

Original Research

Without the Rules, We Speak Better: Intergroup Contact and Equal Participation Rules Affecting the Deliberativeness of Online Discussion

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ABSTRACT

Amid South Korea's ongoing debate over legalizing same-sex marriage, our experimental study explores whether structured online discussions between gay/lesbian individuals and heterosexuals improve the quality of deliberation and the participants' perceptions of it. We examined the impact of heterosexual individuals' direct interaction with sexual minorities and the application of equal participation rules on the participants' behaviors, perceptions, and attitudes. Results show that interacting with sexual minorities improves participants' reciprocal behaviors and their perceptions of discussion's rationality but reduces perceived reciprocity, while implementing equal participation rules decreases the discussion's perceived rationality. Despite an observed interaction effect on observed reciprocity, neither approach influenced attitudes toward legalizing same-sex marriage.

KEYWORDS

online deliberation, intergroup contact hypothesis, online experiment, sexual minorities, LGBTQIA+

Sexual minorities in South Korea face explicit discrimination, with same-sex marriage remaining a contentious issue despite shifting public opinion since the 1990s. The polarized discourse has limited academic investigation into LGBT politics, especially concerning same-sex marriage (Chase, 2012; Park, 2018). Our study examines whether structured intergroup deliberation can foster reasoned and respectful discussions and improve attitudes towards an issue central to the outgroup's rights.

Deliberation advocates have argued that democratic benefits like reaching common ground are achievable through inclusive, reasoned discourse (Gutmann & Thompson, 2004). However, unequal participation, motivated by societal disparities, challenges the legitimacy

of deliberation (Neblo et al., 2010). Despite concerns about the inequality (e.g., Sanders, 1997; Young, 2002), empirical research on deliberation particularly involving minorities that are significantly less represented, remains limited (Kim et al., 2018).

Deliberation research has yet to explore conditions beyond the effects of disagreement (e.g., Mutz, 2002) or reason-giving (e.g., Schneiderhan & Khan, 2008), with limited attention to political deliberation directly involving minorities (Kim et al., 2018). To address this gap, we examine the effects of minority contact on deliberativeness and attitudes toward legalizing same-sex marriage, leveraging the contact hypothesis (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006) and intergroup contact theory within LGBT politics.

In addition to promoting online contact, we employ equal participation among participants, given the marginalization of LGBT voices in online forums. Our experiment, coupled with content analyses of the chat logs, explores how minority inclusion and equality rules affect deliberative quality and attitudes towards minority-benefitting policy.

We make distinct advances in research. First, we map two underpinning principles of deliberative democracy—minority inclusion and equality—onto the conceptual framework of deliberation suggested by Friess and Eilders (2015). Second, we further elaborate on recent studies on deliberative contact (Kim & Wojcieszak, 2018; Kim et al., 2018) with a novel experiment that brings both heterosexual and homosexual individuals together. Lastly, we investigated deliberativeness in two aspects—observed and perceived deliberativeness—to study potential discrepancies between the two. Our results highlight the conducive effect of minority contact and the importance of organic, long-lasting interactions for equal and constructive discussions.

Literature Review

Contact and Equality in Deliberative Context

Friess and Eilders (2015) identify three key components of deliberation: input, throughput, and output. The input dimension involves external factors that facilitate deliberation, such as the design of the public sphere. Throughput refers to the communicative process, while output concerns the beneficial outcomes of deliberation. Based upon this framework, we delve into two input dimensions of deliberation: minority contact and the equality rule.

We realize minority contact by directly incorporating sexual minorities in the discussion. Intergroup contact refers to any interaction between different groups. This entails direct communication between members of groups that differ in characteristics, including ethnic identities or sexual orientations that often involve outgroup prejudice. Contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954) originated in the context of reducing prejudice towards ethnic minorities, its central idea suggesting that meaningful contact between groups can reduce prejudice and/or induce behavioral changes (Amir, 1969). Meta analyses suggest that contact hypothesis generally holds true across various intergroup situations and contexts beyond the approach's initial focus on race-related prejudice (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Still, we saw a necessity to directly include minorities for their better representation. While random sampling can provide general representativeness (Fishkin, 2011), minority groups are often underrepresented, undermining the deliberative outcomes' legitimacy (Cohen, 1997; Dryzek, 2000; Karpowitz & Raphael, 2014). Without firsthand accounts from those with direct experience, deliberation may fail to provoke a meaningful reevaluation of a given issue (Mansbridge, 1999).

Second, promoting equal status is crucial for effective deliberation (Benhabib, 1996; Cohen, 1997), thus we set the imposition of equal

participation rules as another input dimension of deliberation. Anyone should be allowed to contribute to the discourse as they wish, and equality of access and the equal opportunities to participate should be guaranteed for better deliberation (Graham & Wright, 2014). Thus, we particularly impose rules that ensure equal opportunities to speak during deliberation (i.e., discursive equality). This approach ensures that all viewpoints are expressed and heard in a fair manner (Abdullah et al., 2016; Gastil, 1993; Habermas, 1989; Page, 1996) and prevents any viewpoint from dominating the discussion (Dahlberg, 2001; Thompson, 2008).

Deliberative Outcomes of Minority Contact and the Equality Rule

Our study focuses on deliberativeness of discussion and participants' attitudes toward the given issue as an output of deliberation (Friess & Eilders, 2015). The deliberative quality of any political discussion can be assessed across six key elements: event context, project design and setup, structural design, the discussion itself, participants' subjective experiences, and the resulting outputs (Gastil et al., 2012; Knobloch et al., 2013). Among these, we specifically examine deliberativeness in terms of discussion quality, participants' subjective experiences, and attitudes as resulting outputs.

