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Sustaining Dialogue in Polarised Political Contexts: Moving beyond Shared-Identity to Dialogical Position Exchanges

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Abstract

The rise of populism is a prevalent issue on the political landscape both in Europe and the wider world. Such ideologies create defamatory political narratives and exacerbate already partisan social media spaces. This trend challenges psychologists interested in politics to consider what factors could influence dialogue sustainment in these polarised contexts. The current focus of social psychology research is towards identity-based theories to mediate such interactions. The purpose of this paper is to challenge the idea that identity-models are the only effective means of depolarising real-world, discursive political conflicts. This article critiques identity on the following: (1) Ontological assumptions of binary group oppositionality are limiting and unrepresentative of real-world interactions, and (2) Current identity-based models for mediating are ineffective in highly polarised, real-world contexts. We consider the issue of polarising political discourse from a dialogical perspective and propose the Dialogue Sustainment Theoretical Model as an alternative. The model considers: (1) Citizens as political actors with worldviews, (2) The role of the dynamic & relational positionality, and (3) The influence of chronotopic boundaries on political debate. Whilst we acknowledge identity can transcend polarisation in certain contexts, it does not possess such a capacity in politically polarised, real-world contexts. Instead, we argue for an alternative model which is dialogically-focused and offers a distinctive insight into sustaining dialogue.

Keywords: Dialogical, Polarisation, Sustaining Dialogue, *I*-Positions, Social Identity

Introduction

In contemporary capitalist societies, the unrelenting quest for greater productivity has created an era of acceleration. In academia, this acceleration ethos accentuates theoretical models which measure lives within limiting parameters. This is misaligned from the inherent complexity of the world and, instead, supports rationalist ideals in which humanity is ostensibly measurable. Hence the need for models which allow for depth, complexity and offer a counterpoint to this focus on accelerated understanding. That is to say, a type of understanding which prioritises limiting measurements for explaining complex social interactions. The almost ubiquitous use of social media in the last decade shows how these societal accelerations manifest in public discourse. It is undeniable that social media has had a global impact on politics in recent times, be it the #MeToo movement (Peters and Besley, 2019) or #BlackLivesMatter (Ince, Rojas, and Davies, 2017). However, social media also seems to have had a corrosive impact on political discourse among the public. As explored later, the nefarious influence of manipulative algorithms has increased political partisanship (Shin, and Thorson, 2017), polarising narratives (Bail et al. 2018; Gorodnichenko, Pham, and Talavera, 2018), and created public digital spaces unmoored from reality. The threat that these types of social media encounters will merge into real-world interactions is a salient concern. The long-term impact of such influences could create a future in which democracy itself is at stake. For if, as a society, we cannot find a converging reality in which to debate salient issues, political discourse becomes untenable. Shared-identity models offer a valuable explanatory paradigm in many circumstances, however, what is puzzling is how ineffective identity sharing is for polarised political contexts. This article investigates this puzzle, proposing that shared-identity models are inadequate for sustaining dialogue among polarised political interlocuters.

The focus of this article is to introduce an alternative, the Dialogue Sustainment Theoretical Model (DSTM). The aim of which is to better understand how politically polarised individuals could sustain dialogue. The focus is specifically on sustaining dialogue rather than consensus as the former is a more desirable and attainable goal. To avoid any confusion as to our aims, it important to define the difference between 'sustaining dialogue' and 'consensus'. Moscovici and Doise (1994) argue that a fundamental characteristic of consensus in social situations is one in which an active internal choice has occurred (i.e., interlocuters have chosen to search for consensus, rather than conforming to the social norms of polite engagement). However, a complete consensus in highly polarised discussions is unlikely given the realities of political discourse. That is to say, democracy itself requires a certain level of dissensus to function (Rancière, 2016). Thus, our focus here is not to argue that dialogical positioning can produce a complete consensus. Rather, that it may increase the potential individuals have for engaging in political discussion despite obvious differences.

