphere would be limited. And even if both dissimilarity and frequency are high for the average dyad from a given social context, this will matter little if very few dyads come from that context. Ultimately our case must rest on the *type* of political discussions that transpire in the workplace, as well as their *frequency*, and the *number* of discussants with whom such discussions transpire. The Total Exposure to Disagreement measure takes into account the extent of disagreement with discussant dyads in each context as shown in column 4, and the frequency of political discussion with each discussant, as shown in column 3. This weighted measure shown in column 5 is then converted into an indicator of Total Exposure to Disagreement in the social context by taking into account the proportion of all discussion dyads that come from that context (shown in column 1).

Is there more cross-cutting political discussion in workplaces than other contexts? As the last column of Table 1 reveals, the workplace excels as a locus for cross-cutting political discussion. In the South Bend survey, Total Exposure to Disagreement in the workplace is significantly greater relative to all other social contexts. In column five, we see that workplace dyads in South Bend equal or surpass those from other contexts in terms of frequent, cross-cutting political discourse. In the final column, upon taking into account the fact that nearly half of nonrelative discussants come from the workplace, we see that the typical individual is exposed to far more disagreement at work than elsewhere. Because residents of South Bend may not provide a representative picture of the nation as a whole, the Spencer and CNEP surveys are of particular interest. In the summary scales for the Spencer survey, we again see evidence of greater amounts of political discussion involving disagreement at work. All other social contexts provide significantly less cross-cutting political discussion than the workplace. The one comparison that does not achieve statistical significance corresponds to those who met "through a friend." It is difficult to know what context is implied by this reference, but it is notable that the same general pattern is also in evidence in the far right column for the CNEP survey. In these data, we see that the workplace fosters significantly more cross-cutting political discussion than churches or neighborhoods, but the "other" category, while lower, is not significantly so. Overall, these findings corroborate our hypothesis about the unique nature of the workplace. Relative to other tangible social contexts, the workplace is home to a great deal more political discussion that crosses lines of political difference.

A closer look at the additional data in Table 1 suggests why the workplace fares so well relative to other social contexts. First, as shown in the initial column, the workplace is the leading source of political

Table 1 Political Disagreement in Nonrelative Discussion Dyads, by Social Context

	1. Percent of nonrelative discussion partners	2. Average frequency of discussion in dyads	3. Average frequency of political discussion in dyads	4. Average extent of disagreement in dyads	5. Extent of disagreement in dyads weighted by dyad-level frequency of political discussion	6. Total exposure to disagreement by social context[b]
1984 South Bend Study						
Workplace (N = 1,077)	48.0	2.48	1.24	1.58	2.10	1.01
Groups (215)	9.6***	1.86***	1.33#	1.37**	2.04	.20***
Neighbors (423)	18.9***	1.99***	1.20	1.30***	1.76***	.33***
Met via relatives (236)	10.5***	1.92***	1.24	1.46#	1.87*	.20***
School (85)	3.8***	2.16***	1.35	1.44	1.98	.08***
Casual acquaintance (208)	9.3***	1.93***	1.32	1.50	2.19	.20***
1996 Spencer Foundation Study						
Workplace (N = 450)	35.2		2.21	1.88	4.22	1.49
Vol. associations (61)	4.8***		2.25	1.31***	3.10*	.15***
Through a friend (416)	32.5		2.17	1.80	4.11	1.34
Grew up together (147)	11.5***		2.46*	1.69	4.23	.49***
Neighbors (81)	6.5***		1.96#	1.51	3.57	.23***
Other (123)	9.6***		1.98*	1.33***	3.27**	.31***
1992 Cross-National Election Project						
Workplace (N = 498)	33.2		1.89	1.74	3.36	1.12
Church (197)	13.1***		1.69**	1.23***	2.17***	.28***
Neighbors (250)	16.7***		1.80	1.67	3.13	.52***
Other (555)	37.0		1.84	1.51***	2.85***	1.05
1985 General Social Survey[a]						
Workplace (N = 663)	32.2	2.55				
Groups (423)	20.5***	2.16**				
Neighbors (316)	15.3***	2.32				
Advisors (334)	16.2***	1.81***				
Other (746)	36.2	2.09				
1987 General Social Survey[a]						
Workplace (N = 417)	28.4		2.67			
Groups (288)	19.6***		2.33#			
Neighbors (279)	19.0***		2.36#			
Advisors (407)	27.7		2.20***			
Other (394)	26.8		2.23***			
2000 National Election Study[a]						
Workplace (N = 793)	48.4		1.91			
Church (229)	14.0***		2.02			
Neighbors (442)	27.0***		2.03**			
Other (403)	24.3***		2.03**			

