UDK 316.7:008
DOI https://doi.org/10.2298/FID2501119C
Original Scientific Article
Received 17.2.2025. Accepted 13.3.2025.

PHILOSOPHY AND SOCIETY
VOL. 36, NO. 1, 001–332

To cite text:
Campbell, Emily B. 2025. "Rehearsing Civility: Bridgebuilding in Polarized America." *Philosophy and Society* 36 (1): 119–138.

Emily B. Campbell

REHEARSING CIVILITY: BRIDGEBUILDING IN POLARIZED AMERICA

ABSTRACT
Over the last decade, ever-increasing polarization has exacerbated political divisions threatening both the civil sphere and democracy itself. In the United States, concern over democracy's future has led to the growth of self-described bridgebuilding organizations. Bridgebuilding brings people from across the political aisle together for dialogue with the aim of lessening polarization. This paper examines bridgebuilding through a detailed case study of one such organization. Drawing on observation, interviews, and participant surveys, the study describes the motivations and experiences of bridgebuilders. The paper finds that bridgebuilding allows participants to "rehearse civility" experiencing the civility and goodwill they crave in their own lives and desire for the broader society in a relatively safe and controlled setting. Rehearsing civility invites participants to invoke the civil— reaffirming social bonds, speaking to a broader sense of goodwill, in turn rehumanizing their political opponents. Though not without its limitations, the growth of bridgebuilding highlights a deep desire for civility and the experiential and affective pleasure it allows. Civility as mutual regard and as bonds to democratic institutions is considered.

KEYWORDS
Bridgebuilding, civility, civil sphere theory, contact theory, cultural sociology, democracy, polarization, political sociology

Introduction

The caustic pitch of contemporary American political culture is exacerbating underlying tensions and provoking new ones. Most often referred to as political polarization, this phenomenon shapes more than just who people vote for, but also who they choose for friends, lovers, and neighbors (Huber and Malhotra 2017; Mason 2018; Xi et al 2019). This, coupled with increasing social isolation, has rendered Americans more than just a "lonely crowd" (Riesman 1950) but an increasingly hostile one as well. The basic glue that holds societies together—mutual regard, social solidarity, and a sense of belonging, seems to have grown more elusive. In response to this cloudier mood, civic organizations have stepped up, calling for new forms of understanding—challenging political

Emily B. Campbell: Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Rhode Island College; ecampbell1@ric.edu

adversaries to sit down, look one another in the eye, and talk. Bridgebuilders, as they are called, work to bridge political difference. The popularity of the practice in the US has surged (Hartman et al 2022). What are the motivations and experiences of bridgebuilders? And, how do their experiences illuminate contemporary American political culture?

This paper examines bridgebuilding through a detailed case study of Braver Angels, a leading American bridgebuilding organization. Drawing on observation of workshops and interviews with participants, the paper argues that bridgebuilding allows participants to "rehearse civility." Through highly-scripted workshops, participants gain language for how to speak to those with divergent political views, in turn experiencing the emotional payoff of civility. Rehearsing civility gives participants the opportunity to reaffirm social bonds, invoke a broader sense of goodwill, and rekindle hope in the face of a toxic political culture. The rehearsal offers participants the civil connection they crave in their own lives and in the broader society— fostering civil desire.

The paper begins with a brief review of the literature on polarization and its impact on political culture. The paper then engages civil sphere theory (CST) discussions on civility and the anti-civil. The contemporary anti-civil has successfully moved the needle on what speech is permissible in effect importing highly-exclusionary and anti-democratic rhetoric into the mainstream. Yet despite these challenges, the civil sphere continues to hold the possibility for expansion of social solidarity, bonds, and incorporation (Alexander 2006). Civility as social practice and its relationship to democratic culture is discussed (Shils 1991). Moving towards the case, bridgebuilding's roots in contact theory and its contemporary application to affective polarization are examined (Allport 1954). Finally, a detailed overview of the bridging organization Braver Angels is offered.

The methods section details the case study approach including the observation of two half-day workshops and interviews with 14 participants. The findings first offer a thick description of rehearsing civility detailing the two workshops in conversation with interviews and participant surveys. Through the practice of rehearsing civility, participants are given the opportunity to invoke the civil, reaffirming social bonds, and mutual regard. A discussion of the limits of civility as avoidance is then discussed. Lastly, the findings outline the major motivation for participation—personal troubles driven by political conflict with loved ones. The paper then concludes with a discussion of the significance of rehearsing civility and its relationship to democratic culture more broadly.

Literature Review

Polarization

Over the last decade, growing polarization has exacerbated political divisions threatening both the civil sphere and democracy itself (Alexander 2016, 2019; Finkel 2020; Iyengar et al 2019; Kivisto and Sciortino 2021; Mason 2015, 2018;

Shanto et al 2019). Political hatred has seeped into Americans most intimate relations dividing families and neighbors (Rousseau 2020). More, declines in community life and social isolation have accelerated in recent decades— exacerbating longstanding tensions presented by individualism and community (Campbell 2022, 2024; Case and Deaton 2020; Putnam 2000; Putnam et al 2004). The broader picture is one of increased social isolation, declining civic life, and deteriorating public health (Cacioppo; Lee 2022). At the interpersonal level of political culture, scholars have documented the growth of affective polarization.

Affective polarization is political discord that maps onto not just political opinion but is deeply rooted in identity itself (Mason 2018; Hartman et al 2022). This results in many to not simply disagree with political opponents, but rather to despise them. Earlier research on polarization traditionally highlights two key types: identity-based and issue-based (Doornbosch et al 2024). In the contemporary climate, these two have experienced considerable overlap, a phenomenon scholars call social sorting (Mason 2018). Increasing political partisanship has led adversaries to define their opponents as, "selfish, close-minded, unintelligent, dishonest, immoral, or hypocritical" (Doornbosch et al 2024: 98). Polarization threatens democracy when adversaries no longer view each other as legitimate but rather as permanent enemies (Bonikowski 2016; Kivisto and Sciortino 2021).

Civility and the Anti-civil

From the perspective of civil sphere theory (CST), polarization is an expected part of democratic life. A theory of democracy, most fully represented in Jeffrey Alexander's *The Civil Sphere* (2006), CST sees democracy as an ongoing accomplishment with ever-present tensions characteristic of modernity (Alexander 2013). The civil sphere is comprised of regulative institutions like elections, office, the rule of law on the one hand and communicative institutions including a free press, public opinion, and civic organizations on the other. At the level of discourse, political adversaries draw on the language of the civil sphere, which is comprised of binary codes, to define who they are and who they are not. This key feature, rooted in semiotics, makes both inclusion and exclusion possible. Verbal sparring is a healthy and necessary part of democratic societies as long as it does not devolve into radical exclusion.