Discussion quality is often evaluated by analyzing the claims made within the conversation (Black et al., 2011), while participants' subjective experience of deliberation is measured through surveys or interviews that capture their perceptions of the overall deliberative process (Knobloch et al., 2013). We assess the observable quality of the discussion as deliberative outcomes, focusing on two dimensions: rationality and interactivity. Rationality includes elements such as justification and constructiveness, while interactivity is further defined to encompass reciprocity, and empathy and respect (Friess & Eilders, 2015; Jaidka et al., 2019, Monnoyer-Smith & Wojcik,

2012). In addition, we explore participants' subjective experience of deliberation—perceived deliberativeness. This allows us to see potential discrepancies between observed behaviors and perceptions. We assess perceived deliberativeness by applying the definitions and criteria utilized in assessing observed deliberativeness. We lastly explore a resulting output, which in our study is attitudes towards an issue closely related to the minority's rights.

Minority Contact and Observed Deliberativeness.

Deliberation theory emphasizes the value of political discussions driven by well-reasoned arguments (Gutmann & Thompson, 2004). A central element of ideal deliberation is rationality, where individuals provide sufficient justifications for their claims. Contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954), suggests that intergroup contact facilitates increased knowledge about outgroups, serving as a crucial mechanism for rational information processing that ultimately reduces prejudice (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006, 2008). This effect may be amplified in anonymous online communication environments, where online disinhibition (Suler, 2004) reduces hesitation in expressing opinions, whether from majority or minority group members (e.g., Triggs et al., 2021). Such environments are more conducive to the exchange of novel information, particularly the unique narratives of minority groups, which might otherwise be suppressed in non-anonymous settings. These narratives not only enrich the pool of available information but also encourage discussants to formulate more diverse and well-supported rationales. As individuals become better informed through minority contact and intergroup interactions, they are more likely to articulate their perspectives more often with greater rational reasoning (Kim, 2016). For these reasons, intergroup contact has the potential to enhance the rationality of discussion, thus we hypothesize that intergroup contact positively influences the rationality of deliberative discussions.

H1-1. Intergroup contact with sexual minorities will result in a higher degree of observed rationality.

Effective political discussion also requires participants to actively listen and respond (Barber, 2003). This exchange, known as interactivity, has been further categorized and measured as reciprocity, and empathy and respect (e.g., Friess & Eilders, 2015; Habermas, 1989; Stroud et al., 2015). Reciprocity involves statements or actions that make the discussion more meaningful, such as provoking responses or attempting to gather further information (Friess & Eilders, 2015; Jaidka et al., 2019; Rowe, 2015; Stroud et al., 2015). Intergroup contact can reduce anxiety towards the outgroup, and this can drive the increase in the deliberation's reciprocity (Allport, 1954; Amichai-Hamburger et al., 2015; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008). In the South Korean context, where very few heterosexual individuals have experience of contact and direct interaction with sexual minorities, we expect this effect to be pronounced. Thus, we hypothesize that participants would indicate greater reciprocity when minority contact takes place.

H1-2. Intergroup contact with sexual minorities will result in a higher degree of observed reciprocity.

Empathy and respect, often conceptualized together as a component of interactivity in deliberation research, are fundamental to fostering deliberativeness. These traits reflect an individual's capacity to acknowledge and appreciate differing viewpoints through open-minded and sensitive responses (Del Valle et al., 2018; Jaidka et al., 2019; Steenbergen et al., 2003). High-quality intergroup contact experiences have been shown to enhance empathy and perspective-taking toward outgroup members (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008), with robust evidence across various contexts, such as racial outgroups and

sexual minorities (Johnston & Glasford, 2018; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008; Pettigrew et al., 2011). Building on this, we hypothesize that minority contact would causally influence empathy and respect.

H1-3. Intergroup contact with sexual minorities will result in a higher degree of observed empathy and respect.

Minority Contact and Perceived Deliberativeness.

Although a discussion may appear deliberative on the surface, participants may not perceive it that way (Caluwaerts & Reuchamps, 2014). At times, the perception of deliberation can be more significant than its actual deliberative quality (Black, 2012; Steiner, 2012). However, mainstream deliberation research often equates deliberative qualities with observed measures (e.g., Jaidka et al., 2019; Steenbergen et al., 2003), and self-reported deliberative qualities are rarely investigated or compared with observed ones (e.g., Kim et al., 2018).

Perceived deliberativeness may differ from observed deliberativeness, as it is shaped by subjective factors such as enjoyment and satisfaction with the discussion. Research suggests that individuals in privileged social positions (e.g., Caucasian students) often exhibit reluctance toward engaging in intergroup dialogue and harbor less positive attitudes toward interracial interactions. However, these perceptions are not always overtly evident during the interactions themselves (e.g., Gurin et al., 2004). Based on these insights, we examine whether a significant disparity exists between observed and perceived deliberativeness.

RQ1. Would intergroup contact during deliberation affect participants' perceived rationality and interactivity?