***$p < .001$; **$p < .01$; *$p < .05$; #$p < .10$.

Note: All significance tests are based on contrasts between the workplace and the other contexts. There are 1,534 respondents on the 1985 GSS, 91.1% of whom named at least one discussion partner. Corresponding values for the others surveys are: 1987 GSS N = 1,466 (94.1%); 1984 South Bend (c wave) N = 1,512 (94.3%); 1996 Spencer N = 780 (90.0%); 1992 CNEP N = 1,318 (91.4%); 2000 NES N = 1,551 (74.3%).

[a]Percentages in column 1 sum to greater than 100 because GSS and NES respondents could name multiple categories for each discussion partner. Data are coded such that overlapping membership is permitted for all categories except the "Other" category, which includes only non-relative discussion partners who are not known to respondents through other identified social contexts.

[b]Total exposure was constructed by weighting the dyad-level figures in column 5 by the total number of dyads that came from that social context, as shown by the percentages in column 1. Thus the highest total exposure to disagreement in a social context would be produced by a high extent of disagreement, coupled with a high frequency of political discussion, and many dyads from that particular social context.

discussion partners on five of the six surveys, and a close second on the sixth, the 1985 GSS. Although the "Other" categories on the two GSS surveys and the CNEP and the "Met through a friend" category on the Spencer battery are not significantly different from the workplace, *in every instance in which the workplace is contrasted with another specific context, the workplace not only supplied a greater number of discussion partners, but also did so by a statistically significant margin*. This evidence is especially impressive given that many respondents are not employed. If we were to make these same comparisons strictly among those who work and who thus have the opportunity to find discussants in this venue, the workplace would stand out to an even greater extent.

But as the additional columns in Table 1 make clear, this relative advantage is not purely a function of the large number of people with whom workers interact on the job. Dyads formed through the workplace are also most likely to involve people of disparate political perspectives. Across all three surveys, the fourth column shows that the average extent of disagreement is consistently greatest for the workplace, though the differences are not always significant. In South Bend respondents perceived the highest level of political disagreement with discussion partners whom they met through work. Political disagreement with workplace discussants was perceived to be greater than for people met through groups ($p < .01$), neighbors ($p < .001$), and those met through relatives ($p < .10$). Only those whose origin was described as simply a "casual social acquaintance" rivaled the extent of disagreement offered by workplace discussants. People known through groups or through the neighborhood do particularly poorly when it comes to providing political disagreement.

A more extensive, five-item index of political dissimilarity confirmed this same pattern in the Spencer study. Discussants from the workplace were more likely than those from other contexts to be described as disagreeing when discussing politics, opposing rather than sharing their political views, holding views that were generally different from those of the respondent, and to be of a differing political party and to have voted for a different presidential candidate. Similar to results from the South Bend study, voluntary associations were perceived to provide very little exposure to dissimilar political views in the national sample. Likewise, in the CNEP data, levels of disagreement were highest among discussants from the workplace relative to those from other contexts. Disagreement with discussants from church, the only voluntary association included on the CNEP, was particularly rare, corroborating the basic pattern from the South Bend and Spencer studies.

At first glance, data on the frequency of political discussion in the third column of Table 1 are mixed. Although coworker dyads yield the highest frequency levels of any context in three of the surveys, most of these differences do not reach statistical significance, and three of the comparisons suggest that other contexts may produce a slightly higher frequency of discussion. On deeper inspection, however, these data may mask the significance of the workplace by virtue of the way questions were asked. In South Bend, for instance, frequency of political discussion was measured by asking "When you talk with [name], about how often do you discuss politics? Do you discuss politics most times that you talk with him/her, fairly often, only once in a while, or never?" Similar items were used on the Spencer, CNEP, and NES surveys. Vague quantifiers that ask for the relative frequency of an event are notoriously difficult to interpret as absolute frequencies (Schaeffer 1991). The absolute frequency implied by a relative frequency statement depends on how often the general event occurs (Pepper and Prytulak 1974). The *proportion* of conversations that have political content is comparable in the workplace and elsewhere, but there are more actual conversations—and more discussion partners—at work, and therefore more political discussion. Hence, the workplace gains its relative advantage by virtue of the high number of conversations in general that take place there, not by politics dominating as a topic of discussion. This interpretation is reinforced by data from the 1987 GSS. There, the frequency of political discussion was measured using an item that directly tapped absolute frequency, ranging from never to almost daily. Measured in this manner, we see that political discussion occurs significantly more often at work than elsewhere.

