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The Promise of Democratic Silences

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Abstract *Political scientists and theorists have generally approached silence in one of two broad ways. Some have envisioned silence as representing apathy, indifference, ignorance, or general acceptance of the status quo. Alternatively, others have theorized silence as evidence of the workings of power—the phenomenon of "being silenced." Neither approach has explored the ways that silence might be mobilized and practiced democratically. Instead of organizing democratic theory and politics exclusively around the power of speech, it might be useful to explore the promise of silence as a practice of resistance and empowerment in a garrulous world. This article puts forth four "insubordinate silences" that attempt to empower, protest, resist, and refuse. These silences challenge us to think in new ways about democracy, speech, silence, and participation.*

A student walks into her classroom, quickly occupies her regular seat, and proceeds to say nothing. She says nothing to her classmates, her field hockey teammates whose query about practice goes unanswered, and nothing to her teacher, even when called upon several times for the seemingly elusive participation points that, on any other day, seem magnetically attracted to her. Her silence does not go unnoticed. In fact, it garners quite a bit of attention. Some of her classmates become quickly annoyed. Others seem concerned. Her teacher is frustrated and confused. To say the least, her silence is disruptive, and powerful. It is disruptive because her voice seems a necessary part of the machinery that powers the educative and social experiences in this particular classroom. Without her voice, the normal flow of conversation and educational exchanges seems out of sync, unsettling students and teacher alike. It is powerful because it is disruptive, meaningful, and in this case intentional. This particular student is engaging silence as a means to protest the harassment of her LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) classmates, harassment that ultimately silences many of these students much of their lives.[1] Her silence acts as a valuable protest and teaching lesson, as it exposes how the absence of a given

[1] The Day of Silence is described as "a student-led day of action where those who support making anti-LGBT bias unacceptable in schools take a day-long vow of silence to recognize and protest the discrimination and harassment—in effect, the silencing—experienced by LGBT students and their allies." Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN), "Day of Silence," <http://www.dayofsilence.org> . For an example of media coverage of the Day of Silence, see Tara Bahrampour, "Silence Speaks Volumes about Gay Support," *The Washington Post*, April 14, 2005.

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voice really matters, thereby demonstrating how much we stand to lose due to exclusionary practices.[2]

Yet, with some notable exceptions, political scientists and theorists have not said much about silence as a promising democratic resource.[3] Therefore, whether it is a student waging silent protest against LGBT harassment, a religious group silently resisting the Catholic Church's policies against "homosexuality,"[4] war protestors standing together silently on a street corner,[5] or an artist's silence as a means to challenge the exploitative character of contemporary recording contracts,[6] political science has been silent as an intellectual discipline charged with understanding and even promoting democratic politics. Why has political science generally ignored the democratic power of silence? What frameworks have been mobilized that preclude the recognition that such silences can be powerful resources for political contestation? What are the different ways in which silences can be put to democratic means and ends? What does it mean to embrace silence as one among other (speech-oriented) political practices of participation? What follows is a broad overview—an introduction—that attempts to answer these questions and illuminate the silences that have been relegated to the shadows of political science and theorizing for quite some time. I start by describing the broad

[2] GLSEN, "Day of Silence." Under "Testimonials," one student's experience with the Day of Silence is recounted: "Two years ago, my school participated in its first Day of Silence. Students were harassed for participating. Teachers got mad. The next year, many students did not understand the purpose, but some unlikely people began to participate and the GSA began to hear less in the way of homophobic slurs. This year, we offered stickers for those who wanted to participate but could not take a vow of silence. Many people I did not know came up to me asking for stickers and the student body was generally very excited. All of my teachers gave little speeches at the beginning or end of class about why the Day of Silence is important and told us about the queer people in their lives. Everyone really seems to get it now."

[3] Examples of exceptions include: Kennan Ferguson, "Silence: A Politics," *Contemporary Political Theory* 2 (2004), pp. 49–65; Wendy Brown, *Edgework: Critical Essays on Knowledge and Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990); John Zumbrunnen, *Silence and Democracy: Athenian Politics in Thucydides' History* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008).

[4] Eric Ferkenhoff, "Silent Protest Staged During Chicago Mass," *The Boston Globe*, May 31, 2004. After an order was issued in Chicago from the archbishop telling priests not to distribute communion to individuals wearing rainbow-colored sashes, groups of gay men and women went for communion with such sashes. When denied communion, the group returned to their places in the church and, instead of kneeling, they stood silently.

[5] Ian Urbina, "Silence Speaks Volumes at Intersection of Views on Iraq," *The New York Times*, May 28, 2007, p. 9. Urbina states, "No one talks, but a lot is said at the intersection of Savannah Road and Kings Highway. Every Sunday for more than two years, rain or shine, they have shown up here, nodded politely to each other across Savannah Road, and stood motionless for 45 minutes like sentinels. They differ in politics but share a faith in the power of silence." For more examples of silent protests regarding war, see David Fahrenthold, "At Capitol, a Quiet, Persistent Protest," *The Washington Post*, March 21, 2004; John Ingold, "The Silent Minority," *The Denver Post*, September 17, 2006; Nancy Haught, "Activists Hold a Silent Vigil of Protest," *The Oregonian*, January 30, 2003.

[6] Ronin Ro, "A Prince by Any Other Name," *Vanity Fair*, October 19, 2011. During the 1990s, while negotiating with Warner Bros Records to gain more direct control over his music, the musician Prince refused to perform some of his most popular songs in concert. He also changed his name to a symbol. This involved a public vow of silence to draw attention to his being silenced over the direction and management of his music.

ways in which silence and power have been studied and theorized within political science. I then explore some of the silent practices that can emerge within our fields of scholarly vision once we enlarge the scope of our consideration of silence as a politically promising means of engagement and contestation. Insubordinate silences to empower, protest, resist, and refuse will be discussed as complementary means of accompanying speech in the highly discursive and confessional social setting that is our contemporary age. These "insubordinate" silences challenge us to think in new ways about politics, democracy, and the limits of social science.[7]

Silence, Power, and Powerlessness in Political Science

The recent documentary "No End In Sight"[8] tells of the Bush administration's failures after "taking" Baghdad at the beginning of the war in Iraq. The documentarian interviews various participants from the government's occupation of Iraq in those early moments of the war, uncovering poor planning among Bush's inner national security circle. From time to time throughout the documentary—when one of Bush's top advisors is being discussed—suddenly, against a black screen, the following appears: "X refused to be interviewed for this film." Individuals who refused to appear include Condoleezza Rice and Donald Rumsfeld, both at the highest levels of the administration. The war in Iraq, with all its failures, deaths, costs, and destruction, deserves democratic deliberation and debate. This film can be one medium, among diverse media formats, for attempting to hold accountable those in power. Yet, in the attempt to get answers for a whole series of "whys," the filmmaker meets resistance from those at the top, who are seemingly intent on avoiding democratic critique and responsibility.

This is one kind of a politics of silence, in which those with power refuse to speak in certain contexts or about certain topics—usually contexts that include alternative perspectives, and topics that may challenge the status quo.[9] Decision-makers such as Rumsfeld refuse to answer critical questions, and in their silence thereby attempt to suppress the oxygen that breathes life into explanations that threaten their political power. When theorizing, observing, and understanding silence and power, this silence (that of the powerful) co-exists with another silence (that of the powerless) that involves the silencing of subordinated groups. These two silences can join together to maintain hegemonic configurations of power—this is a configuration of politics and silence that perpetuates powerful forces. While it might be that those with power are more apt and able to engage a politics of silences that refuse and suppress, such negotiations of silence and power are

[7] Significant overviews of the importance of social constructivist and confessional politics include: Murray Edelman, *Constructing the Political Spectacle* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1988); John Dryzek, *Deliberative Democracy and Beyond* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Eloise Buker, *Talking Feminist Politics* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1999); Foucault, *History of Sexuality*; and Brown, *Edgework*.

[8] Charles Ferguson, Dir., Magnolia Pictures, USA.