Minority Contact and Attitudes Toward Same-sex Marriage. Intergroup contact reduces

prejudice and improves attitudes toward minority groups or minority-related issues (Miller et al., 1985; Wilder, 1978) through multiple mechanisms. These include not only increased knowledge about outgroups but also a focus on shared commonalities and reduced intergroup anxiety (Cramwinckel et al., 2021), all of which encourage individuals to reconsider their previous biases and stereotypes. This process helps individuals practice perspective-taking and overcome prejudice, ultimately fostering support for policies that benefit outgroups (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008). These effects are evident in the context of LGBT politics, where frequent interpersonal interactions with sexual minorities are positively associated with more favorable attitudes toward the gay community (Cotton-Huston & Waite, 1999; Walch et al., 2012). Building on this reasoning, we investigate whether minority contact influences attitudes toward minority-related social issues.

RQ2. How does minority contact affect participants' attitudes toward the legalization of same-sex marriage?

Deliberative Outcomes of Equality Rules

Equality Rules and Observed Deliberativeness. Equal status among participants is crucial for effective deliberation, as it ensures balanced participation in the discussion (Dahlberg, 2001). Deliberation research has emphasized the importance of equal access and opportunities for participation in the public sphere on various topics, issues, and positions (Friess & Eilders, 2015). The balance in power dynamics encourages people to exchange and consider a broader range of perspectives (Gastil, 1993; 2008; Luskin et al., 2002). Consequently, exposure to opposing viewpoints propelled by equal participation can motivate individuals to articulate reasoned arguments (Price et al., 2002). Based on these insights, we hypothesize that equality

rules will promote more rational and thoughtful behaviors among participants.

H2-1. Deliberations conducted under equality rules will indicate a higher degree of observed rationality.

Ensuring equal opportunities for participation can promote interactivity, such as reciprocity and empathy and respect. When individuals' contributions are protected to voice their perspectives, they would likely foster a perception that everyone has an equal right to contribute. This perception is conducive to a discussion environment where all opinions are acknowledged and valued, thereby promoting empathy and mutual respect among participants. Research suggests that power is generally associated with decreased level of perspective-taking and empathy (Galinsky et al., 2006), implying that people would tend to show less empathy and respect when power imbalance is prominent during deliberation. By implementing equality rules that prime participants to recognize equal status and protected opportunities to contribute, self-centered tendencies can be reduced, leading to a more inclusive and balanced dialogue. Thus, we hypothesize that equality rules will cultivate more inclusive and respectful dialogue, elevating overall levels of reciprocity and empathy and respect throughout the discussion.

H2-2. Deliberations conducted under equality rules will indicate a higher degree of reciprocity.

H2-3. Deliberations conducted under equality rules will indicate a higher degree of empathy and respect.

Equality Rules and Perceived Deliberativeness. Another question concerns whether and how the implementation of the equality rule will affect participants' perceptions of deliberative qualities. On one hand, enforced equality rules

may reduce anxiety, enhance control, and foster a greater willingness to consider and respect others (Amichai-Hamburger et al., 2015), potentially increasing perceptions of rationality and interactivity. On the other hand, being compelled to voice one's opinions may cause psychological discomfort (Mutz, 2006). While equality rules promote interactions within the structure, they might introduce heaviness and rigidity (Amichai-Hamburger et al., 2015), potentially harming perceived deliberativeness. Given these conflicting possibilities, we pose the following research question:

RQ3. How does enforcing equality rules in deliberation affect perceived rationality and interactivity (reciprocity and empathy/respect)?

Equality Rules and Attitudes Toward Same-sex Marriage. We investigate whether the equality rule influences participants' attitudes toward the legalization of same-sex marriage. By ensuring equal participation, we expect participants to encounter a broader range of perspectives. However, the impact of equality rules on attitudinal change is complex and may operate in two opposing ways.

On one hand, equality rules encourage the inclusion of diverse viewpoints, facilitating exposure to cross-cutting information that participants might rarely encounter. According to the "depolarization" hypothesis, such exposure fosters attitudinal ambivalence by increasing familiarity with outgroup members and enhancing understanding of opposing perspectives, potentially leading to attitude shifts (Mutz, 2006; Wojcieszak & Warner, 2020). On the other hand, exposure to cross-cutting perspectives can sometimes backfire, intensifying polarization through confirmation bias and motivated reasoning (e.g., Guess & Coppock, 2020; Kim, 2019). Recent research suggests a curvilinear relationship: while moderate cross-cutting

exposure reduces polarization, excessive exposure may diminish its effects or even reverse them (Lin et al., 2025). Given these mixed findings, direct engagement with minority groups and discussions about policies benefiting minorities may be particularly intense and unpredictable. It remains unclear whether enforcing equality rules will reduce polarization or exacerbate it. To address this ambiguity, we propose the following research question to explore the effects of equality rules on attitudinal change.

RQ4. How does enforcing equality rules in deliberation influence participants' attitudes toward the legalization of same-sex marriage?

Exploring the Interaction Between Inclusion and Equality

Minority contact and equality rules align with the normative principles of deliberative theory that aim for better representation of minorities while fostering more engaged and comprehensive discussions (Thompson, 2008). This synergy is particularly critical in addressing inequalities in online deliberation regarding sexual minorities, where they often face discrimination or are entirely excluded from political discourse (Gardiner, 2018). Although the intergroup contact hypothesis and deliberative theory informs that both conditions would enhance deliberativeness through unique mechanisms, there is a lack of empirical evidence on how these factors interact across the dimensions of observed and perceived deliberativeness. To address this gap, we examine whether the two conditions jointly influence observed and perceived deliberativeness, as well as attitudes toward minority-benefiting policies.

RQ5. What is the interaction effect between enforcing equality rules and the inclusion of sexual minorities on observed and perceived deliberativeness?