Populism has broad impacts on communicative norms and what constitutes "civil interactions" (Tognato 2021: 278). Destructive attacks on the civil sphere that aim to exclude, scapegoat minorities, and reassert primordialisms narrow the vision of the moral community and gain influence by shifting, "what is sayable" (Binder 2021: 178). Such efforts work to, "erode the normal standards in public discourse such as truth, reasonableness, good faith, and accountability" resulting in "increased porosity" or civil/ anti-civil dynamics (Toganto 2021: 285). The impact of mainstreaming is described as a "self-poisoning of the vital

center" (Heins and Unrau 2019: 152). In a study of anti-civil discourse online, impoliteness is found to be central (Theocharis et al 2016).

Uncivility, racism, and populism are deeply intertwined (Kryzanowski et al 2021). Contemporary right-wing populism holds racism and xenophobia as fundamental elements for the cultivation of grievance (Jackson and Doerschler 2024; Jaworsky 2020). At the discursive level, scholars have noted the mainstreaming of radically anti-democratic, racist speech. This happens through "borderline discourse" that, "while remaining seemingly civil in nature (via, e.g. rational argumentation, various forms of democratic legitimation, etc.) effectively puts forward the profoundly anti-democratic views and ideologies which, inter alia, solidify calls for discrimination and exclusion as the apparent "new visions" of politics and society" (Kryzanowski et al 2021: 4). Politically, the success of anti-civil discursive strategies has led scholars to ask, "why violating rather than obeying them started to bring more attention and often guaranteed political success" (Kryzanowski et al 2021: 6).

In the face of such challenges, the possibility for inclusion and the expansion of the moral community remains possible through civil repair and the courage it requires (Alexander 2006; Tognato et al 2020). CST highlights the importance of the micro and macro link especially as it pertains to meaningful social interaction that facilitates inclusion (Alexander 1995; Becker 2023; Tajic and Lund 2022). This process is multifaceted but can include actions that produce "horizontal identification" across groups (Becker 2023: 44). Performing and invoking a vital center is also part of this process as reaffirming common bonds or a shared common good is necessary (Alexander 2019; Heins and Unrau 2019; Luengo and Ihlebæk 2019; Schlesinger 1949). Inclusion and repair, then, require people willing to engage in such culture work or relational exchange.

Civility is of longstanding preoccupation to social theorists and is noted as central to democratic life (Alexander 2006; Elias 1939; Shils 1991; Turner 2021). Edward Shils defines it as, "an attitude of attachment to the whole of society" (1991: 11). Civility, "considers others as fellow-citizens of equal dignity in their rights and obligations… as members of the same inclusive collectivity" (1991: 12-13). This is affirmed through civil manners, courtesy, and "includes concern for the good of adversaries as well as allies" (1991: 13). For Shils, it is a habit of mind and of being, an approach to others that shapes both affective and communicative practices. He declares, "civil manners are aesthetically pleasing and morally upright" (1991: 13). Of course, manners are not enough for the maintenance of democracy, people must also hold shared attachments to democratic institutions as well. Nonetheless, the importance of mutual regard persists, as he warns, "without such civility, a pluralistic society can degenerate into a war of each against all" (1991: 15). Despite the centrality of civility for democratic life, how one fosters civility—or regains it remains underexamined. This paper extends the literature on civil repair and civility through a case study of bridging practices.

Bridgebuilding

In the US, bridgebuilding has grown in popularity as a strategy to reduce polarization (Baldassarri 2021; Doornbosch et al 2024; Gehl and Porter 2020). Rooted in contact theory, it asserts positive contact between adversarial groups can defuse tensions and foster peace (Allport 1954; Levendusky 2023; Pettigrew et al 2011). In its original formulation, Gordon Allport's contact hypothesis (1954) posits that prejudice can be reduced should people from historically conflicting groups make contact under a set of positive conditions. Those conditions are equal status, shared goals, intergroup cooperation, and the support of authorities, law or custom (Pettigrew and Tropp 2006: 264). Though Allport emerged with his theory relying on studies of American black-white race relations, it has since been applied to study of a range of intergroup conflicts (Pettigrew and Tropp 2006). The term bridging also harkens to Putnam's (2000) two types of social capital: bonding, which is inner-group and bridging, which is inter-group.

Studies on contemporary bridgebuilding efforts' impacts are ongoing. A randomized control trial of a bridgebuilding workshop found participation to reduce affective polarization in both implicit and explicit terms (Baron et al 2021). The same researchers also found participants to remain less polarized than those that did not take the workshop seven months later. Though such results are promising, they are not necessarily conclusive, as other research has found similar interventions' impacts to wear off in as little as a week (Duong 2023). Scholarship suggests depolarization efforts don't directly impact attitudes about democracy (Voelkel et al 2023).

Braver Angels

The bridging organization Braver Angels (BA) was founded in 2016 shortly after the presidential election (Bomey 2021.) The name Braver Angels is inspired by President Abraham Lincoln's inaugural address (1861), shortly before the American Civil War, where he called for national unity and appealed to "the better angels of our nature." BA brings people together from across the political aisle for civil dialogue with an eye to highlight shared interests and values (Levendusky 2018). The premise of the BA model is that if people sit down together, build tools for civil discourse, and work to see people before politics, affective polarization will diminish and a revitalized, civil culture can emerge (Baron et al 2021; Gino et al 2022; Hartman 2022). BA members grow their tools for civility through workshops and guided dialogue sessions then go out into the world, their communities, workplaces, schools, and places of worship as "bridgebuilders." Bridgebuilders help to restore civic trust one social interaction at a time (Bomey 2021; Fletcher 2023).