The ability to sustain dialogue in such contexts has a variety of benefits, both to the individual and to wider society. Firstly, the ability for interlocuters to sustain dialogue provides the potential for them to feel they have been respected and received by others. This creates a context that could mediate the perception that those with opposing opinions are corrosive partisans. This is important as such presumptions are the enemy of open-minded engagement with people who possess different opinions. Another important aspect here is that sustaining dialogue offers individuals the experience to know that engaging in such discussions does not have to signal the end of a relationship (be it with a family member,

colleague, etc.). The UK etiquette of 'never talking religion or politics in polite company' does not offer a healthy philosophy for engaging with a conflicting view. Exploring how political psychology could, potentially, provide a better alternative offers an important contribution to society.

Social Media: Polarising paradigms and real-world impact

The rise of populism, for both left and right orientations, has had a polarising impact on how citizens engage in political discourse (Freeden, 2020; Levy and Rezin, 2020; Mahendran, English, and Nieland, 2021a). This negative influence is particularly apparent in discursive engagements on social media. For example, algorithms used on Facebook can create partisan narratives via advertising to heighten political polarisation (Cecan, 2019). Furthermore, segregation and polarisation among social media users due to Facebook's 'echo chambers' results in singular, spurious narratives of political events (Bessi et al. 2016; Del Vicario, Zollo, and Caldarelli, 2017). An additional falsity are social bots which can be designed to either replicate and/or manipulate human behaviour and are increasingly difficult to detect (Ferrara et al, 2016). Evidence of bot activity promoting polarising sentiments is a substantive influencing factor on Twitter users' political discourse (Gorodnichenko, Pham, and Talavera, 2018). It is certainly the case that social media interactions can increase wellbeing and connectiveness for the individual user. For example, among new migrants seeking to settle in an unfamiliar urban environment (Wei and Goa, 2016). Indeed, Raggart et al. (2018) found social media to be beneficial as a support network and information source for those with similar lifestyle goals. However, the issue here is that these social media platforms operate to increase usage rather than increase individual wellbeing. Hence, a system which offers a high prevalence of polarising misinformation and willfully manipulates its users simply to increase engagement.

When considered together, it is difficult to argue that the benefits of social media are not without substantive costs to the quality of public political discussion. The adage 'when you only have a hammer, everything looks like a nail' seems especially salient for political discourse in the social media age. That is to say, all political ills risk being viewed by the social media user through a singular explanatory prism which doesn't offer any capacity for sustaining dialogue with others. Whilst discord and disagreement are an innate reality of politics, polarising online norms seem to be influencing real-world interactions and political worldviews (Ghafar, Shahzad, and Zahir, 2018; Swigger, 2012). Therefore, proposing this Dialogue Sustainment Theoretical Model to better understand discourse in polarised political contexts is timely.

The explanatory value and limitations of Social Identity Theory

Social Identity Theory has been a landmark on the UK & US social/political psychology research landscape for many decades (Hogg, 2016; Hornsey, 2008; Stets and Burke, 2000). The dominance of this theory within the UK & US field of political psychology means it is the likely comparator for any future models exploring similar areas. Therefore, the focus of this section is to outline the importance and limitations of shared-identity theories in order to offer an explanatory context before presenting an alternative. Social Identity theory offers a wide-ranging explanatory value for group processes and intergroup relations (Hornsey, 2008; Sindic and Condor, 2014). The core tenant of Social Identity Theory is that

individuals derive a sense of their identity from group membership. For political group comparisons, three factors must be present: (1) High in-group identification, (2) The opportunity for comparison, and (3) A relevant comparative out-group (Stets and Burke, 2000). These factors offer a valuable framework for exploring discursive polarisation within a political context. This framework guides the Common Ingroup Identity Model's (CIIM) claim that polarisation can be mediated by a shared group identity. That is to say, exposing conflicting individuals to a shared-identity offers the opportunity for recategorization and reduces bias (Gaertner, Dovidio, Anastasio, Bachman, and Rust, 1993). In theory, this creates a super-ordinate identity which attempts to transcend any group conflict (Brewer, 2000). This model has been successful in reducing contact-bias in a variety of areas, e.g., between different nationalities (Eller and Abrams, 2004), and among children in various cultural contexts (Gaertner, Mann, Murrell, and Dovidio, 1989).