RQ6. What is the interaction effect between enforcing equality rules and the inclusion of sexual minorities on participants' attitudes toward legalizing same-sex marriage?

METHODS

Experimental Design

We organized online deliberations on the legalization of same-sex marriage in South Korea using KakaoTalk, a popular messaging application in the country. This messaging platform is extremely popular in Korea, with approximately 45 million monthly active users, nearly matching the country's total population. While the informal nature of group chats may be seen as casual, we determined meaningful discussions could still occur with proper moderation. In addition, the platform provides an anonymous chat, which we determined as indispensable for protecting the participants' identities. Given its accessibility, real-time communication capabilities and anonymity, it emerged as most suitable for our study.

Online chat rooms were created for each experimental group, where participants engaged in discussions using assigned nicknames and adhered to specific discussion rules. The experimental design featured two key conditions: (1) the inclusion or exclusion of lesbians and/or gay men in the session to facilitate minority contact, and (2) the application or non-application of equality rules during the discussion. This resulted in a 2x2 between-subject factorial design: inclusion of sexual minorities (present vs. absent) and equality rules (applied vs. not applied). Each discussion group comprised 7 to 10 participants, with minority-related prejudice levels similarly distributed across groups.

Procedures

Our study has three parts: a pre-experiment survey,

an online discussion session, and a post-experiment survey. Before the chat session, participants were asked questions regarding demographic information and the Modern Homonegativity Scale (MHS; Morrison & Morrison, 2003) that assesses homosexuality-related prejudice. Participants were then allocated into chat groups based on their MHS scores to ensure equal distributions across groups. The MHS had 11 items rated on a 5-point scale from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree), and the average score was computed ($M = 2.43$, $SD = 0.78$, Cronbach's $\alpha = .885$). Following the pre-chat survey, participants were given a nine-page information sheet containing balanced arguments on same-sex marriage and an overview of the discussion rules, serving as an introduction to the study.

The online discussion sessions were conducted one week after. As each session started, the moderator outlined the discussion rules including a 60-minute time limit. In contact conditions, lesbians and/or gay men participated alongside heterosexual participants, who were informed of the minority's presence. To foster in-group and out-group distinction and promote intergroup interaction (Amichai-Hamburger & McKenna, 2006; Thompson, 2008), participants introduced themselves, including their sexual orientations. Intergroup contact was thus operationalized as interactions between participants from distinct groups, with group memberships explicitly acknowledged.

For participants assigned to the equality rule conditions, moderators asked them to speak at least three times (i.e., at the beginning, midway through, and at the end) during the discussion to achieve discursive equality (Graham & Wright, 2014). Discussions followed a predetermined sequence to guarantee equal opportunities for expression and balanced discussion (Coleman & Gotze, 2001; Fishkin, 2011).

After the discussion, participants completed a survey pertaining to manipulation checks,

attitudes toward gay marriage legalization in Korea, and perceptions of deliberative qualities (rationality and interactivity). Upon completing the survey, participants received compensation of 10,000 KRW (approximately \$8 USD) and were debriefed via online messenger.

To quantify observed deliberativeness, three individuals with graduate-level education coded the discussion chat log. A total of 12 transcripts, comprising 1,679 utterances were analyzed to assess the levels of rationality and interactivity (i.e., reciprocity, empathy and respect). Intercoder reliability was achieved through practice sessions, and the reliability coefficients (Krippendorff's alpha) ranged from 0.697 to 0.757 across the coded variables.

Participants

Upon approval from the Institutional Review Board of a University in Seoul, South Korea, 15 gay and lesbian participants and 85 heterosexual participants voluntarily participated in the study. They agreed with all procedures and were adequately informed about the risks of participation. All participants were recruited from university-based online communities at major universities in South Korea. 100 participants were recruited initially, but two heterosexual participants dropped out after the pre-chat survey. All 85 heterosexual participants who took part in the group discussion session completed the post-chat survey. Most were in their 20s (46 males, 52 females), 58.2% of them being undergraduate students. The heterosexual sample displayed moderate variability in political orientation ($M = 3.55$, $SD = 1.08$, 1 = strong liberal, 7 = strong conservative), and majority (69.4%) had no religion, while they indicated a moderate level of interest in LGBT issues ($M = 4.40$, $SD = 1.34$). They reported low level of acquaintance with lesbians or gay men ($M = 1.95$, $SD = 1.19$), rated on a 5-point scale (1 = none, 2 = one, 3 = two to five, 4 = five to ten, 5 = over 10).

Measures

Observed deliberativeness. Deliberative behaviors observed during political discussions were measured through content analysis of discussion transcripts from twelve chat room sessions. Each conversational turn was defined as all utterances made by one participant before another speaker began, serving as the unit of analysis (Kim, 2016). We operationalized the measurement of deliberative quality in terms of *rationality*, *and interactivity*—*reciprocity*, and *empathy and respect*. Rationality of a discussion is one of the indices that reflect deliberativeness (Beckert & Ziegele, 2020; Monnoyer-Smith & Wojcik, 2011), and is often measured by the quantity of arguments in the comment. Observed rationality by quantifying the reasons participants provided to support their arguments in the discussion transcripts (e.g., Monnoyer-Smith & Wojcik, 2011; Stromer-Galley, 2007) ($M = 11.2$, $SD = 5.89$). Reasons involved various supporting materials and justifying statements, such as facts, personal anecdotes, and external links or statistics (Jaidka et al., 2019; Steenbergen et al., 2003; Stroud et al., 2015). Each reason was taken at face value and those that denigrated the personal traits of other participants were excluded from the counts (Mutz, 2002).