BA has grown rapidly since its founding, boasting over 14,700 members nationally (Braver Angels 2025a). The organization has been covered by national media outlets across the political spectrum from CNN to the New York

Times to Fox and USA Today (Braver Angels 2025b). BA is committed to attracting a broad range of voices, though the organization struggles to draw a pool of participants proportionally representative of American demographics (Braver Angels 2021). Demographically, BA as a whole is whiter: 88% of participants identify as White though they make up 64% of the US population (Jones et al 2021). BA is older: 73% are over 50 compared to America's median age of 38 (US Census 2023). Women also outnumber men accounting for 68% of participants. In terms of educational attainment, 65% had post-graduate degrees, compared to 14% of the US population, and just 1% had only a high school education compared to 25% of Americans (Schaeffer 2022). And, though BA does not collect income data on participants, one can confidently conclude based on education levels that more participants are from the middle, upper-middle, and upper classes than the general population. Most directly tied to its mission, ideologically BA is skewed as well. 21% of participants identify as conservative, while 69% identify as liberal. The organization has taken explicit steps to expand their reach through a Red Caucus for conservatives and an Angels of Color Caucus for people of color.

The organization hosts a range of events and celebrates an annual national convention at iconic sites for American conflict, gathering in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania in 2023 and in Kenosha, Wisconsin in 2024. BA also produces media including podcasts, music, and books that support revitalizing America through what they term patriotic empathy. The cornerstone of their work comes in the form of workshops that bring people together from across the aisle to engage, build skills for civil dialogue, and rediscover shared American values (Baron et al 2021; Duong 2023; Hagmann and Tinsley 2021; Oliver-Blackburn 2022). The BA workshop method was designed by marriage counselors who characterized America as a dysfunctional family. They draw, in part, on marital therapy techniques for session design.

On almost any given night, somewhere in the US, a local chapter, termed an "Alliance" is hosting a workshop. For example, from March 2020- February 2021, BA hosted 443 unique events (Braver Angels 2021). BA collects member dues with a minimum donation of $12 annually, though most workshops are open to anyone. All members take the BA Pledge (Braver Angels 2025c), stating,

> I pledge that from this day forward I will seek to be part of the solution to our society's widespread divisiveness, which is hurting individuals, families, communities, our nation, and our world.
>
> I will actively seek out opportunities to engage in dialogue with those who have different views from mine; by respectful listening, I will strive to understand their perspectives better, to identify our shared deeper values, and to build a bridge across the gap that has divided us.
>
> When sifting incoming information, I will seek to be a wise consumer. Taking into account my own biases, I will carefully assess the plausibility of the claim as well as the integrity, competence, and humility of the source, in order to decide whether the information is likely to be trustworthy.

I will resist the temptation to speak about, write about, or share on social media information that claims to be true but is of uncertain validity.

I will bring a generous spirit to all my interpersonal interactions, refusing to ascribe evil intentions to others simply because of different political or societal beliefs. I will be slow to take offense. Loving my neighbor will be my goal.

Methods

This paper examines the meaning of bridging interventions and describes how such groups imagine and instantiate an ideal civil citizen. The qualitative case study looks at one of the leading bridging organizations in the United States, Braver Angels (BA). Case studies have the empirical advantage of illuminating social processes (Small 2009; Yin 2009). Qualitative case studies typically draw on less than forty interviews given the in-depth nature of the approach (Crouch and McKenzie 2006). Though not generalizable in the statistical sense, qualitative research that relies on a smaller number of in-depth interviews can be theory-generative. Interviews allow for the examination of thoughts, feelings, and experience of participants (Cho 2017). The questions guiding this research are: What are the motivations and experiences of bridge-builders? And, how do their experiences illuminate contemporary American political culture?

The organization Braver Angels (BA) was selected as an influential case after a comprehensive national review. For example, in a state of the field paper on efforts to reduce partisan animosity, BA is noted as an exemplar bridging organization with an extensive national infrastructure (Hartman et al 2022). Once BA was selected, the national organization was contacted for permission to conduct the research and to request that the organization suggest a standout, highly successful branch for potential study. The Central Texas Alliance was selected because it is celebrated by the national organization as model (Timmis 2022). The case study draws on the observation of two in-person workshops and interviews with 14 participants totaling approximately 30 hours of contact defined as time spent with research subjects and in the field (Small and Calarco 2022). Additionally, BA-produced workshop materials and internal surveys provided by BA were reviewed. The researcher received internal organization approval from BA and the Central Texas Alliance for the study.

The two in-person BA workshops run by the Central Texas Alliance occurred in April 2023. Alliance is the term used by BA for regional branches of their organization and are run by volunteers. The first workshop, the "Red/ Blue Workshop" was held in Austin, Texas. A hallmark of the Red/ Blue workshop is that they control for political orientation. Republicans or those right of center are called "Reds" and Democrats of those left of center are called "Blues." Workshops are organized for parity of Reds/Blues. The second, titled, "Depolarizing Within Workshop" was held in the small city of New Braunfels, Texas and was geared toward introspection. The organizers did not control

for political identity. The two sessions were attended by a total of 35 participants. The researcher attended the two sessions with permission from facilitators and group participants.

For the workshops, the researcher arrived early and stayed late to get a sense of the people involved and the labor required for hosting a workshop. The researcher took detailed notes while at the events, and photographed collaborative materials produced, in addition to collecting copies of any materials distributed to participants. Detailed field notes were produced immediately following attendance. Each workshop formally lasted three hours, though time at each site ranged from four to five hours. The workshops had more men than women in attendance, though nationally the organization skews female (Braver Angels 2021).

The two workshops selected for study were suggested by the organizers and are among BA's hallmark experiences, running regularly throughout the US. For example, a review of events by BA from March 10 through the end of May 2025, shows the Red/Blue and Depolarizing Within Workshops scheduled in five states—California, Connecticut, Colorado, Idaho, and Michigan. The Depolarizing Within Workshop is also available online as an e-course (Braver Angels 2025d). Though one can logically assume no workshop is the same given regional differences and variations of personality among participants, the highly scripted nature of the workshops does allow for some level of predictability and thus generalizability to their nature.

For the interviews, the researcher was introduced to the participants of the workshops by session leaders at the outset of the sessions. All participants were given the option to participate in an interview following the workshop. The yield of interview subjects was strong with 12 out of 35 participants agreeing to be interviewed, in addition to the two workshop session leaders for a total of 14 interviews. In terms of the partisan affiliation of interviewees, though the Red/ Blue workshop controlled for parity of partisan affiliation, the overall yield of research subjects did skew liberal with 10 out of 14 interviewees identifying as "blue" or liberal. Nationally, BA's membership is 69% liberal (Braver Angels 2021). In this regard, the interviewee yield is highly in-keeping with organizational partisan demographics. Interviews were done over the phone within two weeks following the session and in one in instance, in-person immediately after the session. Interviews lasted from 25 minutes to 1.5 hours in duration. Interviews were recorded, professionally transcribed, and analyzed with an interpretivist approach for emergent themes. Names of interviewees have been changed.

