The Zoom solution: Promoting effective cross-ideological communication online

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Abstract

The rise of ideological polarization in the U.S. over the past few decades has come with an increase in hostility on both sides of the political aisle. Although communication and compromise are hallmarks of a functioning society, research has shown that people overestimate the negative affect they will experience when viewing oppositional media, and it is likely that negative forecasts lead many to avoid *cross-ideological communication* (CIC) altogether. Additionally, a growing ideological geographic divide and online extremism fueled by social media audiences make engaging in CIC more difficult than ever. Here, we demonstrate that online video-chat platforms (i.e., Zoom) can be used to promote effective CIC among ideologically polarized individuals, as well as to better study CIC in a controlled setting. Participants (*n* = 122) had a face-to-face CIC over Zoom, either privately or publicly with a silent ingroup audience present. Participant forecasts about the interaction were largely inaccurate, with the actual conversation experience found to be more positive than anticipated. Additionally, the presence of an ingroup audience was associated with increased conflict. In both conditions, participants showed signs of attitude moderation, felt more favorable toward the outgroup, and felt more informed about the issue after the CIC. These results suggest that face-to-face CIC's are generally positive and beneficial for partisans, and that greater effects may be achieved through private conversations, as opposed to more public social media interactions. Future researchers studying ideological conflict may find success using similar Zoom paradigms to bring together ideologically diverse individuals in controlled lab settings.

Introduction

The meteoric rise of U.S. ideological and affective polarization (1) in the past few decades has led to open hostility across the political aisle and increasing dehumanization of those with conflicting ideologies (2). Democracies are built on and flourish through honest discourse between those with opposing points of view (3) and decades of research indicate that intergroup contact among opposing groups decreases outgroup stereotypes (4-6). Unfortunately, difficult ideological conversations are often avoided due to fear of isolation, conflict, and extremism from the other side (7-9). Moreover, rural and urban areas have become less ideologically integrated, creating physical barriers for those who would seek to have conversations across the ideological divide, i.e., *cross-ideological communication* (CIC) (10). The internet would seem to be an obvious solution to the obstacle of geographical and political boundaries. Although individuals frequently wander out of their ideological bubbles online (11), armed with the cloak of anonymity and an audience that rewards extremism and conflict, internet-based CIC often becomes a hub for hostility and dehumanization rather than a respectful exchange of ideas (12, 13). Thus, a paradox presents itself: more dialogue between ideological opponents seems to be an effective way to combat polarization, yet the most accessible tool for scaling up dialogue (i.e., online technology) tends to exacerbate the problem.

This paradox also exists in academic settings for researchers studying ideological communication. Academic institutions are becoming increasingly homogenous in ideology (14, 15), and recruiting a wide [...] opponents into the lab to have a heated

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discussion. To combat this difficulty, many researchers have opted to use imagined scenarios or forecasted experiences to study ideological communication (6). While these methodologies are useful for identifying potential solutions for polarization, it is difficult to test their effectiveness without the ability to generate CIC in the lab. The current study seeks to address this gap in the literature by comparing participants' forecasts of a CIC to their *actual experience* of one, and by examining the effects of the experience on their ideological attitudes. We demonstrate the viability of using online video-chat (i.e., Zoom) for generating and studying CIC in a controlled laboratory setting. Additionally, to test how group dynamics may hinder productive engagement and to assess the ease of experimental manipulation using online video-chat paradigms, we tested the role of an ingroup audience as a source of conflict during face-to-face CIC.

Negative forecasts and avoidance

It is easy to imagine the dreaded Thanksgiving dinner: family members yelling about politics across the table, tensions rising, and people storming off angrily. Contrary to this perception, these conversations are less common than people would expect as most people choose avoidance over conflict in these situations (16). Participation in CIC can be viewed as a threat to social harmony, group ties, and reputation (17, 18). Arguing at the Thanksgiving dinner table may cause more fracture in the family than ignoring a family member's aversive ideological beliefs. As such, people often suppress their divergent or challenging views, engaging in *self-censorship*, to maintain cohesiveness and avoid ostracism (12, 17, 19). Nonetheless, research has found that dreaded, but non-CIC, social interactions are often found to be more enjoyable than people imagine (20).