We operationalized *interactivity*, to consist of *reciprocity* ($M = 3.13$, $SD = 2.86$) (Jaidka et al., 2019; Stroud et al., 2015), and *empathy and respect* towards other discussants and their opinions ($M = 2.53$, $SD = 2.58$) (Jaidka et al., 2019; Steenbergen et al., 2003). Reciprocity was defined as the demonstration of meaningful interactions with others, prompting a response or additional information (e.g., Friess & Eilders, 2015; Stroud et al., 2015). Empathy and respect, as a single construct, was defined as indications of sensitivity to others through positive, empathetic, or respectful responses that acknowledge others' perspectives (e.g., Del Valle et al., 2018; Steenbergen et al., 2003).

Perceived deliberativeness. Perceived deliberativeness was operationalized to consist of two dimensions—perceived rationality and interactivity—and was measured after the chat. *Perceived rationality* included four items (e.g., “Our group carefully examined the necessity, effects, and extent of the anti-discrimination laws”) based on Gastil et al. (2008). These items assessed whether participants perceived their deliberative experience as a reasonable exchange of opinions (Gastil et al., 2008), and were asked on a 10-point scale, from 1 (strongly disagree) to 10 (strongly agree). The original items were slightly modified to fit the context of the legalization of same-sex marriage in South Korea. Items were averaged to determine perceived rationality ($M = 6.90, SD = 1.68, \text{Cronbach's } \alpha = .789$).

Perceived interactivity was measured in two aspects: *perceived reciprocity* and *perceived empathy and respect* within the discussion. Perceived reciprocity was measured using two items: “Our group accepted me” and “I carefully paid attention to others’ opinions” ($M = 8.45, SD = 1.46$). Perceived empathy and respect were measured using two items: “People respected my opinion about same-sex marriage” and “People were rude to me” (reverse coded) ($M = 8.10, SD = 1.78$), asked on 10-point scales, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 10 (strongly agree).

Attitude toward same-sex marriage. After the discussion session, each respondent was asked to indicate their attitude toward legalizing same-sex marriage in South Korea on a 10-point scale, from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 10 (Strongly agree). After reverse coding one item, the three items were averaged to measure the overall attitude toward same-sex marriage ($M = 7.85, SD = 2.30, \text{Cronbach's } \alpha = .934$).

RESULTS

Manipulation check

We checked (1) whether heterosexual participants in the minority contact group were significantly more aware that the minority were a part of the discussion compared to the non-inclusion group (aware = 1, unaware = 0), and (2) whether the equality rule group recognized the discussion rules imposed on participants (aware = 1, unaware = 0). A *t*-test showed that the contact group ($M = 0.94, SD = 0.47$) was significantly more aware of the presence of sexual minorities in the discussion compared to the no-contact group ($M = 0.24, SD = 0.24$), ($t = -7.769, p < .001$). Based on participants’ subjective evaluations, a *t*-test revealed that the equality rule condition ($M = 0.85, SD = 0.36$) indicated a significantly higher perception of equal opportunities to speak ($M = 0.22, SD = 0.42$) ($t = -7.322, p < .001$). Therefore, we conclude that the manipulations of minority inclusion and the equality rule were successful.

Testing of Hypotheses and Research Questions

The Effect of Minority Contact. We predicted that contacting minorities in deliberation would foster observed rationality (H1-1), reciprocity (H1-2), and empathy and respect (H1-3) in discussions. Two-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) showed that there was a marginal difference in observed reciprocity between participants who contacted minorities ($M = 3.29, SD = 3.22$) and those who did not ($M = 2.57, SD = 2.18$), $F(1, 79) = 2.942, p = .090, \eta^2 = .04$. Thus, the data supported H1-2. However, our data did not support H1-1 and H1-3. Contact condition ($M = 10.47, SD = 6.74$) did not differ from no-contact condition ($M = 10.94, SD = 4.88$) in observed rationality, $F(1, 79) = 0.260, p = .612, \eta^2 = .003$. The minority contact condition ($M = 1.97, SD =$

1.59) also did not differ in observed empathy and respect from the no-contact condition ($M = 2.94$, $SD = 2.89$), $F(1, 79) = 2.691$, $p = .105$, $\eta^2 = .000$.

We examined whether direct contact with sexual minorities in deliberation would affect participants' *perceived* deliberativeness—specifically, perceived rationality and interactivity (RQ1)—as well as their attitudes toward same-sex marriage (RQ2). Compared to when the minority did not participate in the discussion ($M = 6.55$, $SD = 1.80$), minority contact ($M = 7.16$, $SD = 1.44$) increased perceived rationality of the discussion, $F(1, 79) = 3.986$, $p = .049$, $\eta^2 = .048$. The contact condition ($M = 8.20$, $SD = 1.48$) and the no-contact condition ($M = 8.66$, $SD = 1.36$) showed a significant difference in perceived reciprocity, reverse to the hypothesis, $F(1, 79) = 4.039$, $p = .048$, $\eta^2 = .049$. Perceived empathy and respect did not differ between the contact ($M = 7.87$, $SD = 1.99$) and the no-contact ($M = 8.40$, $SD = 1.54$) conditions, $F(1, 79) = 1.380$, $p = .244$, $\eta^2 = .017$. Lastly, participants' attitudes toward legalizing same-sex marriage did not significantly differ between participants in the minority contact ($M = 7.43$, $SD = 2.39$) and the non-contact ($M = 7.59$, $SD = 2.32$) conditions, $F(1, 79) = .001$, $p = .972$, $\eta^2 = .000$.