The study received Internal Review Board (IRB) approval, an independent university ethics committee for research on human subjects, in February 2023.[1]

1 "Strengthening Democracy by Strengthening the Agora" was approved by the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health Institutional Review Board Office in February 2023 (IRB No. 00023010). This research was supported by the Lumina Foundation (Grant number: 139968).

Findings

Rehearsing the civil: Braver Angels of Central Texas

On a sunny Saturday morning in late April in Austin, Texas a group of people gathered at a Dispute Resolution Center above a bank in a large strip-mall. Greeted with coffee, donuts, and kolaches—the Texan version of an oversized pig in a blanket—each participant arrived, pausing at the welcome table to retrieve a handwritten nametag scribed in red or blue, a shorthand signifier for their respective political affiliation, to paste onto their shirts. Volunteers had set up a welcome booth featuring flyers, books, and a sign-in sheet. A life-sized cardboard cut-out of Abraham Lincoln stood proudly inside propped against the wall. Led by two trained facilitators, the morning began with introductions. Each participant was asked to present themselves, their reason for coming, and their hopes for the workshop. Though a diversity of political views were present, one thread tied the people in the room together: a deep concern for the internal divisions and strife threatening America. One young man quipped, "I don't want to catch ideological rabies." Another woman confessed, "I live in a bubble." The facilitators proceeded with ground rules: talk about politics without trying to convince anyone and only represent yourself. Participants were reminded to stay on topic and to focus on listening to others.

The "Red/ Blue Workshop" commenced and Reds and Blues—BA parlance for conservatives and progressives—gathered with members of their own group to generate a list of stereotypes. The stereotypes weren't about the other side, but rather prominent stereotypes about their own political group. Armed with a large notepad and markers, they got to work, building lists of stereotypes. Each stereotype was discussed as participants highlighted what was true and what was false, acknowledging any kernel of truth that the stereotype held. For example, Reds said a prominent stereotype was that they are "all MAGA" and "cult-like." Pushing back against this, they noted that not all Reds like Trump, that the two-party system has limitations, and emphasized, "MAGA is not an attempt to regress to a darker time in history." Acknowledging the kernels of truth in this stereotype, the group ceded that the party is divided on Trump and that some Reds simplify thinking in order to toe the party line.

Blues discussed the stereotype that they are "Anti-American/ woke/ against traditional values." They countered this by stating that they are patriotic, that they, "love our country" and do value inclusivity, and America as a melting pot of diversity. Turning to the kernel of truth, they admitted that, "some language does suggest they are against white, straight men" and that sometimes Blues used extreme language. Reds and Blues then sent a representative to the front of the room to summarize their discussion to the entire group. Then, breaking out into Red/ Blue pairs, participants discussed what they'd learned about the other side and were tasked with looking for points of common ground.

Table 1. Stereotypes generated by participants of the "Red/Blue Workshop"

Stereotypes of "Blues"	Stereotypes of "Reds"
Anti-American/ woke/ against traditional values	MAGA/ cult
Big spenders	Greedy/ money obsessed
Anti-police/ law and order	Bigot/ racist
Pro-abortion/ baby killers	Lacking compassion

The second exercise brought Reds and then Blues into the center of a circle to discuss the questions: Why do you think your side's values and policies are good for the country? What reservations do you have about your side's political positions? Those outside were tasked with listening. After, pairs of Reds/ Blues again teamed up to discuss their impressions, noting what they learned and highlighting any sites of commonality.

The three-hour session closed with a call for participants to share what they gained from the workshop. A general sense of good-will was palpable as participants expressed feeling, "more hopeful for the country" and that "common ground was shared." Others acknowledged a "sense of connection" and that they were hopeful for "a way forward." Another highlighted that, "fear was part of the partisan divide." In a follow-up interview with Charles, a Democrat and retired music technician, he explained the value of participation, "I think they [the polarized media] whip up our negative emotions, and when we get the chance to actually see each other face to face and talk about things, we realize that we have more in common than we realized."[2] When asked for their key takeaway, a Blue participant wrote, "We, both red and blue, have a lot in common, concerns about individual liberty, need for good government, and love of country for example."

The "Depolarizing Within" workshop met Sunday afternoon at an Episcopal church in New Braunfels, Texas. Still buzzing with activity from the morning service, the workshop took place away from the sanctuary in a large meeting room with windows looking onto a bright garden. Twenty participants made their way in, gathering materials, nametags, and a boxed lunch. Some were members of the church, while others were not. Led by two men, one Red and one Blue, the session convened with three stated goals (Braver Angels 2025e):

– Become aware of your own "inner polarizer"

– Learn how to criticize viewpoints without stereotyping, dismissing, ridiculing, and holding contempt for those who disagree with us

– Develop ways to speak up in polarizing conversations with peers about people on the other political side

The first activity prompted participants to fill out a survey, "Recognizing My Inner Polarizer." Written to prompt introspection, the six questions

2 Personal interview, May 5, 2023.

probed beliefs and behaviors about people from the other party. For example, one question asks, "How often do I find myself comparing the *worst* people on the other side with the *best* people on my side?" [sic] Another asks, "How often do I feel a "rush" of pleasure with friends when we ridicule those crazies on the other side?" The last questions had respondents assign an "overall emotional attitude" towards the other side, choosing from hate, disdain, pity, basic respect, and respect and appreciation.

After time for reflection, the facilitators led the group through a slide presentation, warning of the "four horsemen of polarization: stereotyping, dismissing, ridiculing, and contempt." Participants were prompted to consider how they stereotype the other side and how they could resist this inclination. One man offered, "remember all people are made in the image of God." Participants followed along with the slides, flipping through the nine-page BA packet that outlined each activity and the guiding principles in detail. The facilitators then introduced "depolarizing distinctions" between positions and people, policies and core values, and inconsistency and hypocrisy. Drawing on cognitive behavioral therapy techniques, participants were prompted to "edit the story" about people on the other side, challenging unidimensional thinking.