[9] President Ronald Reagan's silence about AIDS in the 1980s is an example of how the silence of the powerful can have devastating effects on more vulnerable populations. See Frank Rich, "Angels, Reagan and AIDS in America," *The New York Times*, November 16, 2003. Another example is President George W. Bush's silence on genocide in Sudan. See Nicholas Kristof, "Day 141 of Bush's Silence," *The New York Times*, May 31, 2005.

available to others as well—there is another face of the politics of silence, one thus far underappreciated in political science. In this section, I discuss some of the work in political science and theory regarding power dynamics that silence subordinated subjects. In the remainder of this article, I describe some important ways in which those with less power can also use silences to challenge and frustrate more powerful forces and people.

Beyond Behavioralism: The Phenomenon of Being Silenced[10]

The Second Face of Power and the Mobilization of Bias

According to Steven Lukes, behavioralist and pluralist approaches to democratic politics in American political science fail to offer an adequate explanation for non-participation, quiescence, and silence.[11] While non-participation and non-voting have been examined, complex studies of silence have been precluded by methodologies less able to accommodate them.[12] An alternative approach to quiescence emerged as a response to behavioralism. Beginning with E.E. Schattschneider and developed by Peter Bachrach and Morton Baratz, it argues that a "mobilization of bias" can lead to unwanted silencing. The mobilization of bias is utilized to create and maintain barriers that preclude certain issues and grievances from getting onto the agenda. Bachrach and Baratz noted, "to the extent that a person or group—consciously or unconsciously—creates or reinforces barriers to the public airing of policy conflicts, that person or group has power."[13] This is a

[10] There are several important ways that behavioralism, as a methodological approach for "explaining" political phenomena, has not been ripe for a thorough examination of silence. Political scientists had to move beyond behavioralism in order to more broadly examine how silence and power dynamics might co-constitute each other. For a discussion of behavioralism and quiescence, see: Steven Lukes, *Power: A Radical View* (London: Macmillan Press, 1974); Peter Bachrach and Morton Baratz, "Two Faces of Power" (pp. 94–99) and "Decisions and Nondecisions: An Analytical Framework" (pp. 100–109), in Roderick Bell, David Edwards, and R. Harrison Wagner (eds), *Political Power: A Reader in Theory and Research* (New York: The Free Press, 1969); and John Gaventa, *Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980).

[11] Lukes, *Power*.

[12] Voting studies, participation, mobilization, and voting behavior have been major areas of research in political science. Lukes and Gaventa are critical of approaches that do not delve deeper than direct observation and/or methodological individualism to understand non-voting, silence, and/or quiescence. While there are examples of studies that attempt an understanding of what barriers exist for political participation, most still do not consider non-participation via silence as a form of active and engaged political resistance. Some examples of research into participation that generally do not thoroughly examine non-participation as a form of contestation and thereby preclude more widespread study of silence include: Steven Rosenstone and John Mark Hanson, *Mobilization, Participation, and Democracy in America* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1993); Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward, *Why Americans Don't Vote* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988); and Angus Campbell, Philip Converse, Warren Miller, and Donald Stokes, *The American Voter* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1960). Adam Berinsky, *Silent Voices: Public Opinion and Political Participation in America* (Princeton, NJ: University of Princeton Press, 2004) takes a step toward a more complicated approach to silence as he highlights the "silent voices" that go unreported in public opinion polling. However, those who respond, "don't know," are not generally shown to be exercising silence as engaged resistance or contestation. In other words, these silent voices are not participatory in the way highlighted in this article.

[13] Bachrach and Baratz, "Two Faces of Power," p. 96.

significant addition to the behavioralist and pluralist approaches. The second dimension of power is perpetuated by non-decisions, which are issues not addressed politically because they are prevented from entering the decision-making arena. Bachrach and Baratz stated this point best, "They (pluralists) have overlooked the equally, if not more important area of what might be 'nondecision-making,' i.e., the practice of limiting the scope of actual decision-making to 'safe' issues by manipulating the dominant community values, myths, and political institutions and procedures."[14] John Gaventa said, "This may include the manipulation of symbols, such as . . . 'communist' or 'troublemaker.'"[15] Manipulation redirects the conflict away from real grievances. This face of power allows those who study politics to recognize the ways in which some political subjects have been silenced.

The Third Face of Power and the Silent Rendered Powerless

Lukes and Gaventa go beyond the second face of power, illuminating how power's third dimension can shape the very conceptions and desires of the powerless in society. The problem with the second dimension of power, according to Lukes and Gaventa, involves its emphasis upon actual conflict. Lukes states, "Thus they (Bachrach and Baratz) write that if 'there is no conflict, overt or covert, the presumption must be that there is consensus on prevailing allocation of values.'"[16] The second face of power does not account for latent, or unobserved, conflicts and interests. According to Lukes, power can be utilized to shape the very conceptions and desires of the powerless in society.[17] Therefore, the powerless may be quiescent because they are not able to conceptualize differing preferences and interests than those they have been socialized to conceptualize. Lukes refers to three-dimensional power as the ultimate form of power in society because it goes far beyond "A" overcoming "B" in the political arena. Lukes states, "A may exercise power over B by getting him to do what he does not want to do, but he also exercises power over him by influencing, shaping or determining his very wants."[18]

The third face of power recognizes that the "powerless" may not recognize their "real" interests because their consciousnesses have been shaped by three-dimensional forces. This approach considers the existence of latent conflict, "which consists in a contradiction between the interests of those exercising power and the real interests of those they exclude."[19] Three-dimensional power is successful when conflict does not emerge. The objective is to keep the powerless from conceiving protest in response to their situations, such as their impoverished

[14] Bachrach and Baratz, "Decisions and Nondecisions," p. 100.
[15] Gaventa, *Power and Powerlessness*, p. 14.
[16] Lukes, *Power*, p. 19.
[17] While varying, some iteration of an ideological hegemony argument appears in other significant works, including: Murray Edelman, *Politics as Symbolic Action* (Chicago, IL: Markham Publishing Co., 1971); Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, Quinton Hoare and Geoffrey Smith (eds) (New York: International Publishers, 1971); Stuart Hall, *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, D. Morley and K.H. Chen (eds) (New York: Routledge, 1996); Pierre Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, trans. Richard Nice (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001); and Ralph Milliband, "Counter Hegemonic Struggles," in Ralph Milliband and Leo Panitch (eds), *The Retreat of the Intellectuals* (London: Merlin, 1990), 346–365.
[18] Lukes, *Power*, p. 23.
[19] Ibid., 24–25.

financial standing or their poor working conditions. For Lukes and Gaventa, the three-dimensional approach is important because it unmasks the way in which people are silenced. It portrays a more complex, nuanced engagement with silence. The emphasis of both the one- and two-dimensional approaches on actual, observable conflict "is to ignore the crucial point that the most effective and insidious use of power is to prevent such conflict from arising in the first place."[20] Lukes and Gaventa open up silence for serious scholarly analysis, and they also open up the potentialities of establishing voice for many who have, in fact, been silenced due to one-, two-, and three-dimensional tactics.

Feminist Theories: Consciousness Raising and Talking Back

While it is widely recognized that feminist theory encompasses many approaches, one of the commonalities among such diverse approaches involves the agreement that women have been silenced, and that this silencing is cause for political resistance.[21] This is a complicated power dynamic, for some are silenced even when speaking. bell hooks notes the relationship between speech and reception, between vocalization and power, stating, "the voices of black women—giving order, making threats, fussing—could be tuned out, could become a kind of background music, audible but not acknowledged as significant speech."[22] Ignoring some speech amounts to a kind of silencing as those who are not listened to come to realize their subordinate status, and possibly adopt reticence. Those who see the disregard of their words by others, and who then challenge such silencing, many times face another kind of silencing: a disciplinary network of pejorative terms and phrases that label the vocal as somehow troublesome. This speaks to the double bind so many women have faced under oppressive conditions as both choices—speech and silence—involve serious negative consequences, and both, in many cases, end with being silenced.[23] These forms of silencing work to constitute us, disciplining our speech and silence, informing us about what places and spaces we should inhabit, and what moments and issues we should not engage.