Thus, even though CIC may be beneficial in reality, inaccurate affective forecasts of how such interactions will go may lead people to avoid these interactions (21). A lack of contact with the 'other side' can lead to inaccurate predictions and assumptions that lead to a misperception of polarization (22, 23). Regardless of what side of the ideological divide someone is on, most have an almost caricatured view of their political opponents, vastly misrepresenting their beliefs and behaviors in a so-called 'perception gap' (24, 25). In reality, ideological attitudes are not as far apart as people believe (26). Affective forecasts of one's own negative feelings also tend to be overly extreme, with participants systematically overestimating the degree of negative emotion and disagreement they will have when engaged in oppositional media content (21). These findings seem to imply that the actual experience of a CIC may not be as bad as people think, but little research has investigated this due to the difficulty of facilitating CIC experimentally. The current study examines these forecasting biases in the context of face-to-face CIC's. If similar forecasting biases are present for face-to-face CIC's, future interventions that mitigate these biases could prove useful.

Even when psychological barriers do not prevent ideological intergroup contact, there are still growing political-geographical barriers to contend with. In the U.S., polarization along geographical lines has increased substantially over the past few decades (10). Numerous studies have found that liberal polarization prevails in highly dense urban areas and conservative polarization prevails in rural areas (27,

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28). Existing demographics and self-selection drive ideological homogeny at the state, city, and neighborhood levels (10, 28, 29). For those who would seek out CIC, extra effort is required in most geographic areas, potentially at the expense of alienating oneself from the community (28). For researchers, this translates into ideologically homogenous samples on campus, making it especially difficult to study CIC.

The Internet: echo chambers, anonymity, and the audience

In its infancy, many researchers saw the internet as an opportunity to overcome the boundaries of geography and social anxiety when it came to CIC (31, 32). However, the internet has failed to provide the solution many thought it would, as individuals tend to inhabit online 'echo chambers' or 'bubbles', often driving people further to the extremes (33). This is somewhat paradoxical, as recent evidence shows spending more time on social media increases exposure to diverse ideological content (34). However, simply encountering an opponent's ideas online is not enough to reduce hostility; if anything, merely encountering it may fuel polarization (35). In an environment where most interactions flow one-way or are text-based, such as social media sites, communication can become extreme, incendiary, and lacking in nuance.

Notably, online CIC typically lacks the nonverbal cues, such as tone of voice and facial expression, that promote greater empathy and perspective-taking during contact (36-38). Without nonverbal cues that provide feedback about an individual's emotions and intentions, miscommunications can quickly devolve into an unproductive "Twitter war" or "Facebook fight". On some discussion forums (e.g., Reddit), the ability to post anonymously removes social pressures for civil dialogue including accountability, possibility for retribution, and fear of isolation. Disinhibited, conversation partners are more likely to use hyperbole, dehumanization, and engage in the conversation as if it were a zero-sum game (36). Online spaces are widely perceived as unwelcoming towards nuanced discussion (9, 39), and many individuals hide their political ideology on social media due to a lack of civility (40, 41).

Online audiences strongly influence what content social media users decide to post, comment, or respond to. Individuals online often feel like they are in a perpetual arms race to keep people's attention, with incentives ranging from self-validation to profit. Natural human tendencies to seek out exciting new information (42) are easily co-opted by highly emotional (43) and potentially misleading information (44). Some individuals thrive on posting novel, but inflammatory content to convey a morally righteous self-image, elicit positive feedback, or solidify ingroup status (45-47). Although this provocative content gains traction easily, it is likely to misrepresent, dehumanize, or contain false information about an outgroup, discouraging productive CIC (43, 44, 48). Additionally, the presence of these "attitudinal ingroup" audiences may create a social pressure to espouse extreme opinions (49) to avoid "looking weak". As such CIC may tend to be more productive in a private one-on-one setting than in a group.