Curiously, as indicated at the outset, the adoption of super-ordinate identities does not seem to be as effective in political contexts. Whilst research within the academy (i.e., undergraduates) has shown some promise (Riek et al, 2010), in real-world politically polarised contexts it has not done likewise. For example, in a Northern Irish Protestant-Catholic context, CIIM did not reduce affective polarisation (Noor et al. 2012) or meaningfully increase the salience of the super-ordinate group (McNicholl, 2018). This is a meaningful limitation as the challenges of today's polarised political climate are more heightened then undergraduate samples can replicate. Moreover, research (Glasford and Calcagno, 2010) shows political commonality messages adopted via CIIM for minority identities were readily disrupted by macro-group membership reminders (e.g., the ethnic group of the individual). Such susceptibility to disruption by reminders of identity risks heightening polarisation in already partisan political contexts. Thus, rendering identity potentially unreliable as the basis for creating a model which seeks to reduce polarisation to sustain dialogue.

In response to the idea superordinate identities may not always be effective, the dual identity model emerged which proposes that polarised individuals can co-exist as 'sub-groups'. This dual identity (rather than identity recategorization) offers potential for successful negotiations; particularly when the superordinate group threatens the sub-group (Eggins, Haslam, and Reynolds, 2002; Hornsey and Hogg, 2000). However, the risk here is that a sub-group can be readily dismissed as insubstantial, thus evoking questions of in-group legitimacy. Hopkins, Reicher and Rijswik (2015) found any external criticisms of an in-group (which are likely in political discourse) will only receive a receptive response if the critic has salient identity signifiers. Therefore, if the legitimacy of the shared sub-group identity is questionable, salient signifiers diminish, thus, negating the efficacy of a dual identity.

In contrast to social identity theory's focus on external factors, dialogicality conceives identity as multifaceted and dependent on elements beyond singular out-group influences (Akkermann and Meijer, 2011). This is not to say that the role of identity is irrelevant to the wider context in which an individual defines themselves. However, in politically polarising, real-world contexts, priming shared-identity features to reduce conflict seems ineffective. As to why this may be the case, perhaps identity-based memberships does not offer a meaningful context (i.e., too superficial) due to the myriad of factors influencing political discourse. The multifaceted array of identity, ideology, and moral commitments present in political partisanship (Graham, Haidt, and Nosek, 2009; Jost, 2017) offer a greater potential for polarisation then other group contexts. A limitation of all identity-based approaches is

they act within inter-group ontological assumptions; a binary, accelerated understanding of measuring lives which may not align with the realities of political discourse. An alternative to this is focusing on self-world relations which may offer the key to unlocking dialogue sustainment.

The ontological limitations of Social Identity Theory

Whist various definitions exist, considered in a political context, ontological assumptions question the nature of social (thus, political) reality (Hay, 2011). Our ontological assumptions not only influence our perception of reality but establish a perimeter on the possible; that is to say, what we can hope to understand by perceiving the world through a particular ontology (Wendt, 1999). Marsh and Furlong's (2002) 'a skin, not a sweater' analogy for ontological considerations succinctly defines the fixed, rather than flexible, commitment to a worldview required of researchers (be it post-positivist, realist or interpretivist). In the context of social identity theory, the implicit ontological assumption is that identity is a binary concept (Gaither, 2018). That is to say, individuals set themselves in opposition to others politically on features of identity. This ontology is inherently rigid in assuming an individual's capacity to navigate the political arena is static. However, it is important to note that this is a lively debate among identity researchers; especially on the dynamics of group identity in response to events (Drury, 2018).

The assumption in a dialogical ontology is that citizens assume roles which are contrary to the binary concepts of identity-based theories. That is to say, they are dynamic, historically situated, and multi-faceted rather than static and binary. A key point here is that dialogical positioning allows interlocuters to adopt dynamically to discursive engagement. This focus on the dialogical allows us to understand who, why and in what context polarised individuals do and don't sustain dialogue. At present, UK & US political psychology is saturated with an ontological focus on inter-group dynamics. An additional focus is to offer an alternative theoretical paradigm outside dominant identity-based theories. The following section outlines a move towards such a new explanatory paradigm with the Dialogue Sustainment Theoretical Model. Whilst we have explored the salience of this model in real-world settings, the focus here is on the theoretical foundations and potential benefits. Namely, offering an alternative explanatory paradigm for sustaining dialogue in political contexts.