The session then shifted to how to depolarize a conversation using "LAPP" an acronym standing for listen, acknowledge, pivot, and perspective. For the approach, each participant listens to the other person, acknowledges or mirrors back what their concerns are, pivots to redirect the conversation focusing on "I" statements, and then offers a depolarizing perspective. Each step contained a short list of script-like examples. An example from the script[3] provided offers:

> **Listen** for the other person's values, and emotions that are influencing the stereotyping, ridicule or contempt.
>
> **Acknowledge** what you are hearing. For example, "I'm sorry you had to deal with those put downs in your family."
>
> **Pivot** to signal a shift in the conversation. For example, "I'm with you on being very concerned about what's going on. Can I throw in another perspective?"
>
> **Perspective** offers a depolarizing viewpoint. For example, "They are coming at this from different backgrounds and experiences."

When prompted to write their main takeaway, a participant wrote, "Polarization starts and ends with me." Another wrote, "Start with self first." And another, "Humble myself and listen." One confessed, "That I can be polarizing."

3 "Depolarizing Within: Becoming A Braver Angel In Your Own World." Distributed April 30, 2023. Adapted for clarity.

Invoking the civil

In interviews and throughout the workshops, participants invoked the civil and spoke to broader themes that united the group. A retired man in his late sixties, a Red, offered his thoughts on the group, [4]

> When you get behind it, they're all really still Americans. They have read the Declaration of Independence. They really have much, much more in common than different. But both have been led astray. That's what I expected to see, and that's what I saw, but the good thing was about it that when they did all get together, I think they started to see that they had a lot more common ground.

Another Republican man, a 60-year-old building inspector, expressed frustration with contemporary divisiveness and appealed to broader social solidarity, "It's not 'they.' There is no 'they.' There's only 'we.' They are us."[5] And, in the survey, pointing to shared goodwill, one Blue respondent wrote, "All participants have sincere desires for the best future of America." Speaking to his own role, Charles, a Democrat explained, "I try to turn down the temperature. That's one of my takeaways from all this. Try to turn down the temperature because you can't hear each other as long as you're shouting."[6]

Civility or avoidance?

In interviews, people shared being drawn to politics over issue-specific concerns including immigration, gun violence, homelessness, and climate change. The workshops did not take on issue-specific concerns, instead emphasizing general communicative norms for respectful dialogue and introspection. For some, this was frustrating, as they yearned to speak more directly, unbridled by the provided script.

One man, a Democrat, retiree, and Vietnam veteran explained, "I'm not sure they [the other participants] were really saying how they felt. Everybody was trying to be too nice to each other. You know what I mean?" He later continued, "I just want to start talking about the real gut issues. Why do you like Trump? What the hell is it with this guy?"[7] Charles, a Democrat, attributed the approach of participants to self-selection bias, "The people who are extremists or very fixed in their views, rigidly fixed, are unlikely to join a group like this because it's going to feel uncomfortable, I think. I found the people there quite willing to participate and be vulnerable and share their points of view in a respectful way."[8]

Another Democrat, a retired venture capitalist, noted the conspicuous absence of the topic of democracy, "If I reflect back on what was discussed [at the workshop], democracy never came up. And I view democracy and attacks on

4 Personal interview, May 8, 2023.
5 Personal interview, May 9, 2023.
6 Personal interview, May 5, 2023.
7 Personal interview, April 29, 2023.
8 Personal interview, May 5, 2023.

undemocratic behavior as an asymmetrical dynamic that's happening. I wish all Americans believed in democracy."[9]

Samantha, a 30 year old Red, acknowledged the limitations of the scripts in a phone interview.

> Samantha: The sessions are set up in a way where you don't get too deep, and that's probably something that bothers a lot of people, because they really do want to talk through actual issues. But the sessions are really not designed for that. And I think that's for the best overall, because it's really just to get people to sit in a room together. Things are so bad right now that just to get people to sit in a room together is...[trails off] I do notice that I still censor myself quite a bit. But I bet they do too.
>
> Interviewer: But in spite of that, you still want to be a part of it and are committed.
>
> Samantha: Yeah. Because I think just sitting in the room is important. It's really important. [10]

Depolarizing family and friends

Across all interviews, people participated in BA to grow their skill at speaking to those with divergent political views. Some had lost family and friends to the caustic political climate. For example, one woman, a Democrat, aged 54, described being caught in the middle of her ultra-conservative, 88-year-old parents and her daughter, aged 20, who is a lesbian. Politics had created a rift in the family, and she hoped to gain skills from BA to manage the conflict.[11] Another woman, a retired school teacher and Democrat explained her draw to the event, "I saw the word depolarizing and I thought, 'This might be a way for me to learn how to communicate with my own husband on a personal level in a better way."[12] Chris, a Red, aged 60, was also motivated by his family. He offered, "There's just so much divide and a lot of hate. It worries me about the future of our country. I have an 18-year-old son, soon to be 19, and I worry about his future." [13]

Samantha, the Red aged 30, had grown disenchanted with leftist ideals causing her to move right in recent years. The change in her political convictions led to a falling out with her friend group. She explained the experience,

> I felt like it was karma pretty much, because they immediately went from friends that I've known for years [to] immediately calling me names or insinuating that I'm on some sort of path to being a white supremacist or being a Trump supporter, or I'm a racist, I'm this, I'm that. And I felt like I had engaged in some of that [type of behavior] when I was younger.

9 Personal interview, May 8, 2023.
10 Personal interview, May 5, 2023.
11 Personal interview, May 9, 2023.
12 Personal interview, May 8, 2023.
13 Personal interview, May 9, 2023.

She sought BA for its cathartic, therapeutic attributes, noting it felt like a "safe space" to talk about her political views and experiences though she confessed she was pro-life in the interview, highlighting how hard it was to admit in any setting.[14]

Concluding Discussion

Affective polarization threatens democratic society because it erodes social bonds—threatening to turn political adversaries into permanent enemies. Bridging organizations have presented themselves as a solution to this challenge, inviting people from across the political aisle to gain tools for civil dialogue. Through a detailed case study of a leading bridging organization, this study has asked: What are the motivations and experiences of bridgebuilders? And, how do their experiences illuminate contemporary American political culture? The importance of civil repair through social interaction is noted by civil sphere theorists (Alexander 1995; Becker 2023; Tajic and Lund 2022). And, civility as central to democratic life is a longstanding preoccupation (Alexander 2006; Elias 1939; Shils 1991; Turner 2021). Inclusion and repair require people willing to engage in such culture work or relational exchange. This paper extends this tradition, showing how bridging facilitates a rehearsal of civility.