The struggle to find voice, to resist the silencing, needs to be accompanied by strategies that transition the silent to speech. Catherine MacKinnon highlights the importance of consciousness-raising as a method of women's efforts to challenge male domination. For MacKinnon, it is not just establishing voice, it is also establishing a certain kind of "truth" about one's life that is vital to consciousness-raising—a way to unmask the dysfunctional epistemologies that have imprisoned

[20] Ibid., 23.

[21] Brooke Ackerly, *Political Theory and Feminist Social Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Wendy Brown, *States of Injury* (Princeton, NJ: University of Princeton Press, 1995); Buker, *Talking Feminist Politics*; Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought* (New York: Routledge, 1991); bell hooks, *Talking Back* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1989); Catherine MacKinnon, *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989); Patty Duncan, *Tell This Silence* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2004); Trinh Minh-ha, "Not You/Like You: Post-Colonial Women and Interlocking Questions of Identity and Difference," in Gloria Anzaldua (ed.), *Making Face, Making Soul* (San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lute Books, 1990), pp. 371–375.

[22] hooks *Talking Back*, p. 6.

[23] Marylyn Frye, *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory* (Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press, 1983), p. 3.

and oppressed.[24] For Wendy Brown, speech is vital to expanding the potentialities, the possible performativities, and the contingent realities that influence how we create our lives together. She states, "We may need to learn public speaking and the pleasures of public argument, not to overcome our situatedness, but in order to assume responsibility for our situations and to mobilize a collective discourse that will expand them."[25] bell hooks puts forth talking back, stating,

> Moving from silence into speech is for the oppressed, the colonized, the exploited, and those who stand and struggle side by side a gesture of defiance that heals, that makes new life and new growth possible. It is that act of speech, of "talking back," that is no mere gesture of empty words, that is the expression of our movement from object to subject—the liberated voice.[26]

Speaking signals the transformation of one's place in a given social context. In all these accounts, if we contrast voice with silence, we can see that silence represents oppression, lack of complete awareness, and a sense of powerlessness. Voice, on the other hand, is the beginning of empowerment and change, as it is the methodology that releases women from situations of domination and subordination.

All the above approaches to silence share a dichotomizing attitude towards speech and silence and, in the end, imbue speech with significant powers—powers that create, challenge, empower, resist, and liberate—while also envisioning silence as that which suppresses and indicates oppression. For instance, many feminists see silence as an oppressive absence and therefore replicate the speech/silence binary, and work to include women in the garrulity that is political speech. Post-behavioralists, feminist theorists, critical race theorists,[27] and democratic theorists[28] all help us better understand and resist the damaging consequences of being silenced; yet few problematize their adherence to a speech/silence binary that leaves silence rendered one-dimensional and under-appreciated.

Rethinking Silence and Power: Some Things May Be Better Left Unsaid

As evidenced by the Bush administration's silence regarding Iraq, the selections we make about what to include in our discourses are vitally transformative—not just in the day-to-day interactions involving existing ideas, solutions, and facts,

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[24] MacKinnon, *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State*, p. 87.

[25] Brown, *States of Injury*, p. 51.

[26] hooks, *Talking Back*, p. 9.

[27] Derrick Bell, *Faces at the Bottom of the Well* (New York: Basic Books, 1992); Ian Haney Lopez, *White By Law* (New York: New York University, 1996); Peggy McIntosh, "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack," in Margaret Andersen and Patricia Hill Collins (eds), *Race, Class, and Gender*, 5th ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2004), pp. 103–108; Charles Mills, *The Racial Contract* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997); Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction* (New York: New York University Press, 2001).

[28] Benjamin Barber, *Strong Democracy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Jane Mansbridge, "Everyday Talk in the Deliberative System," in Stephen Macedo (ed.), *Deliberative Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 211–242; Anne Phillips, *The Politics of Presence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); and Iris Marion Young, "Communication and the Other: Beyond Deliberative Democracy," in Seyla Benhabib (ed.), *Democracy and Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), pp. 120–136.

but also at the very moments of discursive birth. Bringing something into the world of meaning fundamentally transforms it from something we do into something we think about doing, wish we were doing, talk about doing, regret doing, want others to do, want to prevent others from doing, want others to have the right to do, write laws and books about doing, see counselors about doing, and on and on. Michel Foucault illuminates this point well, "And people will ask themselves why we were so bent on ending the rule of silence regarding what was the noisiest of preoccupations . . . And what we now perceive as the chronicle of a censorship and the difficult struggle to remove it will be seen rather as the centuries-long rise of a complex deployment for compelling sex to speak."[29] It is possible that Foucault was helping us understand that, without such discursive existence, we may be able to avoid at least one stream of power, not violence or coercive forces per se, but power.

While silence is part of discourse, it might give the subject the comfort of knowing one does not have to engage in regulatory or unitary discourses. In an attempt to be unaffected by them, silence can be an active effort to avoid regulatory discourses. It can also, in being a lack of engagement in discourse that tends to shape and discipline, allow for alternative world construction and alternative practices that occur outside the purview of disciplinary regimes. In this protective function, it then allows for practices of freedom that may be unrealizable when directly engaging unitary discourses. Silence becomes a way to negotiate around and between and even in spite of a given regulatory structure. Brown states that silence can be "a means of preserving certain practices and dimension of existence from regulatory power, from normative violence, as well as from the scorching rays of public exposure."[30] This is similar to a reading of Jean-Jacques Rousseau as a warning about exposing ourselves to discourse in his *Discourse on Inequality*, in which he envisions an early state of nature without speech.[31] In this vein, silence does not necessarily entail apathy or unreflective existence. Instead, silence can be a practice that is active, selective, and protective. Instead of always responding to regulatory discourses by speaking out against them, silence offers another form of negotiation. Silence can be, and is, woven in and out of speech in ways that offer moments of relief from the compulsion to talk. Additionally, silence is more than simple relief—it can become a practice that helps shape the contours of political life.

There are things said, and things not said; silence can be a way of unsaying. Unsaying becomes a practice for disengaging subjects, attempting to pull away from participation in meaning construction. Trinh T. Minh-ha mentions silence as "a will not to say or a will to unsay," highlighting the intentionality of some of our silences and the effort to refuse speech, to undo what speech has accomplished, to rewind what has gone before. She talks of this will to unsay in a context in which she discusses silence as absence and the linking of this absence with the feminine. She states,

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[29] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, p. 158.

[30] Brown, *Edgework*, p. 85.

[31] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, trans. Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1992).

> On the one hand, we face the danger of inscribing femininity as absence, as lack and as blank in rejecting the importance of the act of enunciation. On the other hand, we understand the necessity to place women on the side of negativity and to work in undertones, for example, in our attempts at undermining patriarchal systems of values. Silence is so commonly set in opposition with speech. Silence as a will not to say or a will to unsay and as a language of its own has barely been explored.[32]

From the seemingly mundane, to the high-stakes dramatic, the will not to say can be a political posture of insubordination in the face of hegemonic regimes of truth that weave their way into the microfibers of our living together. The remainder of this article explores insubordinate silences that attempt to empower, protest, resist, and/or refuse political, economic, and social realities. The insubordinate character of such silences arises from the all-important status of speech, as well as from the various meanings that well-timed silences convey (for instance, the silent treatment). Insubordinate silences are generally the silences of the "weak," weak in the more enduring and historical sense and weak in the more fluid and highly contextual sense. Against domination, these silences defy accepted norms regarding timeliness, appropriateness, deference, and speech rights and opportunities. Insubordinate silences involve the use of silence as one among other weapons of the weak. Foucault talks about silence as "the things one declines to say,"[33] and notes that silence is an "element that functions alongside the things said, with them and in relation to them within over-all strategies."[34] Given a general neglect of such silent strategies within political science, what follows is a brief overview of already existing insubordinate silences and an attempt to shed light upon silences that could offer powerful means of contestation for democratic and non-democratic subjects alike.