Overall then, it is the large number of political discussants from work, *combined* with the political diversity of discussants from the workplace and the volume of conversation at work that makes it such fertile territory for political discourse. Taken together, these indicators make a strong case for the workplace as an important context for cross-cutting political interaction. The advantage of testing our first hypothesis using network discussion batteries designed for more general purposes is that respondents were asked questions that were neutral with respect to social context, so it is unlikely they were prompted to think about what happens at work as opposed to any other social context. Moreover, since the measures we developed for purposes of summary comparison were con-

structed from independent assessments of own and network members' political predispositions, political discussion frequencies, and so forth, respondents were not aware that comparisons by social context were being made when describing their networks.

Nonetheless, it is also of interest to hear respondents' subjective impressions of how much they are exposed to diverse political perspectives in different social contexts. In the Spencer study, tests based on the discussants named by each respondent were augmented by additional comparisons. Respondents were asked the same five questions that they were asked about each discussant's political leanings, frequency of discussion, and so forth, but in this case about members of a randomly selected voluntary association to which they belonged, and about the people with whom they interacted at work. These questions focused attention directly on discussants in these two contexts, regardless of whether these contexts had come up when respondents named their three main political discussants as part of the general network battery. The same measure of extent of disagreement depicted in column 4 of Table 1 was roughly twice as high for the workplace as for voluntary associations, and significantly different. Thus, whether these questions are asked in terms of specific individuals, or more globally about people at work or people in a group to which the respondent belongs, the results look the same. Data from multiple sources provide strong corroboration of the hypothesis that the workplace surpasses other contexts as a locus for cross-cutting political discourse.[4]

To summarize, discussion of politics is not off limits at work. On the contrary, discussion of potentially controversial topics appears to thrive in the American workplace. What remains to be determined is what consequences arise from these conversations. Previous research has identified tangible benefits of cross-cutting political discussion more generally (e.g., Mutz 2002), but questions linger regarding whether political discussion in the workplace yields these same effects.

[4]In the analyses conducted thus far, no distinctions have been made regarding occupation type. Although the workplace as a whole may foster cross-cutting political discourse, one might speculate on systematic variance across workplaces. We examined this matter using South Bend and CNEP data for employed respondents, with data disaggregated following the occupation categories developed by the Bureau of the Census. Estimated marginal means were virtually identical across occupation categories, and in no instance was a statistically significant difference detected.

Does Workplace-Based Political Interaction Promote Deliberative Goals?

In this study, the data provide opportunities to examine two potential consequences of the fact that interactions on the job expose workers to diverse viewpoints. We first consider effects on individuals' levels of awareness of rationales for opposing political viewpoints. Awareness of rationales for oppositional views has been posited as a general product of political exchanges that involve disagreement (Mutz 2002; Price, Cappella, and Nir 2002), but it remains to be seen whether conversations around the water cooler can serve this same purpose. Second, we also evaluate effects on political tolerance, because tolerance has been widely asserted to flow from contact among people of differing views, either because of the information exchanged during informal contact, or because of the relationships that form across lines of difference. In a recent meta-analysis of intergroup contact findings, the workplace was noted as the social context *most* conducive to beneficial intergroup contact (Pettigrew and Tropp 2000). Working together potentially creates favorable conditions for fostering the kind of cross-cutting contact that leads to an understanding of diverse perspectives.

In our analyses we go beyond the descriptive associations between employment and democratic values documented by others to evaluate the proposed mechanism of influence that is typically asserted to account for these relationships—informal political discussion among nonlike-minded coworkers. In addition, we offer better operationalizations of the independent variable in order to more closely approximate the phenomenon widely assumed to play the key role in establishing this relationship—the extent of cross-cutting political discourse that takes place at work. If cross-cutting political conversation is, indeed, central to this process, then we would expect to find that workers exposed to a great deal of cross-cutting conversation through their workplaces should exhibit more of these consequences than those exposed to less of it. We next draw on all available social network surveys that allow us some purchase on this hypothesis. In total, these data made it possible to conduct five independent tests of the relationship between cross-cutting political discussion in the workplace and consequences relevant to a healthy public sphere.