The Zoom solution

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Video-chat software, such as Zoom, is uniquely positioned to resolve both aspects of the CIC problem, namely, the need for more conversations to combat polarization, and researchers' difficulties in studying CIC in the lab. While the typical online interaction may be bogged down by the lack of nonverbal cues, ingroup audiences, and dehumanization, face-to-face video-chat allows for more personal conversations, allowing for online CIC more similar to in-person interactions. Additionally, the ability to connect people from across the country with just a few clicks of the mouse removes the problem of the geographical divide for citizens and researchers alike, greatly reducing the difficulty of bringing together ideological opponents. Though video communication has been around for quite some time, utilization by the general public has been slow and uneven. The need to socially distance during COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the adoption of Zoom to the point where it is now an eponym like Kleenex and Xerox. Many bridge-building coalitions have already begun to utilize video-chat to facilitate CIC (e.g. Living Room Conversations, Make America Dinner Again, America Talks). However, the tool has not yet gained traction among experimental researchers. Online tools like mTurk and Qualtrics revolutionized survey data collection; Zoom could similarly revolutionize the study of dyadic and group interactions. The familiarity and availability of video-chat means most participants will require little to no instruction on how to use the tool. Common barriers for non-college student participation in research such as travel time and location are eliminated, as individuals can participate from anywhere that has a reliable internet connection. Much like a laboratory setting, the environment on Zoom is easily controlled by sending participants to breakout rooms, changing usernames, and recording and monitoring the communication while remaining unseen. Furthermore, compared to lab-executed research with students, participants recruited online do not have to worry about the possibility of future contact with the other participants, decreasing fears of reputational damage and loss of existing relationships. In essence, Zoom chats capture the 'sweet spot' of allowing strangers from diverse backgrounds and locations to see one another in a maximally humanizing way in the short-term, without introducing audience effects and long-term concerns of future interactions.

Overview of the current research

The goals of the current research were twofold. First, we tackle the overarching paradox by showing how online video-chat platforms such as Zoom can be used to promote effective CIC among ideologically polarized individuals. This was done by assessing the extent to which individuals had negative and inaccurate affective forecasts about a Zoom-based CIC, in addition to examining the impact these conversations had on their ideological attitudes. Second, we demonstrate how researchers may use similar Zoom-based paradigms to study ideological communication in controlled settings by testing whether the presence of ingroup audiences may induce greater levels of conflict and other negative outcomes. To do this, we recruited partisans with opposing viewpoints and brought them together on Zoom. All participants first had a conversation alone with a partisan who shared their views. After this initial conversation, participants had a CIC conversation with someone holding the opposing view. In half of the CIC conversations, the ingroup member from the first conversation was in the Zoom call silently observing (i.e., *public* condition) and the other half had a conversation with no ingroup member watching

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(i.e., *private* condition). Level of conflict was assessed both by participant self-report and a set of independent coders.

Results

Affective Forecasts

Participants' forecasts about how a conversation with an ideological opponent would go were contrasted to their actual experience of having such a conversation (see *SI Appendix*, Table S1 for the full list of CIC forecasts). The following results are presented independent of either the *public* or *private* condition as no significant differences were found between conditions. On average, participants reported experiencing less conflict during the CIC than they forecasted ($t = 9.85$, $p < 0.001$, Cohen's $d = -0.96$). As shown in **Fig 1.**, participants also reported that the conversations were more enjoyable ($t = 13.44$, $p < 0.001$, Cohen's $d = 1.23$), less stressful ($t = 11.04$, $p < 0.001$, Cohen's $d = -1.01$) and less difficult ($t = 7.94$, $p < 0.001$, Cohen's $d = -0.73$) than they predicted. Additionally, participants tended to like their CIC partner more than expected ($t = 13.48$, $p < 0.001$, Cohen's $d = 1.31$), and found them to be less emotional ($t = 4.06$, $p < 0.001$, Cohen's $d = -0.40$) and more logical ($t = 7.05$, $p < 0.001$, Cohen's $d = 0.69$) in their arguments than anticipated. Several other measures were collected (see *SI Appendix*, Table S2), showing the same general trend of these conversations being a more positive experience than participants originally believed. The gap between expectation and experience is exhibited even by individuals who reported experiencing higher levels of conflict in their CIC, with ratings of the conversation and their partner still being more positive than anticipated (analyses detailed in *SI Appendix*, Table S3).