Insubordinate Silences

Silences that Empower

In November 2004, students at the University of Virginia waged an impromptu silent protest, envisioned as a way to call attention to what they deemed the silencing of victims of sexual assault by the university's sexual assault policy. The protest originated in an email to fifteen students, asking for a response to the university's policy. The Cavalier *Daily* described the protest as follows:

> An estimated 400 students, faculty, staff and community members lined the sidewalk bordering the Amphitheater in a line stretching from the Lawn to the Bryan Hall bridge. Demonstrators, some with mouths covered in red and pink cloth, stood in silence from 11:40 a.m. to 12:05 p.m. to symbolize what organizers termed the "silence surrounding rape and sexual assault at the University."[35]

As other students passed by the silent protest, they were handed copies of a letter written to university deans; the letter urged the university to increase educational

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[32] Minh-ha, "Not You/Like You," pp. 372–373.
[33] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, p. 27.
[34] Ibid., 27.
[35] Mary Pumphrey, "Students Stage Silent Protest," *The Cavalier Daily*, November 18, 2004.

efforts regarding sexual assault, and "an immediate end to the Sexual Assault Board's confidentiality policy, greater accountability for those who commit acts of rape and sexual assault, increased training in dealing with victims of sexual assault . . . and a presidential commission on sexual assault and safety."[36] According to the event's organizer, Vicky Long, the silence was meant to symbolize the silence and "isolation" that sexual assault victims experience when there is a lack of institutional and communal support. She stated, "Something had to be done to break the silence."[37] Silences that empower take a stand against policies that exclude, in order to establish the impetus for voice.

Silences that empower are a direct response to being silenced. These silences are about gaining access—access to the political, the social, the interpersonal, the economic, the educational, or the spiritual. As emphasized by post-behavioralists (mobilization of bias and ideological conditioning), feminists (the double-bind of speaking up; terror, violence, and social norms against those who express themselves), and democratic theorists (the need for embracing more inclusive forms of talk and deliberation, such as Jane Mansbridge's informal talk and Iris Marion Young's storytelling and greeting), much of the critical work on silencing is about access denied. Silences that empower manipulate norms surrounding silence, speech, absence, and presence in order to bring attention to the detrimental consequences of silencing. For those who have been silenced, and their allies, relying *exclusively* upon speaking out has brought much political progress. This emphasis makes great sense but at times may miss the opportunity that insubordinate silences can provide in establishing the discursive space necessary for speaking out. "Silence Equals Death," "Express Yourself," "Talk About It," all call for the immediate use of one's voice politically. Yet, much of the condition of being silenced means that a one-step move into voice is very difficult, if not impossible. Many groups are silenced because powerful forces are stacked against them, foreclosing opportunities for inclusion.

Ultimately, moving from silence to voice makes political action possible. Silences that empower seek to ameliorate the problem of silencing as a crucial step that puts subjects into positions in which they can become more politically active. In a high-traffic discursive universe, space must be opened up for more voices. This is a crucial way that silence can work to empower. Silence itself is necessary for expression. Bernard Dauenhauer describes silence as providing an empty frame, from which utterances can emerge, stating, "For discourse to be heard there must be room for it. That is, there must be a frame of silence into which it can fit."[38] Silence can be an insistence upon room—room to talk, to think, to do nothing. This view of silence as providing an absence that can then become a performance is not an insignificant function. King-Kok Cheung describes provocative silence as "the paradox in Kingston's *Woman Warrior* and *China Men* whereby parental and historical silence spurs creativity."[39] One of the problems with certain Eurocentric approaches to the silences of constructed "others" has been a tendency for the

[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Bernard Dauenhauer, *Silence: The Phenomenon and Its Ontological Significance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), p. 14.
[39] King-Kok Cheung, *Articulate Silences* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 24.

dominant group to fill in supposed gaps in a given history—this is the dark side of the silence as absence equation; a dominant group uses violence and coercion to silence a subordinate group, then reads this silence as an absence, and furthermore takes license to tell for the silenced. The other side, the potentially promising side, is to take silences as absences as an opportunity for the oppressed to tell, to create, to speak unfettered by preconceived notions and histories that have not emerged from within as of yet.

Insubordinate uses of silence can also illuminate the "who, how, why, and harshness" of undemocratic absences. An important aspect of silences that empower is that they tend to be focused upon relationship and exclusion. A person, or group of people, who should stand in relationship to another person or group of people, or to a system, is not fully enabled to participate in the relationship. Therefore, those who use silences to empower have as their object drawing attention to a dysfunctional relationship between subjects, as well as between silence and speech. In contexts and relationships in which being vocal is vital, tactical silence can call attention to what happens when garrulity breaks down; as well as call attention to what could happen if such silence were more lasting. It is in this calling of attention to the consequences of absence that silence can be deployed to call attention to the potentiality of including more voices. Silence can be used to convey the message that an individual or group being silenced is a loss for a given social, political, educational, or economic context. Political allies can be invaluable when deploying silence for empowerment. Those who suffer from being silenced many times are, due to circumstance, silent; therefore, their political use of silence to draw attention to their silencing might go unnoticed—they are not necessarily disrupting the flow of discourses and power. Therefore, either the silenced have to deploy silence in contexts in which they are not regularly silenced; and/or they have to bring in allies to use silence for them, allies whose voices are regularly heard, valued, and depended upon. The objective is to draw attention to the injustice of being silenced. Having allies can make the effort much more effective.[40]

Silences that Protest

In a highly garrulous context, silence stands out. A group known as "Women in Black for Peace" meets every Friday on a street corner in downtown Portland, waging a silent vigil for peace. Nancy Haught, of the *Oregonian*, notes

> From 12:15 to 12:45 p.m. on Fridays, anywhere from two to a dozen women stand in silence in the one-time women's park. They turn their backs to the Justice Center, their faces toward the Portland Building. They carry one sign that says, simply, "We are women standing in silent vigil wearing black in remembrance, holding a vision of peace." These particular women also hold a vision of silence and what it can accomplish in a world that seems to prize words, whether written, spoken or shouted . . . In a time when the push for causes—war, peace, school funding, budget cuts, pro-life and pro-choice—have spawned a cacophony of voices, the Chapman Square Women in Black stand out because they stand in silence.[41]

[40] For a description of the importance of gay straight alliances for the Day of Silence movement, see Cara Nissman, "As Gay-Straight Alliances Grow, so does Acceptance in Schools," *The Boston Herald*, April 7, 2003, p. 30.

[41] Haught, "Activists Hold a Silent Vigil of Protest."

A participant in these silent protests, Maggie Zadikov, states, "There is a power of silence in community. There is the power of just our presence . . . To see and to be seen; that's the point of holding a vigil."[42] One of the founders of this group, Rev. Rhiannon Griffiths, stated, "It doesn't require words. There are enough words out there. It's possible to get caught up in the words and lost in the words, and that's part of why Women in Black arose. Traditionally, women's voices get drowned out."[43] In this case, the traditional binary configuration of speech and silence is turned upside down. Many would consider silence to be the background upon which speech emerges and dictates and defines and shapes the contours of political and social life. Yet, in a context, and a world, in which speech occurs so regularly as to establish a sort of incessant buzz, it can become the background upon which important, substantive, and illuminated silences will emerge.