Awareness of Rationales for Opposing Viewpoints. The Spencer data permit us to test whether political

conversations with nonlike-minded coworkers increased awareness of rationales for opposing political views. To tap awareness of rationales for differing viewpoints, a series of items assessed respondents' opinions on three issues, including state versus federal control of welfare, affirmative action, and the 1996 presidential candidates. After each issue, respondents were asked to mention any reasons they could in support of either issue position. Independent coders then assessed the number of unique arguments respondents generated in support of their own issue position, and in support of the opposing position. To create general indicators of respondents' levels of awareness of the rationales *supporting* their own issue positions, we summed the number of arguments in support of each respondent's own positions across the three issues. This indicator served as an important control variable.[5] Likewise, we created our dependent variable by combining the unique arguments generated for *opposing* points of view across the three controversies.

To produce respondent-level measures of the cross-cutting political conversation encountered through work, we used the summary measures of how frequently each respondent was exposed to political conversation at work, and the indicator summarizing the extent to which people at work were in political agreement or disagreement with the main respondent; the resulting variable is recoded to range in value from 0 to 1. A second respondent-level operationalization of exposure to cross-cutting views at work was created by summing the dyad-level measures shown in column 5 of Table 1 across all of each respondent's discussants that came from the workplace. Observations on this variable take on values between 0 and 18.

We hypothesized that greater awareness of rationales for opposing views would result from the political discussion across lines of difference that takes place at work. In other words, communication across lines of difference among coworkers should promote an awareness of the legitimate bases of political conflict. But it is important to disentangle this hypothesized effect from plausible rival explanations, such as the possibility that political discussion more generally has these beneficial effects. For these reasons we also included an indicator of the general frequency with which each respondent discussed politics at work, and another variable indicating the average frequency of political discussion in the respondent's general discussion network, including discussion partners from all social contexts.

Given that politically sophisticated respondents are likely to generate more unique arguments for oppositional viewpoints as a result of higher information levels, it is important to control for political knowledge. Those who happened to be interested in the particular issues used to form our dependent variable would be expected to score higher as a result as well, so we include awareness of rationales for one's *own* opinion on these same issues as a control variable. It would not be surprising, nor particularly informative, to find that high levels of political discussion go hand in hand with high levels of information about political issues. But by controlling for general political knowledge,[6] as well as for issue-specific knowledge, we eliminate substantial variance extraneous to our research question. Our model also includes controls for age, education, sex, race, marital status, partisanship, and ideology.[7] Because our dependent variable is a count variable with a preponderance of zeroes and ones (59%), we analyzed these data using Poisson regression.

Table 2 provides two tests, one using measures of the overall extent of political disagreement in the workplace as the key independent variable, and the second drawing on the network dyad measures aggregated across each respondent as described above.[8] The

[5]In order for respondents' arguments to be coded as rationales for opposing views or for their own views, respondents needed to have nonneutral preferences on the issues. For example, if a respondent took a neutral stance on one of the three issues and a nonneutral stance on the other two, then the score for the dependent variable is a count of opposing rationales for the latter two issues, with no additional arguments added for the third, since it cannot be determined which side is consistent with the respondent's own views. Thus scores on the dependent variable will vary partly as a function of the number of neutral stances taken by respondents. To control for the fact that some respondents did not have opinions for some issues, the model includes as a control variable the number of issues on which the respondent took a nonneutral stance.

[6]Political knowledge is operationalized as a count of correct answers on the five-item scale developed by Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996). For some dependent variables, such a scale performs inadequately because it fails to capture the differential effects of incorrect versus "don't know" responses (Mondak 2001). To confirm that the dependent variable used here is not susceptible to this problem, we ran an alternate model in which we substituted counts of incorrect and "don't know" responses for the political knowledge scale. The test variables failed to produce differing effects.

[7]We omit income as a control variable from this and subsequent multivariate analyses in order to preserve a more representative sample, but in no case did it alter the pattern of findings we observed. Although a question addressing union membership was also available in these data, it made no contribution to any of the models in any of these analyses, and thus was also omitted.

[8]Because several of the predictors in Table 2 directly or indirectly involve information levels (education, political knowledge,

Table 2 Cross-Cutting Discussion in the Workplace and Awareness of Rationales for Opposing Views

	Model 1	Model 2
Constant	−2.85***	−2.42***
	(.36)	(.34)
Democrat	.08	.11
	(.11)	(.11)
Republican	−.05	−.05
	(.11)	(.11)
Liberal	−.06	−.04
	(.05)	(.05)
Conservative	−.03	−.01
	(.04)	(.04)
Political knowledge	.09*	.09*
	(.04)	(.04)
Number of issues on which respondent has an opinion	.46***	.41***
	(.10)	(.10)
Awareness of rationales supporting own issue positions	.06**	.06**
	(.02)	(.02)
General frequency of political discussion	.05	.06
	(.05)	(.05)
Frequency of political discussion at work	.09#	
	(.05)	
Extent of political disagreement within workplace	.49*	
	(.19)	
Frequency of political discussion in workplace discussion networks		.00
		(.02)
Extent of political disagreement in workplace discussion network, weighted by frequency of political discussion in dyads		.03*
		(.01)
χ^2	207.43	186.65
Pseudo R^2	.32	.30
Number of cases	400	379