Rehearsing civility allows participants to practice civil dialogue with someone they would consider a political adversary. Set back from the stresses of more antagonistic everyday political communication, the rehearsal allows participants to experience the payoff of civility, reaffirming social bonds diminished by political polarization. In the study, the bridging workshops challenged participants to build their skills at civil dialogue through the use of highly-prescriptive scripts based, in part, on marital therapy. The scripts allowed participants to practice depolarizing conversations with people of divergent political orientation. Many were drawn to participate out of a desire to repair relationships with friends and family estranged by the political climate. Rehearsing civility gave participants language, but also provided an emotional reward—allowing them to experience the civility and connection they craved in their own lives and in the broader society. The rehearsal invited participants to invoke the civil—reaffirming social bonds by speaking to a broader sense of goodwill in turn rehumanizing their political opponents.

There are drawbacks to the scripts, however. In the study, some participants expressed frustration over the highly structured nature of the conversations that allowed for little improvisation or discussion of "the real gut issues" as one participant put it.[15] This feature, in some ways, left the most caustic, pressing elements of contemporary political culture relatively untouched. The literature on the recent success of right-wing populism to pull discourse to its favor highlights the use of "borderline discourse" that follows some civil norms but

14 Personal interview, May 5, 2023.
15 Personal interview, April 29, 2023.

also contains highly anti-democratic and exclusionary speech (Kryzanowski and Ledin 2017; Kryzanowski et al 2021). This works to widen the scope of "what is sayable" (Binder 2021: 178) and creates more porous boundaries between the civil/ uncivil (Tognato 2021).

Within BA and in the practice of bridgebuilding, commitment to parity, balance, and hearing both sides presents a challenge. Though there was no outright anti-civil speech during the sessions, participants were instructed to not try to persuade others. When does civility as a norm become repressive? And, when does a normative commitment to respecting others' views become dangerous? Should extreme speech, that is highly exclusionary, or anti-democratic, be entertained and thus legitimized? Within the scope of this case study, there were no explicit tools presented for dealing with anti-democratic or highly exclusionary language. The tradition of free speech absolutism in America further complicates this puzzle.

Rehearsing civility reveals a deep desire, at least on the part of participants, for the restoration of social bonds lost to political polarization. The growth in popularity of BA and organizations like it since the emergence of Trumpism is significant and in many ways in-keeping with the longstanding American tradition of civic participation. The importance of civic life and voluntary associations has been observed in the US dating back to at least Alexis de Tocqueville ([1835] 2003) though their prominence has been in decline for more than half a century (Putnam 2000; Putnam et al 2004). The bridging turn, if we are to call it that, reveals deep anxieties over the future of American community life and political culture more generally. It could be said that while a generation ago (or more) bridging happened organically through participation in a range of civic associations be them organized religion, union membership, and organizations of community uplift or clubs for hobby, today such shortage of organic bridging necessitates more prescriptive or deliberate approaches.

Even within BA's efforts for civic renewal, a more general turn inward is observed. The project of 'depolarizing within' is a project of self-improvement, where individuals reform themselves and in turn improve society. In the workshops, participants were prompted towards introspection, instructed to represent solely themselves, and to resist labelling the other side. Workshops required participants confess their own shortcomings, acknowledge their own 'inner-polarizer' and openly discuss their misgivings or doubts about their political identity in front of others—rewarding humility. Participants strongly resonated with this approach of personal responsibility and improvement, explaining in interviews their efforts to redirect or reform polarizing thought patterns.

The relationship between depolarization and democratic attitudes is murky at best (Voelkel et al 2023). Within the scope of this study, explicit references to democratic institutions were scant. Rather, emphasis was centered on growing what BA calls 'patriotic empathy.' The sessions did however foster mutual regard—a central and necessary part of the social fabric of democratic life (Shils 1991). In sessions and interviews, participants remarked how pleased they were to come together, invoking broader appeals to shared values, goals, and a

common identity as Americans. Future research should further interrogate the relationship between mutual regard and attachments to democratic institutions.

Empirically, this study is not without limitations. First, due to time constraints, it was not possible to follow up with participants for a second interview months later in order to understand the impact of BA participation over time. In some ways, this is a missed opportunity, given the literature on the durability of bridging interventions' impacts is inconclusive (Baron et al 2021; Duong 2023). Future research should design for follow-up interviews potentially three and six months out in order to illuminate impacts on the practice of civility in everyday life as well as democratic practices and views more broadly. More, interviewees in this study highlight the importance of transforming interpersonal relationships with friends and family members fraught with political tension. Longitudinal research would allow to further probe such dynamics by inviting interviewees to reflect on and explain any changes in their relationships over time and whether they attribute such shifts to skills acquired through bridging participation. Taking this line of inquiry a step further, future research could also incorporate interviews with family and friends identified by bridging participants as well.

References

Alexander, Jeffrey C. 1995. *Fin de siècle social theory: Relativism, reduction and the problem of reason*. New York: Verso.

Alexander, Jeffrey C. 2006. *The civil sphere*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Alexander, Jeffrey C. 2013. *The Dark Side of Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity.

Alexander, Jeffrey C. 2016. "Progress and disillusion: Civil repair and its discontents." *Thesis Eleven*. 137(1): 72–82.

Alexander, Jeffrey C. 2019. "Frontlash/backlash: The crisis of solidarity and the threat to civil institutions." *Contemporary Sociology*, 48(1): 5–11.

Allport, Gordon W. 1954. *The nature of prejudice*. Reading: Addison-Wesley.

Baldassarri, Delia, and Scott E. Page. 2021. "The emergence and perils of polarization." *Proceedings of the national academy of sciences* 118(50): e2116863118.

Baron, Hannah, Robert Blair, Donghyun Danny Choi, Laura Gamboa, Jessica Gottlieb, Amanda Lea Robinson, Steven Rosenzweig, Megan Turnbull, and Emily A. West. 2021. "Can Americans Depolarize? Assessing the effects of reciprocal group reflection on partisan polarization." New York: OSF Preprints.

Becker, Elisabeth. 2023. "Struggles for horizontal identification: Muslims, Jews, and the civil sphere in Germany." *Cultural Sociology*. 17(1): 44–61.

Binder, Werner. 2021. "Memory Culture, the Civil Sphere, and the Right-Wing Populism in Germany." In *Populism in the Civil Sphere*. Medford: Polity.

Bomey, Nathan. 2021. *Bridge Builders: Bringing People Together in a Polarized Age*. Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons.

Bonikowski, Bart. 2016. Three lessons of contemporary populism in Europe and the United States. *The Brown Journal of World Affairs*, 23(1): 9–24.