While silences that empower are certainly, by definition, also silences that wage protest, there are silent political strategies more specifically geared toward expressing substantive and particular political messages that are not also aimed more directly at inclusion. In contrast to silences that empower (in which the focus is upon repairing broken relationships between more and less powerful subjects and institutions), silences that protest focus upon addressing topics—substantive injustices. Such silences are themselves political actions. This active character of silent protests challenges the myth that silence only represents "invisibility, loss, absence, repression, oppression, the unspoken, the unknown."[44] Cheung states,

> Then there are the enabling silences, such as listening in Kingston, the elliptical telling in Yamamoto, and, above all, the breathtaking rendition of soundless but "accurate and alert knowing" in Kogawa. These silences, demanding utmost vigilance from writers and readers alike, are the very antitheses of passivity.[45]

While silences that empower are attempts to address coerced passivity, silences that protest are practiced as active forms of political expression; expressing anger, disgust, fear, anxiety, pain, difference, love, or frustration. Silences can be quite meaningful. Muriel Saville-Troike notes that, "Silent communicative acts conveying prepositional content may include gestures, but may also consist of silence unaccompanied by any visual clues. Even in a telephone conversation where no visual signals are possible, silence in response to a greeting, query, or request which anticipates verbal response is fraught with prepositional meaning in its own right."[46] Silences that protest negotiate the interplay of speech and silence in order to convey political meanings. While such protests do in fact use visual clues to express meaning, this is not always necessary. Whether using symbols ("silence plus"), or pure silence, silences that protest can be powerful expressions of dissent in social and political contexts where speech seems pervasive.[47]

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[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Duncan, *Tell This Silence*, pp. 7–8.
[45] Cheung, *Articulate Silences*, p. 20.
[46] Muriel Saville-Toike, "The Place of Silence in an Integrated Theory of Communication," in Deborah Tannen and Muriel Saville-Troike (eds), *Perspectives on Silence* (Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Corporation, 1985), p. 6.
[47] For a recent example, see coverage and videos of the silent protest waged at the University of California-Davis, <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/need-to-know/the-daily-need/uc-davis-still-reeling-after-police-pepper-spray-students/12408/>.

Untimely Silences. Being insubordinate is about defying expectations. Many expectations of our contemporary age touch upon, or originate with, speaking, listening, and silence. Who should speak when, and who should listen; as well as how long and to whom, structure much of our lives. Given that we live in an age of "diarrhetic speech," it might be that silence can offer one of the most important means of contemporary political contestation.[48] In particular, untimely silences, silences that are insubordinate in their defiance of communicative expectations, offer starkly contrasting moments of political protest—they can stand out.[49] Timing is important when considering what Dauenhauer calls fore-and-after silence. One important facet of such silences is the way in which the movement between speech and silence can be manipulated to interrupt what a given set of interlocutors might deem appropriate conversational etiquette and timing. He describes these silences,

> If one focuses on an utterance as a whole . . . he notices that the utterance is surrounded by a fringe of silence. This silence is fore-and-after silence. This aspect of the phenomenon of silence is constituted by the occurrence of silence which immediately precedes the first sound phrase of an utterance and the occurrence of silence which immediately follows its last sound phrase.[50]

Fore-and-after silence can be envisioned as transition points, small and large spaces in which one set of sound phrases is left behind as another emerges into a discursive context.

An important component of fore-silence involves the anticipation that can accompany discursive interactions. Dauenhauer states, "In anticipatory alertness, fore-silence is experienced both as present, though horizontally so, and as either more or less intense. One readies himself to say or hear."[51] An interesting aspect of anticipatory alertness is the varied ways in which such a silent space can be filled with diverse wishes, hopes, fears, and wonders. In other words, such anticipatory alertness is usually, at least partially, filled in by those who are anticipating; yet, the anticipation itself is a moment of dependence, a dependence upon a discursive structure to produce something of interest that might meet the expectations of the wonderer. Another aspect of this anticipatory alertness is the intensity that can accompany such silence—depending upon context, of course, one can manipulate the timing of such anticipatory silences in order to raise or lower intensity of feeling and thought. Such deployments of fore-silence can be effective ways to draw attention to an issue or utterance, as one can raise the intensity with a longer period of silence. Finally, anticipatory alertness via fore-silence can be utilized to discontinue one series of utterances in order to make space for something else, and, if used effectively, can alert others that such a transition is taking place, or is being demanded.

In February of 2003, a college basketball player waged a silent protest against the Bush administration's push towards war with Iraq and against unjust

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[48] Brown, *Edgework*, p. 83.

[49] See Nikolas Rose, *Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), regarding the importance of untimeliness and critique.

[50] Dauenhauer, *Silence*, p. 9.

[51] Ibid., 11.

inequalities throughout the United States. At the beginning of the singing of "The Star-Spangled Banner," Toni Smith, a player for the Manhattanville women's basketball team, turned away from the US flag and lowered her head in silent protest. Her silence led to team-wide and community dialogue about both the substance of her protest and her right to speak her mind through silence.[52] Smith's silent protest exemplifies the use of anticipatory silence to disrupt expectations of fore-silence. For audiences at sporting events in the US, there usually emerges a distinct fore-silence preceding the playing of the national anthem. The crowd quiets, and group fore-silence emerges as anticipation grows. The anticipatory silence involves a knowing attitude regarding what will happen when the silence is broken: The announcer asks the crowd to stand, music begins to play, the audience is turned toward a flag, and singing commences. Smith's silent and symbolic protest was an elongation of the fore-silence, an interruption of the usual narrative, a disruptive silent act in the discursive flow of patriotic performance. She manipulated the fore-silence in several ways: First, when everyone stood, instead of facing the US flag, Smith turned her back on the flag, thereby disrupting the crowd's normal structure of anticipatory silence when they settle in to a patriotic posture. Second, the standing crowd, to demonstrate respect, took off hats, held their heads up and faced the flag, sometimes putting their hands on their chests; Smith bowed her head and looked at the ground—the opposite of the others. Third, as the music began and the fore-silence ended with singing, Smith maintained her silence, upsetting the expectations of the audience and signaling that she was in fact waging a personal protest of some kind. Smith's actions displayed a keen use of fore-silence, defying normal anticipatory expectations, raising awareness, and garnering both support and counter-protests.

Silences that Resist

John Gilliom, when studying the ways in which welfare recipients resist state surveillance, notes, "In their need and anger, they mounted no litigation or protest campaigns, but engaged in necessarily quiet practices of everyday resistance and evasion to beat, as best they could, the powers of surveillance."[53] Much of this evasion involves silence. Gilliom describes how welfare recipients use silences that resist:

> . . . even as Mary says that they have her "over a barrel," she begins to reveal the many ways that clients struggle against the power; she is able to get around the system by having someone else purchase goods; other people babysit for unrecorded and unreported cash. Even in the face of one of the most advanced systems for the detection of financial activity, we begin to see that the subjects of the system find little ways to sneak something by and, in so doing, to challenge the state's command that all be known.[54]

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[52] Janet Paskin, "A Silent Protest on the Basketball Court," *The Journal News*, February 21, 2003, p. A1.

[53] John Gilliom, *Overseers of the Poor: Surveillance, Resistance, and the Limits of Privacy* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2001), p. 6.

[54] Ibid., 51–52.

One welfare recipient in Gilliom's study, who worked for extra cash, said, "I babysat for about three months… But I didn't report that."[55] When asked whether others had confided in her about their own efforts to supplement their welfare benefits with under-the-table work, she stated, "No… you know, you just don't tell people…"[56] Gilliom's analysis of the ways welfare recipients in southeastern Ohio negotiate the surveillance and control of welfare regimes of power has many examples of silences that resist via not telling and not reporting. Such forms of resistance are powerful and consequential practices among some of society's most stereotypically powerless groups—these are the weapons of the weak—and help these subjects care for their children and maintain a standard of living in defiance of state power.

Silences that resist might also be attempts at protest; they indirectly protest conditions and practices deemed inappropriate and unjust. Therefore, as with the insubordinate silences described above, the political goals of empowerment, protest, and resistance certainly blend together in practice. However, silences that resist are about more than straightforward expression of discontent. Silences that resist are practiced as forms of subversion: subverting the man, the government, the system, the economy, the boss, the corporation, the policy, or the narrative. There are the silent interventions that are meant to upset the normal flow of communicative contexts and exchanges, as well as "game the system" so as to resist some of its most constraining and debilitating facets. As was mentioned previously, silences are both a necessary component of communication and a potential means of resistance as we attempt to become and re-become political interlocutors. Silences that resist in this way are about subverting the configuration of a given discursive terrain, contingent narrative structure, hierarchies of privileged speakers, and unequal distribution of resources. Silences that resist also involve the multiple ways that people decide not to tell, or to remain silent, when asked to provide a story, information, adulation, confession, opinion, and/or consent.