Dialogical Sustainment Theoretical Model

This model consists of three distinctive components for exploring dialogue between politically polarised interlocuters. The three components of this model are: the internalised (political worldviews), the interactive (dialogical positioning), and the dimensional (temporal and spatial chronotopes). The first section argues that, to understand the dynamics of political discourse, it is important to understand the internalised social representations which define an interlocuters' worldviews. The second section argues that knowing an interlocuters' dialogical positionings offers a greater potential for understanding dialogue sustainment compared with identity-based models. The third section focuses on the dimensional by understanding how interlocuters evoke temporal and spatial boundaries to frame a political issue.

Internalised: The individual as a political actor with worldviews

The framework guiding the model's first component is that the public are political actors with the capacity to engage in the democratic process. Evidence of this can be found in the concept of mini-publics; a process which selects groups of citizens for the purpose of discussing and offering recommendations on policy issues. Typically, experts engage in this process to inform and offer knowledge bases which act as a platform for group deliberation (Carson and Schecter, 2017). Research on mini-publics shows individuals have the capacity to deliberate complex political issues and develop salient knowledge in these areas (Elstub, 2014). Indeed, these deliberative democracy forums find individuals change opinions (Grönlund, Setälä, and Herne, 2010) when engaging in such processes. However, these opinion changes can be the result of factors unrelated to the deliberation process. For example, the influence of the expert on collective opinion or the desire for group conformity (Anderson and Hansen, 2007.

The artifice found in a mini-publics' assembly (e.g., the format, use of experts etc.) does not offer a reasonable comparator for real-world discursive engagements (Elstub, Johnson, Puttick, and Wilkinson, 2018). However, they do offer some value to the assumptions of this model's first component; namely, showing that individuals have the potential to be political actors who engage with others. Whilst an important initial step, knowing individuals have such potential is merely a foundation for considering how individuals actually share knowledge and worldviews. To this end, the next step is to focus on the role of social representations and common-sense knowledge during discourse. To clarify, dialogically speaking, a worldview is not simply the individual's ideological affiliations (e.g., capitalist, socialist, etc.), but, rather, assumptions about the world which are presumed to be shared by others. The focus now is to understand how these worldviews manifest via social representations when individuals engage in political discourse.

Understanding the Political Actor: The role of Social Representations

The next consideration for this first component is to understand the assumed knowledge implicit in an individual's political worldview. To do so, we focus on the role of social representations to understand differing collective cognitions on cultural, social and/or symbolic objects (Moscovici, 2001). For example, whilst climate change may be somewhat abstract in everyday life, an objectifying representation (e.g., media image of a polar bear isolated on a melting ice formation) offers a salient microcosm of a macro-issue (Smith and Joffe, 2009). To understand an individual's social representations is to understand the following: (1) The process in which individuals orientate themselves to concepts in their social world, and (2) The means in which interlocuters exchange and communicate concepts (Höijer, 2011). For the latter, these exchanges develop into 'common sense knowledge' (Galli and Fasanelli, 2020); social realities that we take for granted as true to allow us to engage in daily life. These are concepts which become explicitly thematised or implicitly 'taken for granted' as conceptual truth when discussing politics (Marková, Linell, Grossen, and Orvig, 2007).

Therefore, understanding the social representations which constitute shared worldviews is important for understanding political debate. For example, understanding an interlocuters' hegemonic representations (shared by most group/nation members), and polemic representations (things symbolising societal controversies between-group conflicts) offers clues for actions, future thoughts, and mobilisation. The hegemonic set of representations offer a means of understanding the interlocuters' shared expectations of the social/political

world. These are not merely self-other social representations, but also self-world representations. Such self-world relations can be dominated by an existential threat of globalized deterritorialization and liberal policies on migration (Kinnvall and Lindén, 2010). This can also manifest as symbolic and normative representations of caring communities (Salvatore et al., 2018), belief in a laissez-faire world or social-justice-related world orders (Staerklé, 2013).