The Effect of the Equality Rule. We hypothesized that deliberations conducted under the equality rule would demonstrate a higher degree of observed rationality (H2-1), reciprocity (H2-2), and empathy and respect (H2-3). A two-way ANOVA indicated that there was no substantial evidence that the equality rule condition ($M = 11.53$, $SD = 5.94$) and the no-rule condition ($M = 9.72$, $SD = 5.24$) differed in observed rationality, $F(1, 79) = 1.965$, $p = .165$, $\eta^2 = .024$. The equality rule condition ($M = 2.96$, $SD = 2.40$) and no-rule condition ($M = 2.75$, $SD = 3.00$) also did not differ in observed reciprocity, $F(1, 79) = 0.179$, $p = .673$, $\eta^2 = .002$. Observed empathy and respect in discussions did not differ between the equality rule condition ($M = 2.32$, $SD = 2.31$) and the no-

rule condition ($M = 2.83$, $SD = 2.68$), $F(1, 79) = 0.439$, $p = .510$, $\eta^2 = .006$, either.

The third and fourth research questions pertain to the potential effect of equality rules on participants' *perceived* rationality and interactivity (RQ3), and attitudes toward legalizing same-sex marriage (RQ4). Surprisingly, participants in the equality rule condition ($M = 6.44$, $SD = 1.46$) perceived significantly less rationality compared to no-rule condition ($M = 7.27$, $SD = 1.84$), $F(1, 79) = 6.300$, $p = .014$, $\eta^2 = .074$. Equality rule condition ($M = 8.31$, $SD = 1.46$) also did not differ in perceived reciprocity, from no-rule condition ($M = 8.56$, $SD = 1.52$), $F(1, 79) = 0.035$, $p = .852$, $\eta^2 = .000$. Perceived empathy and respect did not significantly differ between the equality rule condition ($M = 7.97$, $SD = 1.90$) and the no-rule condition ($M = 8.53$, $SD = 1.48$), $F(1, 79) = 1.800$, $p = .184$, $\eta^2 = .017$. Lastly, participants' attitudes toward same-sex marriage was not significantly different between the equality-rule ($M = 7.30$, $SD = 2.59$) and no-rule ($M = 7.81$, $SD = 1.95$) conditions, $F(1, 79) = 1.305$, $p = .257$, $\eta^2 = .016$.

The Interaction Effect. We sought to explore whether there was an interaction effect between minority contact and the equality rule on observed or perceived deliberativeness (RQ5), and attitudes toward legalizing same-sex marriage (RQ6). A significant interaction effect was found on observed reciprocity, $F(1, 79) = 7.507$, $p = .008$, $\eta^2 = .087$.

We conducted a simple main effects test and Fisher's LSD post hoc tests and found that observed reciprocity was significantly higher for the no-equality rule condition ($M = 4.50$, $SD = 0.74$) than for the equality rule condition ($M = 2.64$, $SD = 0.55$) with minority contact ($p = .047$, $\eta^2 = .049$). There was a marginally significant difference in participants' observed reciprocity in no-contact situations ($p = .067$, $\eta^2 = .042$) between the equality rule condition ($M = 1.88$, $SD = 0.52$) and the no-rule condition ($M =$

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Observed Reciprocity

Minority Inclusion	Equality Rules	M	SD
Inclusion	Imposed	3.00 [*]	.48
	Not Imposed	5.00 [*]	.66
No Inclusion	Imposed	3.24	.54
	Not Imposed	1.88	.56

Note. ^{*} $p < .05$, ^{**} $p < .01$, ^{***} $p < .001$

Figure 1. The Interaction Effect of Minority Inclusion and Equality Rule on Observed Reciprocity



Note. Interaction effects between minority inclusion and equality rules were found on observed reciprocity.

3.24, $SD = 0.51$), too. Figure 1 demonstrates the interaction effect, and Table 1 summarizes the descriptive statistics of the post-hoc comparison of mean differences in observed reciprocity.

All other dependent variables, including observed rationality, $F(1, 79) = 0.065, p = .799, \eta^2 = .001$, observed empathy and respect, $F(1, 79) = 0.016, p = .899, \eta^2 = .000$, perceived rationality, $F(1, 79) = 0.003, p = .955, \eta^2 = .000$, perceived reciprocity, $F(1, 79) = 2.028, p = .158, \eta^2 = .025$, perceived empathy and respect, $F(1, 79) = 0.034, p = .855, \eta^2 = .000$, and attitudes toward legalizing same-sex marriage, $F(1, 79) = 1.097, p = .298, \eta^2 = .014$, were not significantly affected by the

interaction between the two variables. Table 2 summarizes the effects of independent variables on dependent variables.