Telling and not telling are, in many cases, high stakes practices, sometimes recognized as political and oftentimes not, that shape the lives, opportunities, and policies of millions of people every day. Silence as a means of resisting being called upon to tell is much practiced and should be recognized and embraced as a political tactic. Many institutions and narratives of power depend upon telling to function according to (shifting) designs. Citizens, employees, and subjects are asked much. How old are you? How much money did you make last year? Do you live with a boyfriend? Are you gay?[57] What's your race? Do you have a history of depression? Have you ever smoked marijuana? There are also invisible questions—the moments when one feels the need to tell, even when she has not been asked. These confessional urges can include compellations to tell about our

[55] Ibid., 53.

[56] Ibid., 53.

[57] For supportive examples of encouragement to "talk about" one's sexuality, see: "Resource Guide to Coming Out," The Human Rights Campaign Coming Out Project, <http://w3.hrc.org/Template.cfm?Section = Coming_Out&Template = /ContentMan a gement/ContentDisplay.cfm&ContentID = 32669>; and "A Straight Guide to GLBT Americans," The Human Rights Campaign, <http://w3. hrc.org/Template.cfm?Section = Get_Informed4&Template = /ContentManagement/ContentDisplay.cfm&ContentID = 34212>.

sins, our sexuality, our political affiliations, our misdeeds and mistakes, and our misfortunes. When subordinated subjects resist telling, they can reshape the contours of such powerful forces. Silences that resist are practices of not telling. Not telling helps subjects act in their interests outside the purview of authorities.

It is helpful to think of silences that resist as akin to the everyday forms of resistance illuminated by James Scott. He describes these weapons of the weak as, "Here I have in mind the ordinary weapons of relatively powerless groups: foot dragging, dissimulation, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage, and so forth."[58] False compliance and feigned ignorance likely entail some measure of insubordinate silence. False compliance can involve not telling what one did or did not do. Not telling what one really knows can be a form of feigned ignorance. In both sets of practices, the subordinate skillfully use silences to subvert the system, to resist its regulations and regimes. In a discursive age, these weapons of the weak tend to be necessarily quiet tools of political contestations. Scott quotes Marc Bloch, who states,

> Almost invariably doomed to defeat and eventual massacre, the great insurrections were altogether too disorganized to achieve any lasting result. The patient, silent struggles stubbornly carried on by rural communities over the years would accomplish more than these flashes in the pan.[59]

While there are many reasons to debate and reflect upon the long-term effectiveness of such everyday resistance, it is undeniable that these represent whole categories of resistant practices and that such practices rely heavily upon insubordinate silences. They are not resistances that are likely to completely or even substantially reform a given relationship between employer/employee, government/citizen, or bureaucrat/subject-client. In contrast to silences that empower, in which silences are meant to lead to a much more thoroughgoing challenge of power dynamics, silences that resist have less grand objectives. Patricia Ewick and Susan Silbey state, "These everyday practices can be thought of as tactical insofar as they are maneuvers within a terrain organized and imposed by a 'foreign power.'"[60] Ewick and Silbey highlight the difference between strategies and tactics, the former taking place upon the thoroughfares of power, and the latter within the alleyways: "strategies" aimed at broader political change or maintenance of the status quo, and "tactics" confined to pockets of resistance where powerful forces exclude one from participating in the broader political processes. Due to the vast inequalities involved—that the relationship configuration seems mostly unchangeable—this tactical resistance is focused upon obtaining a marginal increase of resources, or a little less supervision. Nevertheless, even marginal change can make a big difference in the lives of everyday people.

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[58] James Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985), p. 29.

[59] Ibid., 28.

[60] Patricia Ewick and Susan Silbey, "Conformity, Contestation, and Resistance: An Account of Legal Consciousness," *New England Law Review* 26 (1992), pp. 742–743.

Silences that Refuse

> Is it possible, he wondered, that the most psychologically sound alternative for truly devout gay men and women would be to defy both groups? It is an approach that Flanigan is sure has relieved suffering among his deeply conflicted clients, and yet he sometimes is struck by the method he has chosen. As he explained it to me, "The idea that I am helping the client stay in the closet is bizarre to me."[61]

Silence can provide space—protective space for the development of alternative identities.[62] Brown states, "Yet . . . silence—even that produced within discourse—may also function as that which discourse has not penetrated, as a scene of practices that escape the regulatory functions of discourse. It is this latter function that renders silence itself a source of protection and potentially a source of power."[63] Denis Flanigan is a self-described "militant homosexual" who practices psychotherapy in Houston, Texas. While he lives his life out of the closet, and he respects the importance of a right to live openly, in his practice he offers his patients a choice to live ambiguously—neither in nor out, even when they profess same-sex attraction and desire. Flanigan has come to the conclusion that an either/or approach to coming out is not appropriate for all his patients who are struggling with sexual identity. This is particularly true for his clients who have a difficult time with the conflict between their sexuality and their Christian faith.[64] When patients are pulled from two opposing perspectives (one that asks individuals to relinquish their orientation, and the second that asks them to give up their religion and come out), sometimes a mixture of silence and moments of openness and expression is a viable alternative. This can be a difficult choice, given how pervasive confessional settings surrounding sexuality are in our contemporary life. The overwhelming choice is usually between living a lie or being authentic. Flanigan offers his patients the option of "living the good lie," which, when contrasted with calls to come out of the closet, can be a controversial path.

This is the complicated terrain of the silences that refuse. Again, it is worth noting that all insubordinate silences are practices of refusal—refusing exclusion and silencing, refusing policies and injustices, refusing powerful forms of social control and manipulation. Yet, silences that are more thoroughly and deeply committed to refusal deserve further illumination. While all the above silence contestations contain some measure of refusal, they involve a level of continued engagement that some silences that refuse intend to cast aside. Silences that

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[61] Mimi Swartz, "Living the Good Lie," *The New York Times Magazine*, July 16, 2011, pp. 31–35, 54, 57.

[62] Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, pp. 92–93, points out how the silences of black women do not fit easily into the silenced framework of much feminist theorizing. Silence has not always represented either a deep resignation that nothing can be done nor a totalizing ideological conditioning that produces quiescence. She states, "Silence is not to be interpreted as submission in this tradition of a self-defined Black women's consciousness." Silences that refuse offer a consciousness shelter, a space that emerges by refusing to tell, refusing to reveal that which inside resists multiple oppressions that emerge from the outside. Collins states, "Black women intellectuals have long explored this private, hidden space of Black women's consciousness, the 'inside' ideas that allow Black women to cope with and, in most cases, transcend the confine of race, class, and gender oppression."

[63] Brown, *Edgework*, p. 88.