Braver Angels. 2022. "Braver Angels 2020-2021 Report: Depolarizing During the Pandemic." Retrieved at: https://braverangels.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/BA-2020-2021-Report-Extended-1.pdf.

Braver Angels. 2022. "Braver Angels 2020-2021 Report: Depolarizing During the Pandemic." Retrieved at: https://braverangels.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/BA-2020-2021-Report-Extended-1.pdf.
Braver Angels. 2025a. "Braver Angels." https://braverangels.org/. Retrieved January 31, 2025.
Braver Angels. 2025b. "Our Impact: Making a difference." https://braverangels.org/our-impact/. Retrieved March 10, 2025.
Braver Angels. 2025c. "Road to wisdom pledge." https://braverangels.org/road-to-wisdom-pledge/. Retrieved January 31, 2025.
Braver Angels. 2025d. "Events." https://braverangels.org/events/. Retrieved March 10, 2025.
Braver Angels. 2025e. "Workshops: Build Skills and Engage. https://braverangels.org/attend-a-workshop/#standard-workshops. Retrieved January 31, 2025.
Cacioppo, John T., and Stephanie Cacioppo. 2014. "Social relationships and health: The toxic effects of perceived social isolation." *Social and personality psychology compass* 8(2): 58–72.
Campbell, Emily B. 2022. "Contesting deaths' despair: Local public religion, radical welcome and community health in the overdose crisis, Massachusetts, USA." *Open Theology* 8(1): 248–260.
Campbell, Emily B. 2024. "Grieving Overdose." *Contexts* 23(2): 36–43.
Case, Anne, and Angus Deaton. 2020. "Deaths of Despair and the Future of Capitalism." In *Deaths of Despair and the Future of Capitalism*. Princeton University Press.
Cho, Jeasik. 2017. *Evaluating qualitative research*. New York: Oxford University Press.
Crouch, Mira, and Heather McKenzie. 2006. "The logic of small samples in interview-based qualitative research." *Social science information* 45(4): 483–499.
De Tocqueville, Alexis. [1835] 2003. *Democracy in America*. Washington D.C.: Regnery Publishing.
Doornbosch, Linda M., Mark van Vuuren, and Menno DT de Jong. 2025. "Moving beyond us-versus-them polarization towards constructive conversations." *Democratization* 32(1): 96–122.
Duong, Fred, Calista Small, Stephen Hawkins, Coco Xu. 2023. "Outgroup Testimonials and Ingroup Validation Strengthen the Effects of Perception Gap Interventions on Affective Polarization: Evidence for a Large-Scale Experiment." New York: More in Common US.
Elias, Norbert. *The civilizing process*. 1939, 1969. New York: Urizen Books.
Finkel, Eli J., Christopher A. Bail, Mina Cikara, Peter H. Ditto, Shanto Iyengar, Samara Klar, Lilliana Mason et al. 2020. "Political sectarianism in America." *Science* 370(6516): 533–536.
Fletcher, John. 2023. "Braver Angels: Performing Comity in a Polarized Era." In *Theatre and Human Flourishing*. New York: Oxford University Press.
Gehl, Katherine M., and Michael E. Porter. 2020. *The politics industry: How political innovation can break partisan gridlock and save our democracy*. Cambridge: Harvard Business Press.
Gino, Francesca, Julia A. Minson, and Jeff Huizinga. 2020 "Braver Angels: A Grassroots Effort to Depolarize American Politics." *Harvard Business School Case* 920-054, March.
Hagmann, David, and Catherine Tinsley. 2021. "Personal narratives build trust across ideological divides." New York: OSF Preprints.
Hartman, Rachel, Will Blakey, Jake Womick, Chris Bail, Eli J. Finkel, Hahrie Han, John Sarrouf, Juliana Schroeder, Paschal Sheeran, Jay J. Van Bavel, Robb Willer

& Kurt Gray. 2022. "Interventions to reduce partisan animosity." *Nature human behaviour* 6(9): 1194–1205.
Hartman, Rachel. "Moral Curiosity: The Desire to Learn About Others' Moral Values." PhD dissertation, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2022.
Heins, Volker M., and Christine Unrau. 2019. "Anti-immigrant Movements and the Self-Poisoning of the Civil Sphere." *Breaching the civil order: Radicalism and the civil sphere,* 145.
Huber, Gregory A., and Neil Malhotra. 2017. "Political homophily in social relationships: Evidence from online dating behavior." *The Journal of Politics* 79(1): 269–283.
Iyengar, Shanto, Yphtach Lelkes, Matthew Levendusky, Neil Malhotra and Sean J. Westwood. 2019. "The origins and consequences of affective polarization in the United States." *Annual Review of Political Science* 22(1): 129–146.
Jackson, Pamela Irving, and Peter Doerschler. 2024. "What drives support for authoritarian populist parties in Eastern and Central Europe?." *International Sociology* 39(6): 606–630.
Jaworsky, Bernadette Nadya. 2020. "The "Thirteenth Immigrant"?." In *Populism in the Civil Sphere.* Medford: Polity.
Jones, Nicholas, Rachel Marks, Roberto Ramirez, Merarys Rios-Vargas. 2021. "2020 Census Illuminates Racial and Ethnic Composition of the Country. *US Census*. August 12.
Jones, Nicholas, Rachel Marks, Roberto Ramirez, Merarys Rios-Vargas. 2021. "2020 Census Illuminates Racial and Ethnic Composition of the Country. *US Census*. August 12.
Kivisto, Peter and Giuseppe Sciortino. 2021. "Is populism the shadow of the civil." *Populism in the civil sphere*: 287–303.
Kivisto, Peter Kivisto and Giuseppe Sciortino. 2021. "The Road to a Sociological Theory of Civil Society." *Handbook of Classical Sociological Theory*:507–525.
Krzyżanowski, Michał, and Per Ledin. 2017. "Uncivility on the web: Populism in/and the borderline discourses of exclusion." *Journal of Language and Politics* 16(4): 566–581.
Krzyżanowski, Michał, Mattias Ekman, Per-Erik Nilsson, Mattias Gardell, and Christian Christensen. 2021. "Uncivility, racism, and populism: Discourses and interactive practices in anti-& post-democratic communication." *Nordicom Review* 42(1): 3–15.
Lee, Amber Hye-Yon. 2022. "Social trust in polarized times: how perceptions of political polarization affect Americans' trust in each other." *Political behavior* 44(3): 1533–1554.
Levendusky, Matthew S. 2018. "Americans, not partisans: Can priming American national identity reduce affective polarization?." *The Journal of Politics* 80(1): 59–70.
Levendusky, Matthew. 2023. *Our common bonds: Using what Americans share to help bridge the partisan divide*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Luengo, María and Karoline A. Ihlebæk. 2020. "Restaging a Vital Center within Radicalized Civil Societies." *Breaching the Civil Order: Radicalism and the Civil Sphere*, 123.
Mason, Lilliana. 2015. "I disrespectfully agree": The differential effects of partisan sorting on social and issue polarization." *American Journal of Political Science* 59(1): 128–145.