Issue-based changes

To examine what effect engaging in a CIC had on participants' ideological attitudes, their responses on a series of issue-based measures were compared between pre- and post-conversation. Similar to the affective forecasting results, the following set of findings are presented independent of condition. Participants felt more informed on the issue that was discussed ($t = 4.88$, $p < 0.001$, Cohen's $d = 0.42$), cared more about it ($t = 3.01$, $p = 0.003$, Cohen's $d = 0.27$), and perceived it to be more important ($t = 2.74$, $p = 0.007$, Cohen's $d = 0.25$) after having a CIC. In addition to this increase in interest towards the issue, participants became less confident from pre- to post-study that their attitude on the issue was any more correct than the opposite attitude ($t = 3.69$, $p < 0.001$, Cohen's $d = -0.33$). Additionally, their reported attitudes on the issue became less extreme on average, moving towards the center ($t = 2.49$, $p = 0.014$, Cohen's $d = -0.23$). Participants' feelings toward their attitudinal outgroup also improved from pre- to post-study: participants felt more favorable towards those people with the opposite opinion as them on the issue ($t = 3.41$, $p < 0.001$, Cohen's $d = 0.31$). Full analysis can be found in the *SI Appendix*, Table S4. Together these results highlight a shift towards attitude moderation after engaging in a CIC.

Audience effects

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The role of ingroup audience was analyzed with both self-reported and coder-rated conflict during the CIC as a factor of condition (i.e., *private* vs. *public*). During the CIC, participants in the *public* condition self-reported experiencing more conflict on average compared to participants in the *private* condition ($t = 2.03$, $p = 0.044$, Cohen's $d = 0.37$). Corroborating the self-report data, independent coders also perceived more conflict on average in the *public* condition compared to the *private* condition ($t = 2.03$, $p = 0.032$, Cohen's $d = 0.39$). Participants in the *public* condition also felt the CIC was more difficult than did participants in the *private* condition ($t = 2.44$, $p = 0.016$, Cohen's $d = 0.44$) as did coders ($t = 2.167$, $p = 0.032$, Cohen's $d = 0.39$). Coders also perceived more stress ($t = 3.40$, $p < 0.001$, Cohen's $d = 0.62$), and less respect ($t = 2.55$, $p = 0.012$, Cohen's $d = -0.46$) in the *public* condition. More detailed analysis of condition differences can be found in the *SI Appendix*, Table S5.

As shown in **Fig. 2**, when participants spoke *privately* in their CIC, they liked this conversation partner just as much as their ideological ingroup member from the initial conversation ($t = 0.50$, $p = 0.62$, Cohen's $d = -0.07$). However, when the ideological ingroup member was silently observing the second conversation (i.e., *public*), this led to significant drop in liking for the CIC conversation partner ($t = 3.26$, $p = 0.002$, Cohen's $d = -0.41$). The full interaction between condition and conversation partner was also significant ($F = 4.04$, $p = 0.047$; full analysis in *SI Appendix*, Table S6). Though we did not have coders rate the initial conversation with the ideological ingroup member, the coders did perceive a significant difference for partner liking in the CIC ($t = 3.49$, $p < 0.001$, Cohen's $d = -0.63$), such that in the *public* condition coders perceived participants liking the conversation partner less than those in the *private* condition.