Source: 1996 Spencer Survey, workers only.
Note: Cell entries are Poisson regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variable is a count of the number of rationales offered by respondents for issue positions opposite of the positions held by the respondents. Models include controls for age, education, sex, race and marital status.
***$p < .001$; **$p < .01$; *$p < .05$; #$p < .10$.

results reported in the first column of Table 2 demonstrate that it is not the overall frequency of political discussion, nor even the general frequency of political discussion at work, that matters for purposes of promoting an awareness of oppositional views. Instead, it is the extent of political disagreement in the workplace that has the most impressive effect on respondents' understanding of oppositional viewpoints.[9] In the second column, we see that using the network-based measures produces similar results. The dependent variable has a mean value of 1.45. With other variables held constant at their means, predicted values of awareness of oppositional views increase from 1.05 to 1.71 across the range of our first indicator of exposure to cross-cutting communication in the workplace, and

number of issues on which respondent has an opinion, awareness of rationales supporting own issue positions), we initially were concerned about possible collinearity. However, two factors assuaged this concern. First, all of the variables in question yield statistically significant coefficients, suggesting that any adverse effect of collinearity on standard errors is not so great as to prevent detection of significant effects. Second, diagnostic tests revealed that collinearity is minimal. For example, when each independent variable in Table 2 is regressed on all other predictors, the highest R^2 value, which is obtained when political knowledge is the dependent variable, is only .42.

[9]To ensure that Poisson regression was appropriate, we estimated a negative binomial model and contrasted it with the Poisson specification. The negative binomial model's overdispersion parameter was insignificant. For the respondents in this analysis, the dependent variable was mean = 1.45, s.d. = 1.56, and the frequencies are 0 (35.3%), 1 (23.9), 2 (20.1), 3 (10.6), 4 and higher (10.2; highest observed value is 11).

from 1.24 to 2.13 for the second measure. The influence of cross-cutting discourse is over and above the significant effect associated with general frequency of political discussion and the effect of frequency of political discussion within the workplace. In both columns, we see evidence of the mechanism we have proposed for employment's beneficial effects. Regardless of how we operationalize it, the extent of disagreement encountered in discussions at work is important to an understanding of "the other side."

Political Tolerance. Two of the surveys made it possible to evaluate consequences of cross-cutting workplace discourse for political tolerance. Both the 1985 GSS and the 1996 Spencer survey included tolerance items as well as network measures, although they differ in the measurement strategies used and in the level of detail available in the indicators. The GSS uses a modified Stouffer tolerance battery, while the Spencer survey includes a content-controlled measure consistent with Sullivan, Piereson, and Marcus (1982). In the GSS, the tolerance measure is a count of how many controversial acts respondents would tolerate, ranging from 0 to 15. On the Spencer survey, tolerance is an index constructed as an average of six tolerance items, each ranging from one to four.

Although neither data set offers the ideal set of variables for testing the tolerance hypothesis, we reasoned that if consistent results were found using data from two different surveys, with two forms of the dependent variable, and different means of operationalizing the independent variable, then we would be able to offer a more definitive statement regarding the link between talking politics at work and political tolerance than from a single test. At a minimum, our analyses have the potential to move theoretical insight and empirical support for the effects of workplace interaction well beyond the simple association between working and tolerance that has been previously noted.

With the Spencer survey we can isolate the frequency of political discussion and of political disagreement, specifically with those known through work. These items allow us to differentiate the potential consequences of frequent discussion, and discussion that is nonlike-minded in perspective. As in the analyses of awareness of rationales for oppositional views, we include a large number of control variables to rule out plausible spurious relationships, including the frequency of political discussion in the workplace, and the average frequency of interaction with members of respondents' general discussion networks.