DISCUSSION

We explored the impact of minority contact and equality rules on deliberativeness. The significance of our study lies in the integration of the intergroup contact hypothesis with deliberation theory. Using the three-stage categorization of deliberation proposed by Friess and Eilders (2015), we framed minority contact and equality

Table 2. Effects of Minority Inclusion and Equality Rules on Deliberativeness and Attitudes Towards Same-Sex Marriage

	Observed Deliberativeness											
	Rationality				Reciprocity				Empathy and Respect			
	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	η^2	<i>p</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	η^2	<i>p</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	η^2	<i>p</i>
Inclusion (A)	1	.260	.003	.612	1	2.942	.036	.090	1	2.691	.033	.105
Equality rules (B)	1	1.965	.024	.165	1	.179	.002	.673	1	.439	.006	.510
Interaction (A x B)	1	.065	.001	.799	1	7.507	.087	.008**	1	.016	.000	.899
Error (S/AB)	79	(32.51)			79	(6.60)			79			
	Perceived Deliberativeness											
	Rationality				Reciprocity				Empathy and Respect			
	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	η^2	<i>p</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	η^2	<i>p</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	η^2	<i>p</i>
Inclusion (A)	1	3.986	.048	.049 [†]	1	4.039	.049	.048 [†]	1	1.380	.017	.244
Equality rules (B)	1	6.300	.074	.014 [†]	1	.035	.000	.852	1	1.800	.022	.184
Interaction (A x B)	1	.003	.000	.955	1	2.028	.025	.158	1	.034	.000	.855
Error (S/AB)	79				79				79			
	Attitude towards Same-sex marriage											
	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	η^2	<i>p</i>								
	Inclusion (A)	1	.001	.000	.972							
Equality rules (B)	1	1.305	.016	.257								
Interaction (A x B)	1	1.097	.014	.298								
Error (S/AB)	79											

Note. Entries in parentheses are mean square of error.

[†]*p* < .05, **p* < .01, ***p* < .001

rules as key inputs of deliberation, and empirically tested their effects. Our experiments stand out for directly involving sexual minorities in structured online discussions governed by moderated equality rules—an approach that remains rare and underexplored. Our study is also notable for examining both observed deliberativeness and individuals' subjective evaluations of deliberative qualities, addressing the discrepancy between the two.

We found that minority contact enhanced participants' perception of the discussion's rationality but did not significantly promote rational behaviors. Exposure to dissenting opinions through contact should encourage individuals to generate more reasons (Price et al., 2002), as driven by increased knowledge about the outgroup (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008), but this only held true with regards to perceived rationality. Upon reviewing the chat logs, we observed that participants did provide high-quality reasons, likely reflecting enhanced knowledge gained through contact. However, the overall frequency of rational behaviors remained consistent across contact and no-contact conditions.

Participants generally offered well-reasoned arguments and thoughtful justifications, which likely resulted in a higher evaluation of rationality in the minority contact conditions compared to the no-contact ones. However, as turns progressed during discussion, the quantity of arguments participants contributed diminished, with participants often opting to agree with others' opinions rather than reiterating their own. Thus, the structured turn-taking may have discouraged individuals from repeating points they felt had already been adequately addressed by others, possibly to avoid redundancy. Furthermore, our coding scheme classified agreement as reciprocity rather than rationality, and such categorization may have influenced the null effect by shifting focus away from the rational contributions participants made. These factors together may have obscured differences in rational behaviors

between the conditions.

Minority contact did not lead to any significant changes in participants' empathetic or respectful behaviors, nor did it affect their perceptions of the discussion's deliberativeness. We speculate that this may have stemmed from the participants' apprehension of harming the minority with their statements, or the contact's characteristics in our experiments.

While participants in the contact conditions actively engaged in discussions to reduce intergroup anxiety, the presence of sexual minorities may have led individuals to withhold their opinions, mindful of the potential to harm or offend the minority. Individuals often practice self-censorship when they perceive their speech could threaten others' identities (Ramsoomair, 2019). Thus, the perceived risk of causing harm may have activated discussants' self-censorship, which could have, in turn, left them with the impression that their contributions were neither fully recognized nor valued.

Research has highlighted the need to distinguish between intergroup interaction and intergroup contact (MacInnis & Page-Gould, 2015). Intergroup interaction is typically artificial and brief, whereas intergroup contact involves more genuine interactions in organic settings, often over longer durations, fostering closer relationships. MacInnis and Page-Gould's (2015) meta-analysis shows that intergroup interaction, compared to intergroup contact, in fact increases anxiety, stress, outgroup avoidance, and prejudice, unlike prolonged intergroup contact that reduces anxiety, bias, and prejudice.

Our study's short, structured discussion setting more closely resembles intergroup interaction than intergroup contact. Participants in the minority contact conditions may have experienced stress and anxiety during the brief encounter, which could have diminished the contact's impact on empathetic behaviors and perceptions. Future research should investigate whether stress and anxiety indeed affected

deliberativeness by incorporating measures to address these factors.

Minority contact did not affect individuals' attitudes toward the minority-benefitting issue. While meaningful intergroup contact reduces prejudice and improves outgroup attitudes (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008), this was not evident in our findings. We suspect that the absence of prolonged or meaningful interactions largely contributed to these null results. Given that extended interactions in organic settings are more effective in fostering attitudinal change, future research should prioritize sustained engagement in a more natural discussion setting. In addition, investigating mediators of contact-attitude association such as intergroup attitudes, anxiety, and perspective-taking (Vezzali & Giovannini, 2011) will help clarify the potential causal relationships.

Despite explicitly promoting equal participation, the equality rules had no significant effect on most observed or perceived deliberativeness. Upon reviewing the chat logs, we concluded that the equality rules, in conjunction with our discussion structure, were not well-suited for fostering effective deliberation. As turns progressed, participants contributed fewer arguments, with later speakers often agreeing with others rather than offering new points, likely to avoid redundancy. Furthermore, agreement was not measured as a distinct argument for rationality or reciprocity, and this may have obscured the impact of the equality rules, as well. Overall, while we aimed to ensure equal participation by requiring a certain number of contributions, the structure of the discussion may have canceled out the effect of the equality rules on deliberativeness or attitudes. Future research should utilize measures less influenced by discussion structure or settings that do not inherently inhibit the participants' contribution.