Discussion

Overall, the results appear promising for the potential of video-chat paradigms to facilitate effective CIC, both for participants and for researchers. Perhaps the most consequential results involved affective forecasting, as participants largely overestimated the negative affect that they would feel during a CIC. Participants found that the CIC experience was more enjoyable and less stressful than they had anticipated, with essentially only half as much conflict as predicted. Participants also found that the other side tended to be more logical and less emotional than expected. Furthermore, participants found that they liked their conversation partners as individuals, despite having negative opinions about them prior to the experiment. In fact, many participants wrote about how misinformed their initial assumptions about a CIC partner were. One participant in particular summed up what many said throughout the comments:

The person from the second conversation was not who I was expecting. I pictured someone more stereotypically conservative, bigoted, and likely to recite propagandized arguments founded in emotion/fear/religion. Admittedly, I prejudged the participant before I met them. I was pleasantly surprised to meet someone much different, whose reasons for opposition were intelligent and founded in logic. The conversation did not convince me to change my opinion on the issue, but it did open me up to another perspective.

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These inaccurate forecasts demonstrate the reality that many people have misconceptions about their ideological opponents, highlighting the so-called 'perception gap'. Furthermore, it may be that these initially negative perceptions contribute to avoidance, creating barriers to engaging in CIC (19–21), and ultimately preventing these misperceptions from ever being corrected. Although future studies are needed to investigate the role these misperceptions play in discouraging CIC, one participant's comment after opting out of the study prior to the conversation lends support for this possibility:

I am not sure that I can trust [the person I would be talking to]… I don't know if they will try to do something psychotic if they don't like what I said. …recently people are not acting rationally and are attacking people just because they don't completely agree with them.

Future work on how to encourage CICs may benefit from seeking to reduce people's initially negative perceptions of such interactions. Indeed, one of the best ways to encourage more CICs may be to raise public awareness about the misperceptions that we have about them.

An encouraging result for researchers seeking to reduce ideological polarization is that in many cases, simply engaging in a CIC led to attitude moderation and more favorable dispositions towards ideological opponents. Neither of these results were specific to either the *public* or *private* condition, so it seems that just having a conversation with someone with different views was enough to inject nuance into people's ideological views. Furthermore, like previous research that has looked at affect post-CIC (50), participants felt more informed about the issue and more positive about similar types of communication in the future.

Similar to previous research (46) showing that online audiences can lead to more antagonistic behaviors, the current research found that having a silent ingroup audience present in a face-to-face CIC led to more conflict. Two possible mediating factors may help explain why the presence of an ingroup audience leads to more conflict. The first may be that in the presence of an ingroup audience participants felt more emboldened to speak up about their beliefs which generated more conflict with their cross-ideological partner. One participant's comment exemplifies this, "Having the other two folks watching was really nerve-wracking, but occasionally I'd see my fellow [partner] nod [along] and it made me feel reassured." The second possible mediating factor for more conflict in the *public* condition is that participants felt more pressure to defend their attitude, or wanted to avoid looking disingenuous, when someone from their ingroup, with whom they had already spoken, was present. This would explain why participants in the *public* condition felt the CIC was more difficult than those in the *private* condition.

The success of the current paradigm paves the way for Zoom-based paradigms to become a staple for researchers studying CIC. The face-to-face nature of conversations avoids the pitfalls of traditional internet-based conversations (5, 37), but the virtual aspect may make participants feel more comfortable due to greater anonymity than would be possible in-person, preventing conversations from feeling artificial or forced. Of course, future work is needed to investigate the full mechanisms behind how Zoom CIC differs from online or in-person CIC. Nonetheless, the current study has found great success both using Zoom to facilitate effective CIC, and to ask experimental questions about the factors that influence

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Like any research that requires voluntary participation, the current study may be subject to the problem of self-selection. Many participants chose not to continue once they found out the study entailed talking to another participant of the opposite attitude face-to-face. As such, the participants that did complete the study may only represent a subset of individuals who are brave enough to take part in a face-to-face CIC, or who just enjoy a lively debate. Future research would benefit from looking into how these self-selected participants are similar and different to the larger population of partisans, perhaps providing insight into how participation in CIC might be encouraged.