As shown in Table 3, tolerance varies as a function of the frequency of political discussion at work, but even more so due to exposure to political disagreement at work. Consistent with the theory predicting this relationship, the nature and content of interactions is most pertinent for political tolerance. Evidence in the first column suggests that workplace-based political discussion has positive implications for political tolerance.[10] Because the indicator of exposure to disagreement at work has values between 0 and 1, the .37 coefficient corresponds with a shift in value of .37 points on the tolerance dependent variable, or better than half a standard deviation, across the range of the workplace variable. In the second column of Table 3, the independent measures based on each respondent's aggregated dyads fail to produce consistent results. Here neither Frequency of political discussion nor Extent of difference weighted by frequency produce significant findings.

We formulated one additional test of the consequences of political conversations at work based on the 1985 GSS data. Unfortunately, the GSS discussion battery did not include direct assessment of exposure to disagreement, thus we had to settle for an indirect, imperfect proxy. We know from Table 1 that workplace dyads bring individuals into contact with persons of diverse social and political views, so it follows that the highest probability of exposure to disagreement at work will be among respondents with the largest number of discussants from work, as opposed to discussants from other social contexts. While dyads from other contexts certainly can contribute to cross-cutting exposure, workplace discussants should stand out in this regard.

Thus, in the analysis in Table 4, we treat the number of discussants each respondent draws from the workplace as a proxy for the extent of cross-cutting political conversation at work. The Spencer data provide an opportunity to gauge just how close a proxy the number of workplace-based discussants is likely to be for this item. In that survey the number of discussants from the workplace and direct assessment of the extent of cross-cutting conversation at work

[10]Research on the composition of workplace discussion networks corroborates our claim of a causal relationship between exposure to disagreement and political tolerance. For causality to be specified incorrectly it would have to be that individuals high in tolerance seek out disagreement in political discourse. However, the composition of the context, not a worker's own views, is the primary force influencing network composition in the workplace (Mondak and Mutz 2001), and respondents reported that discussants initiated a preponderance of conversations about politics, often against the wishes of the respondents.

Table 3 The Impact of Cross-Cutting Discussion in the Workplace on Political Tolerance

	Model 1	Model 2
Constant	1.15***	1.47***
	(.20)	(.18)
Democrat	–.07	–.07
	(.08)	(.08)
Republican	–.14#	–.13
	(.08)	(.08)
Liberal	.04	.03
	(.04)	(.04)
Conservative	–.04	–.04
	(.03)	(.03)
Political knowledge	.16***	.16***
	(.03)	(.03)
General frequency of political discussion	.04	.06
	(.04)	(.04)
Frequency of political discussion at work	.08*	
	(.04)	
Extent of political disagreement within workplace	.37*	
	(.16)	
Frequency of political discussion in workplace discussion networks		–.01
		(.02)
Extent of political disagreement in workplace discussion network, weighted by frequency of political discussion in dyads		.00
		(.01)
R^2	.30	.27
Number of cases	381	360

Source: 1996 Spencer Survey, workers only.
Note: Cell entries are OLS regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variable is political tolerance measured via a least-like group protocol. Models include controls for age, education, sex, race and marital status.
***$p < .001$; *$p < .05$; #$p < .10$.

were closely correlated ($r = .82$, $p < .001$). The strength of this relationship between a direct measure and its proxy gives us confidence in the measure we use with GSS data.

In order to take into account other network influences, additional predictors were included, representing the number of political discussion dyads drawn from within the family (all relatives, including spouses), from group members (excluding relatives and coworkers), and from other nonrelatives. Because the workplace facilitates cross-cutting political discourse more than these other contexts, and we hypothesize that this exposure promotes tolerance, we expected the number of political discussants who are coworkers to be positively related to political tolerance.

This analysis still leaves open the possibility that working people (who naturally have more discussants from that context than nonworkers do) are more tolerant than nonworkers because of some third variable promoting a spurious association between working and tolerant attitudes. To eliminate this possibility, we include a dummy variable in the model representing whether a respondent works outside the home.

Consistent with our expectations, Table 4 suggests that working promotes political tolerance and that political discussion at work is especially valuable toward that end. Tolerance rises sharply as a function of the number of discussion partners from work. A person who named five discussants from work scores, on average, nearly three points higher on the GSS tolerance measure than someone with no workplace discussion partners. Discussions with relatives and group members yield no such effects. The coefficient for other nonrelatives is statistically significant, but smaller in magnitude than the effect for coworkers. The workplace is the leading context for exposure to cross-cutting political discourse; discussion with relatives and group members does not expose individuals to diverse points of view, and discussion with friends and casual acquaintances brings only moderate exposure to political diversity. With those data in mind, the

Table 4 The Impact of Workplace Discussants and Employment Status on Political Tolerance