[64] Swartz, "Living the Good Lie."

empower, protest, and resist attempt and engage in action, whereas refusal embraces inaction. Silences that refuse involve leaving; leaving a world, a life, an identity, a relationship, a conversation, a self, a community, or a *nomos*.[65] These are the silences that both illuminate, and attempt to leave behind, failure or inadequacy—a failed worldview, life, identity, relationship, or self. The previously discussed silences, whether focused upon improving or better negotiating relationships, or changing substantive injustices, tend to emphasize endurance, endurance of relationship, topic, or livelihood. This is not the aim of silences that refuse. When attempts to reform fail, or when certain political, social, personal, or economic configurations are deemed not susceptible to change, silences that refuse can allow an exit that might open the possibility for radically new ways of engagement and existence. Silences that refuse are not about attempting to enlarge one's presence as a political contestant. Instead, these silences are about cultivating absence. They are about turning away from a given reality or narrative—refusing to be present via one's voice upon and within topographies, structures, constructs, and/or relationships. Lisa Block de Behar notes, "that only silence can offer a means of avoiding the automatism of language."[66]

Silences that refuse can be partial or all encompassing. The vast majority of such silences will be partial refusals of both minor and major areas of political and social life. Silences that refuse will usually involve a refusal of a narrative in order to deplete it of the voice necessary for political or social existence. Murray Edelman illuminated how social issues may or may not become socially constructed as problems within the political spectacle.[67] Refusing to speak about a given issue can be a refusal to acknowledge the issue as a problem. A person may also refuse to talk to another person, or group of people. In so doing, one is refusing and/or ending one's relationship with that person or group. Silences that refuse may also entail a non-declaration of one's identity, thereby refusing calls to identify as black, white, gay, or straight, for instance. Finally, it is possible that one could decide to use such silences to refuse sociality altogether. It can be helpful to think of silences as refusing a given interpellation. Describing interpellation, Donna Haraway states, "Althusser used the example of the policeman calling out, 'Hey, you!' If I turned my head, I am a subject in that discourse of law and order: and so I am subject to a powerful formation."[68] An important way in which silence can be deployed politically is the refusal to be subjected to a given powerful formation or narrative. Such refusals allow for complicated maneuvering between engagement and disengagement. They allow for alternative engagements of identity politics, through disengagement. By refusing to declare oneself a part of a

[65] Robert Cover, "Violence and the Word," in Martha Minow, Michael Ryan, and Austin Sarat (eds), *Narrative, Violence, and the Law* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), p. 95: "We inhabit a *nomos*—a normative universe. We constantly create and maintain a world of right and wrong, of lawful and unlawful, of valid and void . . . .The rules and principles of justice, the formal institutions of the law, and the conventions of a social order are, indeed, important to that world; they are, however, but a small part of the normative universe that ought to claim our attention."

[66] Lisa Block de Behar, *A Rhetoric of Silence and Other Selected Writings* (New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1995), p. 4.

[67] Edelman, *Constructing the Political Spectacle*.

[68] Donna Haraway, *Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium.FemaleMan_Meets_OncoMouse* (New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 50.

given identity formation, one can disrupt and multiply the number of identity choices available.

Patty Duncan recognizes that "coming out" within a discursive construct that illuminates coming out as something abnormal may indicate compliance with a hegemonic framework, and may therefore be ripe for selective silent refusal. She asks, "How effective are 'speaking out,' 'finding a voice,' 'breaking silence,' and 'coming out' as liberatory rhetoric and political acts when such notions rely on the very discursive practices through which social and political domination occurs?"[69] There are no guarantees that talking about one's pain will fulfill the promise of a life being transformed from shame to pride.[70] Brown states, "When all such experiences are put into discourse—when sexual, emotional, reproductive, and artistic lives are all exhaustively chronicled and thereby subjected to normativizing discourses—might this imperil the experiences of autonomy, creativity, privacy, and bodily integrity so long denied those whose subjugation included, *inter alia*, sexual violation or other deprivations of privacy?"[71] One possibility is that the refusal to "come out" may work to challenge the notion of the "closet" altogether. Duncan, describing and analyzing an autobiography by a Chinese writer, continues,

> Finally, her official silence and unwillingness to name either herself or her narrative as "lesbian" perhaps signifies not an intention to remain in the "closet" but a refusal to partake in such conventional methods of naming, tied as they are to other binaries of dominant discourse both in China and globally. I read her silence . . . as a carefully delineated form of resistance to any official, dominant discourse that upholds the rights of the elite while eliding those of others. For Min, made invisible within the historical setting she describes, except as a degendered, desexualized being, naming a relationship or individual according to Western sexual categories is not necessarily empowering. Thus, her reliance on particular forms of silence with regard to such categories suggests her critique of the categories themselves, as well as the meanings attached to them.[72]

The silences that refuse to participate in, and perpetuate, a given discourse and constitution of the subject are political responses—such silences rework the configuration of the political.

Refusing to "Come Out": A Potential Deployment

Embracing silence as a tactic for democratic engagement opens up issues of identity that have appeared to be dichotomous for newer complexities. For many years, sexuality was confined to hegemonic heterosexuality that forced many subjects into "closets," where they hid their desires and submerged their

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[69] Duncan, *Tell This Silence*, p. 14.

[70] For discussions of the complexity surrounding coming out narratives, see: Susan Burgess, "Did the Supreme Court Come Out in Bush v. Gore? Queer Theory on the Performance of the Politics of Shame," *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 16:1 (2005), pp. 126–146; and Judith Butler, "Imitation and Gender Insubordination," in Hazard Adams and Leroy Searle (eds), *Critical Theory Since Plato* (Boston, MA: Thomson Wadsworth, 2005), pp. 1490–1499.

[71] Brown, *Edgework*, p. 95.

[72] Duncan, *Tell This Silence*, pp. 210–211.

identities. Coming out practices and narratives then offered an alternative. The alternative was packaged as a means to engage one's authentic self, and to live a more honest, open, and liberated life. For many individuals who are today struggling with their sexual identities, there now appear to be two choices: either to stay in the so-called closet, or to come out. Of course, the everyday reality of people's lives sees them living in many ambiguous spaces, in which they are "out" to some people, yet not to others; they are "out" in some contexts, yet not in others, and so on. However, in spite of this lived complexity, there remains the pull of only two major trajectories. For those who are "out" to only some, or in only some contexts, the ultimate goal is to eventually live a liberated life of openness to all and everywhere. For others, the only choice seems to be one in which they are forever enclosed within a closet of secrecy and/or denial. In negotiating these choices, silences that refuse might offer at least two more options for those struggling with sexual identity. One, silences that refuse might offer an alternative to either staying completely within the closet, or making it one's goal to completely come out. Second, silences that refuse might be used to more thoroughly dismantle the incessant call to confess one's sexuality more generally.

Denis Flanigan seems to recognize the dilemma of being confined by the in or out choice. Early in his practice, he witnessed the suffering experienced by the either/or choice faced by many of his clients. Feeling as though they had to make a definitive choice, they became deeply alienated from those people and beliefs they felt they had to leave behind in order to secure a more stable identity. On the one hand, coming out of the closet, voicing one's sexual identity to others publicly, would have left them exposed to the judgments and condemnations of their evangelical peers, and left them alienated from the church. On the other, remaining absolutely silent and confined to the closet would have left them exposed to their own self-denial and struggles of anxiety and frustration. Flanigan offers them the alternative of not having to choose, of living ambiguously.[73] When his clients come to him and wonder whether they should talk about their sexuality with those around them (family, friends, or co-workers), Denis Flanigan asks, "Why do you want to do that?"[74] Ironically, Flanigan (who is one of contemporary society's listeners par excellence) refuses some of the power that comes with confessional settings. Instead of boxing his clients into an either/or situation, he expresses an openness to helping them construct approaches that help them avoid being subjected to new injuries, but also allow them to keep possibilities open.

Insubordinate Silences and Visibility

Before moving to the conclusion, it is helpful to highlight one of the important ways that the four types of silences discussed above differ from one another. In doing so, other differences between these silences will be brought into focus. The issue of visibility divides these four silences into two categories—the visible and the less visible. Silences that empower and protest need the light of day; whereas, silences that resist and refuse usually seek the cover of darkness. Those who use silences that empower, for instance, want to draw attention to their efforts. They use visible strategies such as taking a vow of silence in a context in which

[73] Swartz, "Living the Good Lie."
[74] Ibid., 32.

they are supposed to speak, or publicly placing a piece of tape over their mouths in order to make a dramatic point about being silenced by oppressive forces. Those who engage in silences that protest usually use signs (such as "End the War") as a means to communicate the substance of their protests to passersby. They also choose public spaces as venues for silent protests. They purposely manipulate the timing of silence and speech in order to draw attention to themselves, which can then illuminate their messages. Silences that protest use silence among other forms of communication to convey important political messages. On the other hand, silences that empower attempt to make silence itself visible in order to communicate one important message—silence excludes important voices and people from politics. For those using silences to empower, the silence itself is the message, whereas, for those using silences to protest, the silence is a means to convey another substantive political message. There is a similar dynamic regarding means and ends at work between silences that resist and refuse.