Another limitation of the study is the fact that all participants had a conversation with an ingroup member. This conversation was used to create a sense of ingroup for the *public* condition and was included in the *private* condition for control purposes. The conversation with an ingroup member always came first in the current study, so it may have acted as a form of practice, allowing people to revisit their beliefs before talking to an opponent. This could have prepared people to talk about their attitudes in the CIC, changing how it might have gone if this first conversation were not present. For instance, a participant might feel emboldened to defend their opinion by the first conversation, leading to more confrontation in the CIC. Alternatively, having a positive interaction with an ingroup member first may have made people more agreeable when talking to their opponent afterwards. Pilot work in our lab without the first conversation tended to produce CIC in which both participants acted as if their own position was much more in the ideological middle than it truly was. This yielded pleasant, but artificial conversations in which little meaningful dialogue or attitude change occurred. Future work is needed to understand how a pre-cursor conversation, or lack thereof, can affect people's mood or ability to speak about an attitude during a CIC.

Conclusion

Rather than treat online ideological interactions as a lost cause, a better solution may be to embrace ever-improving technology and find new ways to have positive interactions. With the increased adoption of online tools such as Zoom, it is possible to break people out of their ideological bubbles to foster more productive CICs. By recruiting individuals from across the United States we were able to avoid the geographical divide, humanize ideological opponents to each other, and generate effective CIC in the lab. We hope that by highlighting the inaccuracy of negative forecasts surrounding CIC we might better foster more engagement and break down the misconceptions that pervade discussions of ideology. Similar Zoom paradigms may be a promising tool for researchers looking to develop interventions for polarization. Combatting polarization requires specific goals at every level in society. At the interpersonal level, increasing participation in CIC may be one of our most effective tools to mitigate antipathy directed at outgroups and combat the growing divide. In a moment in history when many people feel like the only sensible thing to do is to 'tune out' the other side, being willing to 'log in' and get face-to-face may be our best hope to really understand each other.

Materials And Methods

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The study was approved by the institutional review board of the University of California, Los Angeles. Due to the online nature of the study a consent form was presented before the pre-screener, pre-study survey, and Zoom conversations. Participants were U. S. residents that consisted of an ethnically diverse sample (for more detailed demographics see *SI Appendix*, Table S1). Primary analysis included a total of 122 participants, 59 male, 59 female, 4 non-binary aged 18−40 (M_{age} = 30.36, *SD* = 5.65).

Candidates for the study were recruited from Amazon's mechanical Turk platform and took a brief attitudinal pre-screener based on five issues (see Table 1) to determine eligibility. Issue-based attitudes were measured on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree) and participants were considered eligible if their attitudes on at least one of the five issues fell between 1−2 (strongly agree/agree) or 6−7 (strongly disagree/disagree). Once eligible, if participants chose to participate the study consisted of three phases: pre-study survey, Zoom conversations, and post-study survey. In the Zoom conversation portion participants first had a conversation with an ideological ingroup member (ingroup conversation) followed by a conversation with an ideological opponent (CIC).

Table 1
Topics discussed during CIC for the experiment

Topics of conversations
1. The father of an unintended pregnancy should have the right to be involved in the decision-making process for an abortion.
2. We shouldn't force people into the categories of male or female, gender is a spectrum.
3. Cities should defund the police to combat systemic discrimination.
4. Colleges should use affirmative action policies, such as considering an applicant's ethnicity, income level, etc., when deciding admissions.
5. Private businesses should have the right to refuse service on the basis of religious exemptions.
Note. Participants had conversations on a single topic that they had indicated feeling strongly about.