In contrast, polemic representations are important for understanding why dialogue may not be sustainable; that is to say, when common-sense understandings being exchanged are not aligned with the individual's social representations on the issue. Thus, this consideration that an individual's worldview is the sum of their social representations offers a means of exploring how and why dialogue becomes unsustainable. This also provides a potential clue as to why sharing identities may not be successful when the political stakes are high. That is to say, identity can offer only a superficial snapshot of a person compared with understanding their internal social representations of the world. Therefore, analysing a discursive engagement via social representations offers a greater potential for understanding dialogue sustainment.

Interactive: From worldview to relational positionality

This second component focusing on dialogical positioning is essential for considering how these worldviews manifest during dialogue with others. Specifically, the role of shared *I*-positionings (see the next section for details), and the discursive context in which such sharing occurs. Understanding how, if at all, exploring the role of positionalities in dialogue could mediate polarising moments. The ontological assumption here rejects the concept that individuals engage with others via rigid roles with prescribed modes of behaviour or interaction. Davis and Harré's (1990) Positioning Theory (PT) argues that any exploration of social interactions must consider the individuals' potential agency, and the subtly of dialogue exchanges. PT research found individuals claim subject positions by receiving, resisting, or rejecting, whilst remaining within the same 'role' (Harré and Langenhove, 1991). This is not to negate the function of roles within society, but rather, an acknowledgment that individuals engage in multifaceted dialogue with the self and others. This aligns with Bakhtin's concept of the polyphonic novel; an author style in which the protagonist is not written to convey a single message but, rather, has multiple internal functions.

Dialogical Self: The Dynamic Citizen

The function of the dialogical self is to offer an explanatory paradigm beyond the Cartesian perspective and its assertion that a singular subjective self exists within a contained context (Marková et al. 2007). Considered politically, this perspective does not suggest that an individual can effortlessly move between liberal and fascist positions merely based on context. Rather that individuals have the capacity to adopt a variety of positions in relation to one another (Kinnvall and Lindèn, 2011; Mahendran, English, and Nieland, 2021b). However, these must be consistent with macro-political narratives and engagement (Andrews, Kinnvall, and Monroe, 2015).Therefore, the Dialogue Sustainment Theoretical Model considers an individual's political 'sense-making' to emanate from dialogue exchanges understood in the context of dialogical self-based *I*-positionings. The Dialogical Self is a concept which defines the self as comprising of multiple versions existing within the individual which are responsive to context (Sullivan, 2012). Within this paradigm of

understanding, an *I*-position is a 'voiced position' in which perspectives are constructed; either on the positions' own terms or in response to external context. This concept acknowledges that meaning-making can be an intersubjective process between complimentary and conflicting positions (Gillespie and Cornish, 2010).

The dialogical *I*-position has both an active positioning (self-positioning as a self-critic, a cooperative etc.), and a passive positioning (positioned by others in social contexts). The latter position can also be responded to by the individual with an 'answering position' (i.e., either agreeing or disagreeing with the contextual positioning of another) (Hermans, 2015). These differing positions both have meaning to the individual and can co-exist as complimentary. In contrast, they can also be in conflict with one another; for example, adopting an *I*-Democratic position to argue a democratic vote must be honored, despite disapproving of the vote outcome. To avoid confusion, the *I*-Democratic positioning is adopted when an individual prioritises the democratic process above personal outcome preferences, rather than any explicit alignment to the Democratic Party within the USA (or any other political party with a similar name).