	Coefficient	Standard Error
Constant	3.22***	.71
Democrat	−.68*	.28
Republican	−.45	.29
Liberal	.95**	.29
Conservative	−.67*	.27
Number of discussants who are relatives	.06	.09
Number of discussants who are nonrelative group members	−.23	.18
Number of discussants who are nonrelative coworkers	.56***	.14
Number of discussants who are other nonrelatives	.36**	.12
Respondent does not work outside of the home	−.60*	.27
R^2	.30	
Number of cases	1,527	

Source: 1985 General Social Survey.
Note: Cell entries are OLS regression coefficients, with t-values in parentheses. The dependent variable is political tolerance as measured using the GSS modified Stouffer battery (0 = low tolerance to 15 = high tolerance). The model includes controls for age, education, sex, race and marital status.
***$p < .001$; **$p < .01$; *$p < .05$.

results in Table 4 strongly support the hypothesis that exposure to incongruent perspectives is positively related to political tolerance.[11] It is also worth noting that those who do not work outside of the home tend to be less tolerant than those who are employed, thus suggesting that even after taking into account any general characteristics that differ between those who work and those who do not, our crude indicators of cross-cutting exposure help identify part of what it is that is beneficial about the workplace.

Political tolerance is about putting up with people whose ideas we reject. For many individuals, this is exactly what is required in the workplace. Coworkers must spend a great deal of time together and engage in cooperative endeavors. Because it is a fertile environment for the expression of diverse political perspectives, the workplace compels incongruent experiences of the precise sort hypothesized to promote legitimacy and political tolerance. The Spencer and GSS results jointly provide corroboration for this proposition in four out of the five tests we were able to construct. Using data from two independent national surveys, and with different specifications of both the dependent variable and the key independent variable, these tests confirm that workplace-based discussion is capable of promoting democratically valuable consequences. Whether we compare those with political discussants drawn from work versus those from other contexts or compare workers in more and less politically agreeable work environments and social networks, cross-cutting discussions in the workplace have beneficial consequences.

How confident should we be that the relationships identified in Tables 2, 3, and 4 represent causal influences? The analysis predicting awareness of oppositional perspectives in Table 2 is, if anything, a conservative specification given that it isolates a very specific kind of awareness by including controls for awareness of rationales on one's own side of the issues, and extremity of opinion, as well as general political knowledge, political discussion frequency, and political interest. Reverse causation also seems implausible in this case, since there is little reason to expect that being aware of oppositional viewpoints will lead one to discuss politics more with nonlike-minded coworkers.[12]

[11]In addition to the OLS model reported in Table 4, we explored two alternate modeling strategies for the GSS tolerance data. First, because the 0 to 15 scale represents a count of responses on a series of dichotomous items, we estimated a negative binomial model (this model's overdispersion parameter was significant, indicating that a Poisson approach is inappropriate). As in the OLS model, the count of discussants from the workplace emerged as a highly significant predictor in the negative binomial model (b = .11, s.e. = .03, $p < .001$), but the dummy for employment status produced an insignificant effect (b = .07, s.e. = .06). Second, with scale values on the dependent variable reversed (0 = maximum tolerance, 15 = maximum intolerance), we estimated a zero-inflated negative binomial model. Mondak and Sanders (2003) argue that this strategy permits differentiation of the presence or absence of intolerance from variance in levels of intolerance. In the current case, results of a Vuong test do, in fact, indicate the superiority of the zero-inflated specification relative to the conventional negative binomial model. In this model, the number of discussion partners from work produced a significant effect in the count equation, suggesting a strong relationship to levels of intolerance (b = −.09, s.e. = .02, $p < .001$), but an insignificant effect in the zero-inflated equation. Conversely, employment status produced a moderate effect only in the zero-inflated equation (−.50, s.e. = .21, $p < .05$).

[12]An anonymous reviewer suggests that understanding of oppositional perspectives may make one more secure, and thus more willing to seek out political disagreement. Although this is possible, it also possible that prior understanding of opposing views alerts some individuals to positions they find objectionable, and thus discourages subsequent exposure to disagreement. Absent evidence to the contrary, we see it as unlikely that either of these

These kinds of considerations should be more of a concern in the analyses of tolerance in Tables 3 and 4. Here it is plausible either that tolerance makes people more likely to talk about politics with nonlike-minded coworkers, or that a spurious relationship is present, perhaps as a result of some unmeasured characteristic such as open-mindedness, which could drive both tolerance and the willingness to talk to coworkers of opposing political views. Our concern for this latter possibility led us to conduct a final empirical test. If, as we have suggested, tolerance drives people's willingness to talk with those of opposing views at work, or some characteristic such as open-mindedness causes both tolerance and willingness to talk with those of opposing views at work, then it follows that these same tolerant/open-minded people should also be more likely to discuss politics across lines of difference in other, nonwork-related, contexts. Interestingly, this is not the case.[13] This result leads us to believe that the extent of cross-cutting exposure one experiences at work has less to do with individual choice and extent of tolerance and has more to do with structural features of one's work environment that promote cross-cutting exposure. This overall pattern gives us increased confidence in our assertion that cross-cutting political conversations at work promote political tolerance.