Mason, Lilliana. 2018. "Losing common ground: Social sorting and polarization." *The Forum*. 16(1).
Oliver-Blackburn, Bailey M., and April Chatham-Carpenter. 2022. "'But I don't know if I want to talk to you': strategies to foster conversational receptiveness across the United States' political divide." *Journal of Applied Communication Research*: 1–17.
Pettigrew, Thomas F., and Linda R. Tropp. 2005. "Allport's intergroup contact hypothesis: Its history and influence." *On the nature of prejudice: Fifty years after Allport*: 262–277
Pettigrew, Thomas F., Linda R. Tropp, Ulrich Wagner and Oliver Christ. 2011. "Recent advances in intergroup contact theory." *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 35(3): 271–280.
Putnam, Robert D. 2000. *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community*. New York: Simon Schuster.
Putnam, Robert D., Lewis Feldstein, and Donald J. Cohen. 2004. *Better together: Restoring the American community*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
Riesman, David. 1950. *The Lonely Crowd: a study of the changing American character*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. 2020. "7. The Social Consequences of Partisan Hatred." *Angry Politics: Partisan Hatred and Political Polarization among College Students*: 154.
Schaeffer, Katherine. 2022. "10 facts about today's college graduates." Pew Research Center: https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2022/04/12/10-facts-about-todays-college-graduates/.
Schlesinger, Arthur M. 1949. *The Vital Center: The Politics of Freedom.* Cambridge, MA: The Riverside Press.
Shils, Edward. 1991. The virtue of civil society. *Government and opposition*. 26(1): 3–20.
Small, Mario Luis. 2009. "How many cases do I need?' On science and the logic of case selection in field-based research." *Ethnography* 10(1): 5–38.
Small, Mario L., and Jessica M. Calarco. 2022. *Qualitative literacy: A guide to evaluating ethnographic and interview research*. Oakland: University of California Press.
Tajic, Denis and Anna Lund. 2023. "The call of ordinariness: peer interaction and superdiversity within the civil sphere." *American Journal of Cultural Sociology*, *11*(3): 337-364.
Theocharis, Yannis, Pablo Barberá, Zoltán Fazekas, Sebastian Adrian Popa, and Olivier Parnet. 2016. "A bad workman blames his tweets: The consequences of citizens' uncivil Twitter use when interacting with party candidates." *Journal of communication* 66(6): 1007–1031.
Timmis, Gabriella. 2022. "From 11 to 1,500: How a Braver Angels Alliance expanded its reach and made a national impact." *Braver Angels Dispatch, Posts*. March 31: https://braverangels.org/from-11-to-1500-how-a-braver-angels-alliance-expanded-its-reach/.
Tognato, Carlo, Bernadette Nadya Jaworsky, and Jeffrey C. Alexander, eds. 2020. *The Courage for Civil Repair: Narrating the Righteous in International Migration*. New York: Springer Nature.
Tognato, Carlo. 2021. "Commentary: Demarcating Constructive from Destructive Populisms: Civil Translation vs. Civil Mimicry." In *Populism in the Civil Sphere*. Medford: Polity.
Turner, Bryan S. 2021. "Book Review: Populism in the Civil Sphere." *Journal of Classical Sociology* 21(3-4).

US Census. 2023. "America is Getting Older." June 22.
Voelkel, Jan G., James Chu, Michael N. Stagnaro, Joseph S. Mernyk, Chrystal Redekopp, Sophia L. Pink, James N. Druckman, David G. Rand, and Robb Willer. 2023. "Interventions reducing affective polarization do not necessarily improve anti-democratic attitudes." *Nature human behaviour* 7(1): 55–64.
Xi, Liu, Clio Andris, and Bruce A. Desmarais. 2019. "Migration and political polarization in the US: An analysis of the county-level migration network." *PloS one* 14(11): e0225405.
Yin, Robert K. 2009. *Case study research: Design and methods*. Vol. 5. Sage.

Emili Kembel

Uvežbavanje civiliteta: Izgradnja mostova u polarizovanoj Americi

Apstrakt

Tokom poslednje decenije, sve veća polarizacija produbila je političke podele ugrozivši time kako građansku sferu, tako i samu demokratiju. U Sjedinjenim Američkim Državama, zabrinutost za budućnost demokratije dovela je do porasta organizacija koje sebe opisuju kao „posvećene izgradnji mostova". Izgradnja mostova podrazumeva razvoj dijaloga između ljudi suprotstavljenih političkih stavova sa ciljem smanjenja polarizacije. Ovaj rad analizira izgradnju mostova kroz detaljnu studiju slučaja jedne takve organizacije. Oslanjajući se na posmatranje, intervjue i ankete učesnika, istraživanje opisuje motive i iskustva onih koji se bave izgradnjom mostova. Rad pokazuje da izgradnja mostova omogućava učesnicima da „uvežbavaju civilitet", da iskuse uljudnost i dobronamernost za kojom žude u sopstvenim životima i koju žele u širem društvu, i to u relativno sigurnom i kontrolisanom okruženju. Uvežbavanje civiliteta podstiče učesnike na osnaživanje građanskog, kroz učvršćivanje društvenih veza, prizivanje šireg osećaja dobronamernosti i humanizaciju političkog protivnika. Iako nije bez ograničenja, porast broja organizacija koje se bave „izgradnjom mostova" ukazuje na duboku potrebu za civilitetom, kao i iskustvenu i emocionalnu vrednost koju dosnosi sa sobom. Razmatra se civilitet kao međusobno uvažavanje i kao veza sa demokratskim institucijama.

Ključne reči: organizacije posvećene izgradnji mostova, civilitet, teorija građanske sfere, teorija ugovora, kulturna sociologija, demokratija, polarizacija, politička sociologija