Shared-identity advocates are likely to ask if prioritising the dialogical self over self-identity is a distinction without a difference? That is to say, dialogical self labelling is merely identity with a different name. A legitimate enquiry and one which is important to address before considering dialogicality any further. Firstly, it is relevant to clarify that is not incongruous for an interlocuter to adopt positionalities that overlap with core identities (e.g., class, race, gender etc.). However, dialogicality captures processes which entirely distinguish it from any 'identity in all but name' accusations. The dialogical self focuses on understanding the internal social representations influencing individuals and how this manifests in discursive engagements (Goncalves and Riberio, 2012). Such self-narratives, in conjunction with lived experiences, create a dynamic interplay from which the self emerges. These ever-shifting self-narratives determine how the individual engages with both themselves and others (Hermans and Kempen, 1993). This consideration is especially relevant to the individual's internal political life, which likely consists of disparate internal/external voices. To the extent that they, potentially, create conflicting, even contradictory political opinions. Whilst assigning identities to a political actor can be relevant (e.g., social conservative, radical feminist etc.), it does not offer a context to understand the dynamic capability of individuals in discursive exchanges. A capability which goes beyond recategorizing to any relevant group that may emerge during political interactions. Nor does identity categorisation acknowledge the 'bit that doesn't fit' regarding the individual's contrasting internal political views, nor how they manifest during discourse.

Dialogically acknowledging this dynamism affords an advantage over identity in considering external manifestations of the internal self. This is better also for understanding the nuances of context-dependent exchanges which may occur during political discourse. Thus, assigning a political actor a positionality when analysing dialogue acknowledges this accumulation of internal processes and contextual factors. Indeed, a commitment to a dialogical approach is to understand that interlocuters will change in response to both internal narratives and external input. For example, speaking to a young child and a work colleague would evoke different voices even if the content and context were identical (Akkermann and Meijer, 2011). Alongside the self, knowing who an individual aligns themselves with and distances themselves from affords further explanatory value. Indeed, such we/they positionings offer insight into the multi-positional features of political public-

opinion formation (Mahendran, 2018). Thus, providing an analytical context for understanding who individuals evoke or reject when engaging in polarising discussions. The value of this analytical context is that it offers an additional layer of insight; namely, how engaged/polarised interlocuters respond to each other's alignments to specific groups or public opinions.

Discursive Engagement and Position Exchanges

Given our critique of identity-models in real-world contexts, the onus here is to consider the explanatory value of our Dialogue Sustainment Theoretical Model in such settings. To this end, we shall consider the role of *I*-positions via Gillespie and Martin's (2014) Position Exchange Theory (PET). This theory proposes the following three assumptions: (1) Social positionings exist within a social context and are interdependent on another position, (2) Social positions constitute perspectives which influence action and thought, and (3) Social positions are constructs that individuals move between in relation to context. PET argues that, due to these three factors, individuals develop multi-layered psychological and narrative constructs, therefore becoming dialogical. The first assumption is that each position is interdependent on another position (e.g., neurosurgeon has a patient, the parent an offspring, storyteller an audience, etc.). This assumption is salient to polarised political discourse which, inherently, has interdependent positionalities (e.g., positions either supporting or rejecting the issue in question). Considering interdependent positionalities in political discourse provides potential 'markers' for noting how and when individuals engage or disengage during a vexed moment. This is a valuable consideration as it offers a platform for exploring how such moments could be used to sustain dialogue during discourse. That is to say, what interdependent positionalities, evoked by a specific discursive context, create an environment for depolarisation interlocuters during political discourse.

The second PET assumption focuses on the role of positionalities in influencing thought and action. This aspect of PET is relevant when exploring how positionalities manifest among individuals engaged in political discourse. For example, understanding to what extent adopting macro- and micro- positionalities prompts an interlocuter to actively heighten or ameliorate moments of discord. PET offers a framework for considering how thought becomes action among individuals engaged in political discussions. Thus, potentially offering new insights on behaviour and how it may impact on moments of polarising discourse. PET's third assumption states that individuals move between social positions in relation to context. For example, the formal social position of a nurse is salient to the hospital environment. However, prior to entering this environment, the individual was a parent at home (a stable position), and a commuter in transit (a transient position) etc.