Equality rules may have undermined perceived rationality, likely due to participants' dissatisfaction with the discussion content under these

conditions. By mandating contributions, participants were denied the option to remain silent, even in situations where they might have preferred to. Furthermore, requiring all participants to speak exposed them to a broader range of opinions, including those they may have found irrational or disturbing. While exposure to counter-attitudinal information expands knowledge, uninvitedly confronting dissents often leads to negative evaluations of out-group members or the discussion itself (Nickerson, 1998; Wojcieszak, 2011) or can even intensify ideological polarization (Kim et al., 2018). In this context, discomfort likely stemmed from the equality rules—the inability to opt out of speaking and the forced exposure to differing opinions—and negatively affected perceived rationality.

We identified a significant interaction effect between minority contact and equality rules on observed reciprocity. With minority contact, the no-rule condition led to significantly higher levels of observed reciprocity compared to the equality rule condition. Without minority contact, a marginally significant difference was observed, again the no-rule condition exhibiting higher reciprocity than the equality rule condition. Observed reciprocity was highest when minority contact occurred without the equality rules and lowest when minority contact was absent and equality rules were present. Notably, the equality rule suppressed the positive influence of minority contact on reciprocity.

This suggests that enforcing an equal participation rule, at least as implemented in our study, was counterproductive for fostering reciprocity, disrupting the natural benefits of minority contact on reciprocal behaviors. By requiring participants to make contributions, the structured interventions constrained the organic reciprocity that might otherwise emerge from minority contact. Still, promoting equal status among participants is important to maximize the contact's conducive effects (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008). Future research should approach rules

in deliberation experiments with caution, as they can inadvertently hinder organic, reciprocal interactions and diminish the promises of equality-focused interventions and minority contact. Rather than mandating contributions, more nuanced approaches like gentle suggestions or providing rewards could be employed to foster the perception of equal status among participants while preserving the spontaneity of interactions.

In conclusion, our findings indicate the positive impact of minority contact in fostering reciprocal behaviors during deliberation, while the imposition of rigid equality rules—such as mandating an equal number of contributions—can negate these benefits. Also, we identified that discrepancies could exist between observed and perceived deliberativeness, thus we suggest future research to further investigate them.

LIMITATIONS

Our study is not without limitations. First, we did not directly investigate the mechanisms through which intergroup contact and equality rules influence deliberativeness and attitudes. According to the intergroup contact hypothesis, reductions in outgroup prejudice and improvements in attitudes occur through mechanisms such as increased knowledge of the outgroup, reduced anxiety, and enhanced perspective-taking. Future research could provide deeper insights into the causal processes underlying changes in deliberativeness and attitudes by rigorously examining these mediators.

Second, the design of the deliberative settings could be improved. Effective intergroup contact requires meaningful, extended interactions in natural settings rather than brief, artificially structured exchanges. In our study, the one-hour, structured discussion with rigid rules likely limited the positive effects typically associated with intergroup contact. The combination of equal participation rules and a rigid turn-taking structure may have further inhibited

deliberativeness and attitudinal shifts. Organic discussion environments, where reciprocity can flourish, also respect participants' freedom to remain silent, a critical aspect of authentic engagement. Scholars emphasize that deliberative interactions should not only ensure equal speaking opportunities but also ensure that participants feel genuinely heard (Landwehr, 2014). The lack of autonomy in controlling one's contributions may have negatively impacted perceptions of being heard. As a result, it remains unclear whether participants truly felt engaged and valued under the equality rules, despite our efforts to establish equality. Future research should explore the impact of more thoughtfully designed equality rules in fostering meaningful deliberation.

Additionally, alignment between measurement and the discussion structure is crucial to avoid confounding effects. Our chat log analysis revealed that the rigid turn-taking structure restricted the natural flow of ideas, potentially confounding relationships between independent and dependent variables. Participants often contributed less as the discussion progressed, frequently expressing agreement with prior speakers rather than presenting new arguments. Since observed rationality was measured by the number of arguments provided while expressions of agreement were not considered as reciprocity, this approach may have compromised the accuracy of the measurement. Future studies should carefully design discussion formats to prevent such interference and ensure robust measurement of outcomes.

Another limitation is the lack of investigation into how minority groups experience contact and equality rules in discussions. This remains a vital area for exploration, particularly in deliberations involving unequal power dynamics (Kim et al., 2018). Minority participants may perceive and behave differently from heterosexual participants, making these differences a compelling avenue for research. Strategies such as encouraging individuals to take a side in debate

formats (Manin, 2005) or facilitating enclaved deliberations among minority groups prior to broader discussions (Karpowitz & Raphael, 2016) could help reduce psychological burdens on minority participants (Fiske & Taylor, 1991) while fostering attitudinal shifts among majority group members (Mansbridge, 1999). Future studies could also compare deliberativeness and attitudinal changes across different deliberative settings incorporating these strategies.

Finally, the small sample size and overrepresentation of undergraduate students limit the generalizability of our findings. Sensitive issues, such as the legalization of same-sex marriage, often elicit diverse opinions across generational and demographic groups. Future research should aim to include larger, more diverse populations to ensure broader applicability of the findings.

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