Silences that resist are usually mobilized as covert tactics against power. As "weapons of the weak," such silences are one tool within a small toolbox available to those trying to negotiate significant inequality. Ewick and Silbey state, "For most of those without power or position, the only alternative to conformity is resistance: poaching, appropriation, or silence."[75] To be effective, these silences cannot be visible—those who use them cannot be found out. Silences that refuse also tend to avoid visibility. However, this is less as a means of secret resistance to gain resources, or to avoid tactical supervision, and more as a goal in and of itself. Instead of using the cover of darkness to wage such resistance, those who refuse to speak embrace silence as a refuge and/or as a means of individually and thoroughly rejecting particular configurations of a politics of truth. They are not so much using invisibility to avoid being found out, as much as they are refusing the reality of "found-out-ed-ness" itself. For those who use silences to resist via not telling, these efforts use invisibility as a cover for tactical maneuvers. For those who use silences to refuse via not telling or not talking, invisibility is embraced more as an end in itself. The invisibility is sought as a space that may submerge, and keep submerged, an unwanted identity formation, for instance. Such refusals may also bathe in the ambiguity of, as Brown puts it, ponds of silence. Submerged in these murky waters, there is a refusal of clear boundaries and binaries that register and designate. Under a pond of silence, it becomes difficult for others to define who one is—this, itself, is a powerful refusal of identity politics that attempt to consolidate selves in order for political action. Insubordinate silences interact in differing ways with visibility and invisibility. These differences are important to note because they can help political scientists and practitioners understand and use such silences more effectively.

Conclusion

Insubordinate silences question many of the prevailing assumptions of both those who engage and those who observe politics. Treating silence as one among many forms of political contestation can open up new areas of empirical research, as well as offer more options to those who seek to challenge injustice and inequality. This article began by illuminating what Ferguson has

[75] Ewick and Silbey, "Conformity, Contestation, and Resistance," p. 747.

called "denigrated silence,"[76] the ways in which political scientists have overlooked silence. Lukes, Gaventa, and others helped alleviate some of these shortcomings by putting forth multi-dimensional views of power that uncover how some groups have been silenced by powerful forces. While calling attention to silencing is invaluable, some of those who are considered silenced might actually be choosing silence insubordinately. This insubordinate silence framework allows us to reinterpret this literature and those who are quiescent.

How many non-voters are paying close and critical attention to politics, yet simply refuse the terms and predominant methods of the dominant political landscape? In taking a closer look at citizens who, while seemingly quiet, might be registering dissent and protest through silence, political scientists can make better assessments as to the health of democratic politics in a variety of settings. Furthermore, instead of discarding the ideologies and political inclinations of traditionally designated non-participants, studies can emerge that attempt a better understanding of both what issues are driving some citizens to use silence as a tool of resistance and why silence became their choice for showing their disdain. Diverse identity formations are likely ripe for analyses that, instead of assuming non-participation results from apathy or silencing, start by envisioning racialized or gendered groups, for example, as politicized in silence against the system. What kinds of unrecognized democratic deliberation and talk might be occurring in spaces left unexamined by political scientists less inclined to look for them? Are there forces (structural, institutional, identity-based) that tend to shuffle some citizens towards more traditional forms of political participation, and others towards more marginal alternatives such as silence? Have citizens who are more likely to engage in silent forms of dissent only turned to silence and disengagement because they have found other choices unfruitful, inappropriate, or unavailable? Have silent citizens figured out how to "work" the political system effectively by avoiding the exposure associated with more direct forms of engagement? Is it the case that silence is one of those weapons of the weak, a technique for negotiating subordination? Maybe some citizens engage silence because they come to realize speaking out is more dangerous and costly. Perhaps there is an understanding, not a blue-ribbon moment for democratic hopes, that the best one can do is work underground networks; networks that do not generally appear to those in positions of authority.

In what ways does political participation based exclusively upon voice differ substantively, strategically, and tangentially from engagement that uses silence? For instance, I began this article with an example drawn from the Day of Silence movement, in which students take a vow of silence to draw attention to the disempowered. The Day of Silence movement seems very committed to values such as diversity of voice and tactics, inclusiveness, bottom-up political visions, and care. Are these characteristics unique to the Day of Silence, or might they be indications that those who use silence (sometimes along with voice) to engage politics are more apt to value diversity and care? Some theorists highlighted in this article have pointed out how words can do real damage to those subjected to them. The point has been made that speaking can surely be liberating, but it can also tend to be divisive and potentially alienating. Does using silence and voice lead citizens to become better listeners and deliberators? Political scientists

[76] Ferguson, *Silence*, pp. 50–54.

who take a closer look at the similarities and differences between strategies of resistance organized around speech and silence might come up with some answers to such questions.

How effective is silence? How does silence influence those subjected to it? How might a political protest in which the participants stand silently differ in its impact from one in which participants chant slogans? How might passersby receive the silent protest? Would they be more receptive to the message or less receptive? How might the silence influence the perceptions others have of the protestors? Would the protestors be viewed as stoic, ineffectual, or passive? Are the vocal protestors viewed more negatively as aggressive, disruptive, and disrespectful? Research could be done regarding the ways in which the actual participants differ based upon whether they are organized around speech or silence, or both. It might be possible that some identity formations are drawn to less vocal forms of political engagement. What if our current age, with its emphasis upon speaking out to get one's views heard, alienates those less inclined to talk loudly? What may be some detrimental side effects of recent efforts to gain voice? For instance, the focus among feminist theorists and activists upon going from silence to speech may, at times, inadvertently perpetuate masculine speech performances.

Studying and deploying silence is not without its problems. From a social science perspective, silences can be inherently insubordinate—they can refuse to open up to observation, hypothesization, and operationalization. How can silence be translated into workable variable(s) and made available for quantitative analyses? How can one distinguish different degrees of silence and different types of silence? While not impossible, answering such questions does present some difficulties for political scientists. Additionally, silences that refuse may be impossible to study for a political scientist. The refusal will cease to be a refusal if and when its user starts explaining herself. When using silences, one must be careful not to perpetuate one's own subordination. Silence could easily morph into a perpetuation of the status quo. One must pay close attention to relationality and context. In contexts and relationships in which one is relied upon for voice, silence might be an effective means for bringing about change. However, even in these cases, silence can often be ignored; or, one's voice can be replaced by another's voice. This may mean that many silences are both risky and potentially ambiguous as forms of contestation. An over-indulgence in silence can render a subject irrelevant. If no one is paying attention, silences will go "unheard." When using silence as a form of resistance, subjects must do so carefully.

Silence is complicated. However, its complexity should not preclude us from studying and engaging its politics. By illuminating the promise of silences as participatory resources in our efforts to struggle for democracy as a way of life, we bring within our disciplinary field of vision practices and subjects who have too often been placed at the margins of political science.[77] Silences that empower, protest, resist, and refuse offer citizens, consumers, workers, friends, lovers, and thinkers ways to negotiate power dynamics beyond a one-dimensional emphasis upon speech. For too long, silence has been relegated as the background upon which speech is able to contrast and flourish. Yet, in a contemporary topography

[77] John Dewey, *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1916).

so inundated with talking, it might be that speech comes to act as a sort of background condition from which silence stands out. This is a compelling reason for us to consider that it is during this age that silence may offer one of the more powerful means of political contestation. It is hard to imagine our world today functioning without incessant talk. Because so much of what we do and who we are comes to fruition via a dependence upon communicative interaction, the world is ripe for insubordinate silences. Such silences, through their own kind of radical insistence, may be a critical and neglected tool in the struggle for democratic transformation.