Understanding the discursive contexts in which political positionalities are adopted and discarded offers an additional level of understanding. Namely, to what extent contextual factors influence any positional shifts which sustain dialogue beyond moments of polarisation. This is distinct from PET's first assumption in that the focus here is not on interdependent positions but the relationship between context and positional shifts. To explore these assumptions, Gillespie and Martin (2014) reviewed literature in developmental contexts (game playing), education, and across life trajectories (longitudinal studies) which all supported the explanatory value of PET. This diverse application bodes

well for PET's potential as an exploratory tool for how dialogue could be sustained. The next step is to apply this in real-world, politically polarised domains to explore the theory further.

Dimensional: Chronotopic boundaries in polarised dialogue

The model's third component affords a chronotopic understanding of where in time (past/present/future) and space (national/local/ group boundaries etc.) political actors position themselves or are positioned by others. Aligned with contemporary developments in physics, Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin developed the Chronotope as a conceptual metaphor in a literary context in 1937 (Bemong et al. 2002). Whilst Mikhail Bakhtin never devised a definitive chronotope definition, broadly speaking, a chronotopic perspective assumes all time-space depictions are fundamentally ideological. Thus, such a perspective adheres to both the multi-faceted positioning and subjective interpretation of an internal narrative (Johnston, 2000). Considered in politically discursive contexts, analysing chronotopic meaning-making offers a chance for exploring how interactions are bound by spatial and temporal influences.

The assumptions of our Dialogue Sustainment Theoretical Model are that an individuals' political narratives are chronotropic in nature. This is an epistemological commitment that proposes understanding political discourse must involve knowing an individual's past/present/future boundaries (relevant to the context of the discussion). For example, exploring how individuals engage with one another and understanding what chronotopic representations are evoked. On the national stage, hegemonic chronotopic meaning-making is commonly used by nationalists (and sometimes right-wing populists) to create a 'golden past/stalled present/great future' narrative This serves to create justifying imperatives for changing current policy in an attempt to return to this imagined time (Mahendran, English, and Nieland, 2021a) Indeed, individuals also evoke chronotopic representations when telling personal narratives in social contexts (Zittoun, 2008; Zittoun et al. 2013). The purpose of the DSTM is to identify the discursive manifestation of these internal spatial and temporal manoeuvrings.

Temporal Focus: The Importance of Time in Meaning-Making

While the temporal and spatial aspects of a chronotope are parts of a unified concept, here we consider them individually for the purposes of detailing their influence on political thinking. Regarding the aims of DSTM, identifying chronotopic meaning-making during polarised political discourse offers a number of explanatory advantages. Firstly, it offers a means of understanding if the interlocuter is interpreting current events via a past, present or future orientation. This can be an essential component for comprehensively understanding the individual or group's political imperative. For example, a black community in Oklahoma solicited local government support to access environmental justice resources using chronotopic representations. The focus here was a temporal-connectivity between previous racist municipal policies and the damaging environmental consequences of the present (Blanton, 2011).

Such temporal-connectivity is also present in the rejection of a political project; that is to say, these chronotopic representations are present when rejecting an identity. Woolard (2012) found temporal chronotopes to be highly prevalent in young Castilian's objections to Catalonia-focused independence signifiers (Woolard, 2012). Such chronotopic meaning-making may be valuable for understanding how one interlocuter responds to another

imposing a spurious identity upon them in polarising moments. Furthermore, understanding chronotopic meaning-making is vital for contextualising firmly held political imperatives, and how they influence current considerations. That is to say, recognising to what extent a temporal chronotopic focus contributes to personal meaning-making on vexed issues. In the context of politically polarised discourse, this offers a means of exploring if moments of synchronicity in these temporal domains could, potentially, sustain dialogue.

Spatial Boundaries: Understanding Where Citizens Orientate Themselves

The spatial boundaries of chronotopic representations offer another dimension in which to analyse political discourse. Understanding how individuals orient themselves in the political domain using spatial representations are relevant to the Dialogue Sustainment Theoretical Model. Such spatial-focused chronotopic meaning-making is prevalent among those in highly polarised political contexts. Davidson (2007) found that, many years after the Berlin Wall's demise, former East-Germans still evoked spatial chronotopes of previous circumstances to understand the current political climate (Davidson, 2007). For example, speakers with former Eastern citizenship use *Hier* ('here') to refer to perceptions of a still-existing East-German space. In contrast, a unified Germany is considered *drüben* ('over there') or *im Westen* ('in the West'). The use of spatial chronotopes as a paradigm for comparison is an important consideration when analysing political discourse. Primarily for tracking how such comparisons actually function within the course of a polarising discussion. The potential of spatial chronotopes also offers meaning-making for those engaged in political movements; for example, Occupy Wall Street's reorganising of the corporately-owned public space Zuccotti Park which had come to symbolise public-private spatial boundaries of elite institutions (Perić, 2015).