Discussion

Work is about more than producing widgets and bringing home the bacon. In the process of performing instrumental functions in their places of employment, people experience important incidental exposure to political ideas that differ from their own. Our analyses examining the extent to which citizens engage in political communication converge on one central conclusion: *Of all contexts with the potential for political interaction, the workplace currently has the greatest capacity for exposing people to political dialogue across lines of political difference*. Despite the many reasons one might avoid talking about politics at work, our evidence consistently points to the workplace as a key context for cross-cutting social interactions. The workplace surpasses other social contexts in the number of political discussants it provides. And most importantly, cross-cutting political discourse flourishes with discussants from the workplace.

In addition, our findings go beyond documenting the extent of cross-cutting interactions at work to show that these discussions do, indeed, have some measurable consequences. Even though these exchanges are unlikely to involve the kind of in-depth discussion that theorists might advocate, cross-cutting interactions at work nonetheless lead to greater awareness of the rationales for views other than one's own. By learning about their coworkers' views and perspectives, people gain a better understanding of the legitimate bases of political conflict. In addition, cross-cutting exposure in the workplace may lead to greater political tolerance. The experience of talking with politically dissimilar others may serve to increase workers' appreciation for the rights of groups with whom they personally disagree.

Although the specific reasons that the workplace facilitates cross-cutting discourse warrant additional study, several unique aspects of the workplace are already apparent. First, relationships in the workplace are characterized by frequent, regular contact. People spend a great deal of time at work, typically in the presence of others. This reality fosters casual conversation, including casual conversation about politics. Second, workers tend to have little or no say in the composition of their workforce, yet both formal and informal forces encourage them to get along. Hence, not only is self-selection minimal, there also is an involuntary component to social interaction in the workplace. Third, this sense of "involuntary association" extends to the dyad level. Survey respondents overwhelmingly hold that political topics are fair game in the workplace, and yet many workers indicate that they often are reluctantly, yet unavoidably, drawn into conversations about politics (Mondak and Mutz 2001). In other contexts—the neighborhood, the church, the association, and so on—people are not required to spend long hours in the company of others who are not of their choosing. Fourth, the weak social ties that typically characterize relationships among coworkers may make it easier to acknowledge disagreements than acknowledging them with close social ties such as friends and family. Close friends and family are likely to be in agreement in any case, but when they are not, political differences of opinion can seem threatening among intimates. Finally, although we did not test for such effects here, it is entirely plausible that the workplace also exposes individuals to

dynamics operate with much prevalence, and thus the most plausible explanation for the effect we have identified is that exposure to disagreement fosters understanding of oppositional views.

[13]This test focused on the 294 Spencer respondents for whom there are both workplace and nonworkplace nonrelative discussants. For these, the average disagreement x frequency score per discussant among workplace and nonworkplace discussants is correlated at an insignificant −.03.

nonverbal signals that reinforce or complement the effects of political discussion we identify.

Perhaps more than any other social context, the workplace serves as a setting in which casual discussions of politics transpire among people of opposing views. But this is not to say that the workplace forms a perfect substitute for the street corner or that all workplaces necessarily are equal in fostering cross-cutting political exchange. In light of the general attributes of workplace-based political discussion identified here, we think the political socialization of citizens that takes place through people's work lives is clearly deserving of further study. Past scholarly inattention to the workplace means that the consequences of political communication in this context remain largely unexamined or they are severely limited by available data. Scholars have assessed the role of workplace experiences in fostering the skills needed for political participation and the time and money that serve as important resources toward that same end (e.g., Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). But we have only begun to examine a few of the many potential political consequences of participation in the workforce. Given the unique features of the workplace as a context for social interaction, it is vital that the theoretical benefits of exposure to dissimilar views be explored more fully. We see it as particularly important that we improve our understanding of what it is about the workplace that enables cross-cutting interaction and what implications such interaction has for political behavior outside of the workplace.

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