The pre-study survey consisted of issue-based measures, conversation-based forecasting measures, and related demographic measures. Issue based attitude was re-assessed on the same scale as the brief pre-screener survey. Other issue-based measures included how much they cared, felt informed, and felt the issue was of importance (1 = not at all to 4 = extremely) as well as how correct they felt their attitude was in comparison to the opposite attitude. To assess feelings toward counter-attitudinal individuals we asked participants to rate how favorably (1 = extremely unfavorable to 7 = extremely favorable) they felt towards those who strongly disagree with their attitude on the issue. A series of affective and behavioral forecasts relating to the forthcoming CIC were used in the pre-study survey. Participants were told, "…you may have a conversation with someone who has the opposite opinion as you on the following issue," and then asked to forecast how the conversation experience would be (i.e., enjoyable, stressful, difficult), what

they thought the other person would be like (i.e., likable), what the other person's arguments may be like (i.e., emotional, logical) and what percentage of the time they predicted they would be in conflict with their CIC partner. After completion of the conversation phase all issue-based measures were re-assessed on the post-study survey as well as the past tense versions of the pre-study survey forecasts, modified to ask how the actual conversation experience was, for both the CIC and ingroup conversations. For example, the pre-study survey question "I feel this interaction would be very stressful," was changed to, "I felt this interaction was very stressful" for the post-study survey.

Before the start of the conversations, participants were held in a Zoom waiting room and let in one by one. A total of four participants were scheduled for each session. In the event that only two participants with opposing views could be scheduled at the same time, trained confederates were used in place of the ingroup conversation partners (for details on the use of confederates see *SI Appendix*). To protect anonymity participant usernames were changed (i.e., Pro/Con 1 or Pro/Con 2) and were then sent to a breakout room to wait, alone, while the rest of the participants arrived. Regardless of condition, all participants first had a one-on-one conversation with a participant (or confederate) that held the same attitude, which we refer to as the ingroup conversation. Once moved to their respective ingroup breakout rooms, participants were told they held similar attitudes on the issue. Participants had a conversation about the topic for ten minutes. The structure of their conversation was designed to be open with nothing off limits, but participants were told to stay on topic. After the ingroup conversation participants were moved to either the main chat room or a new breakout room to have a CIC.

If randomly assigned to the *public* condition, both ingroup conversation pairs (Pro and Con) were brought together in the main chat room. Before the start of the conversation participants were told that the new pair of participants held the opposing attitude about the issue and that only one person from each side would take part in the second conversation first (i.e., Pro 1 and Con 1) while the other two (i.e., Pro 2 and Con 2) would be muted. The muted participants were told to keep their webcams on, pay close attention to the conversation, but to not interrupt the conversation. The CIC included the same instructions as the ingroup conversation, but fifteen minutes were given instead of ten. After fifteen minutes Pro 1 and Con 1 were stopped and told they would then listen as Pro 2 and Con 2 had a conversation about the issue. Only the first CIC (between Pro 1 and Con 1) from the *public* condition was used for analyses since the *private* condition only had one CIC. In the *private* condition, participants were separated and sent to a new breakout room with an opposing attitude participant for the CIC. For example, Pro 1 and Con 1 would be in breakout room 1, and Pro 2 and Con 2 would be in breakout room 2. Instructions for the conversation were the same as the *public* condition, sans muted participant instructions. For both the *public* condition and *private* condition, after the last conversation had ended, each participant was given a link to and completed the post-study survey.