These examples indicate that evoking spatial boundaries offer a representational relevance to highly motivated political actors. How such chronotopic meaning-making manifests in polarised discussions among invested political actors is interesting to consider. Indeed, the use of spatial chronotopes is particularly salient in the age of social media where platforms are emancipated from the physical realm. Thus, removing them from everyday political discussions that would have occurred in previous decades. Whilst political discourse was previously the domain of the family and/or local community, it has now become trans-national. Schwartz and Halegoua (2014) found the 'spatial self' is the social media users' spatial capacity when untethered from a physical presence. Exploring spatial-chronotopic boundaries allows the potential for a greater understanding of this dual-reality (i.e., the real and digital) within the context of political engagements. That is to say, if distinctive spatial framing on social media manifests directly into real-world discourse and what this could mean for dialogue sustainment.

Parameters of the Dialogue Sustainment Theoretical Model

Alongside the advantages of exploring dialogue sustainment via a dialogical model, certain limiting parameters are evident. The model's response to shared-identity approaches critiques SIT's ontological assumptions and applied limitations in real-world settings. However, the Dialogue Sustainment Theoretical Model does not presently offer contrasting research evidence to the shared-identity literature. Given the unpredictability of political discourse, exploring the DSTM in a real-world setting will be the test. At the time of writing,

empirical work investigating the parameters of the model (e.g., pairing interviewees on shared positions in polarised political contexts) is currently on-going. Another consideration is the scope of the model and in what real-world scenarios it can meaningfully be applied. An advantage of identity-based models is that the tools (e.g., open or close ended surveys) used to measure identity are easily applied (Sylvan and Metskas, 2009). However, as discussed in the introduction, this focus on accelerating understanding is not without conceptual limitations. Especially in the domain of politically-focused social interactions which involve a myriad of complex influencing factors. However, a practical disadvantage of DSTM over identity-based measures is that the latter requires a greater investment of time and resources. Especially for understanding an individual's dialogical positions prior to any intervention which attempts to sustain dialogue. Furthermore, if social media is as negative an influence on political discourse as we propose, a logical step is to explore the explanatory value of the DSTM in this domain. However, at present, DSTM has only been used to explore face to face encounters, so the value in applying this model to a social media context is currently unknown.

Conclusion

This article proposes a dialogical model for exploring how dialogue between politically polarised interlocuters could be sustained. Identity-based models, with a focus on superordinate or dual identities, can be relevant in specific conflict scenarios. However, in highly polarised, real-world political contexts, they do not offer a means of reducing conflict to promote dialogue. Hence, an alternative model is required which moves beyond the ontological assumptions of shared-identity. To this end, the Dialogue Sustainment Theoretical Model explores the complexities of politically polarised discourse. Indeed, DSTM offers the potential to create a multifaceted understanding of the dynamic interplay between interlocuters. This involves analysing polarised political discourse as three different components: internalised (political worldviews), interactive (dialogical positioning), and dimensional (temporal and spatial chronotopes). In the age of social media, populist imperatives have thrust political discourse into an existential crisis. For such discourse has limited value in an age where facts are as bespoke as opinions and the bad intentions of 'the other' are assumed. The purpose of this article is to offer theoretical psychologists concerned with political phenomena, an alternative paradigm to the existing shared-identity models. To outline ontological and epistemological assumptions which consider, dialogically, the individual's potential for dynamic discourse in polarised political contexts. Specifically, the factors which may influence or create dialogue sustainment in otherwise polarised political engagements. To this end, we hope to have offered a compelling case for the need to do so and why the Dialogue Sustainment Theoretical Model could contribute to further understanding.

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