Declarations

Acknowledgments

Competing Interest Statement: The authors declare no competing interest

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Figures

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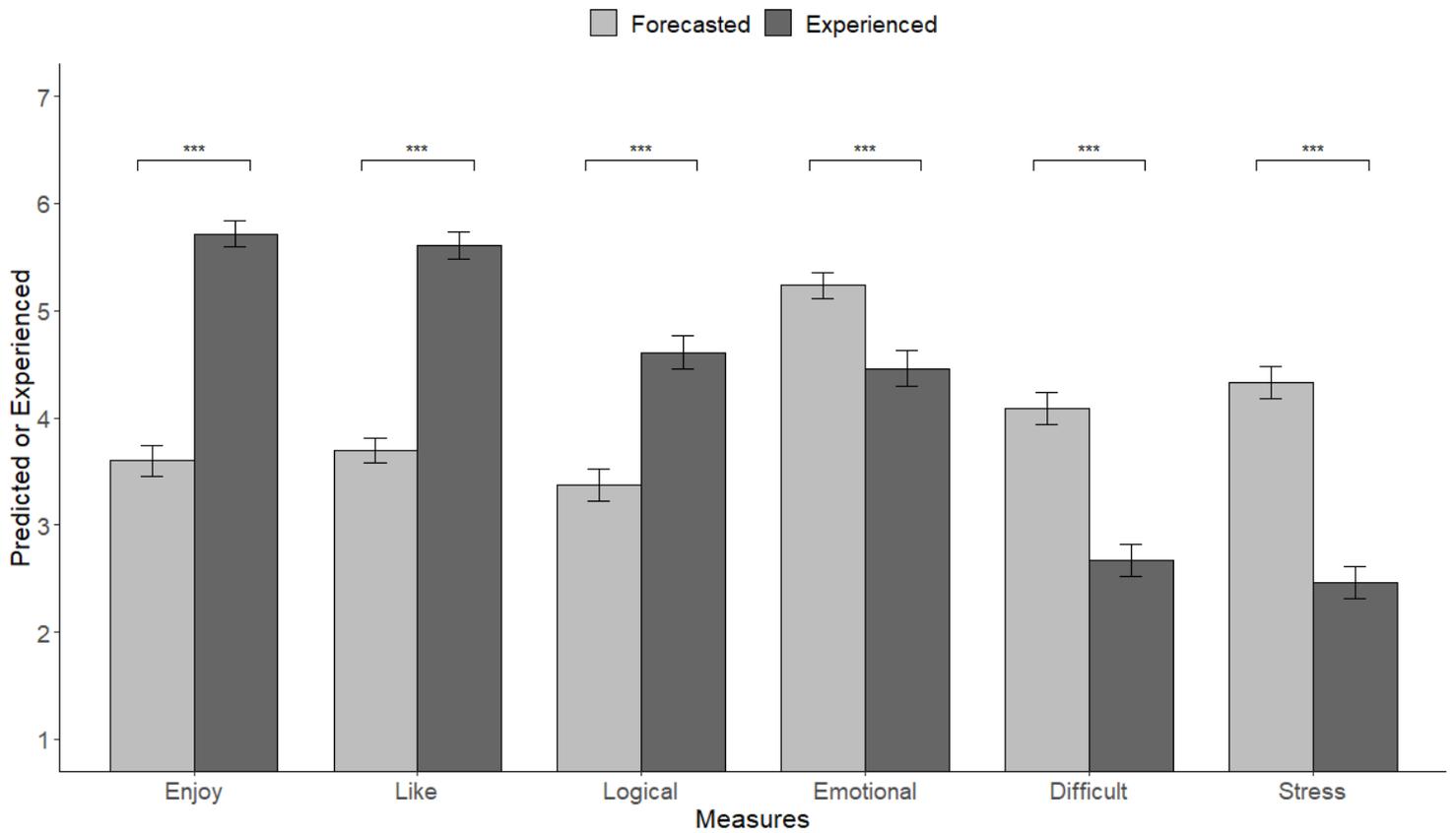
Figure 1

Difference in what participants (n =106) forecasted about the CIC beforehand, compared to what they actually experienced during the CIC. Variables were measured on a 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) scale. For example, "I believe this interaction would be enjoyable" and "This interaction was enjoyable". For exact wording of questions and additional statistics, see SI Appendix, Table S1. ***$p <$ .001
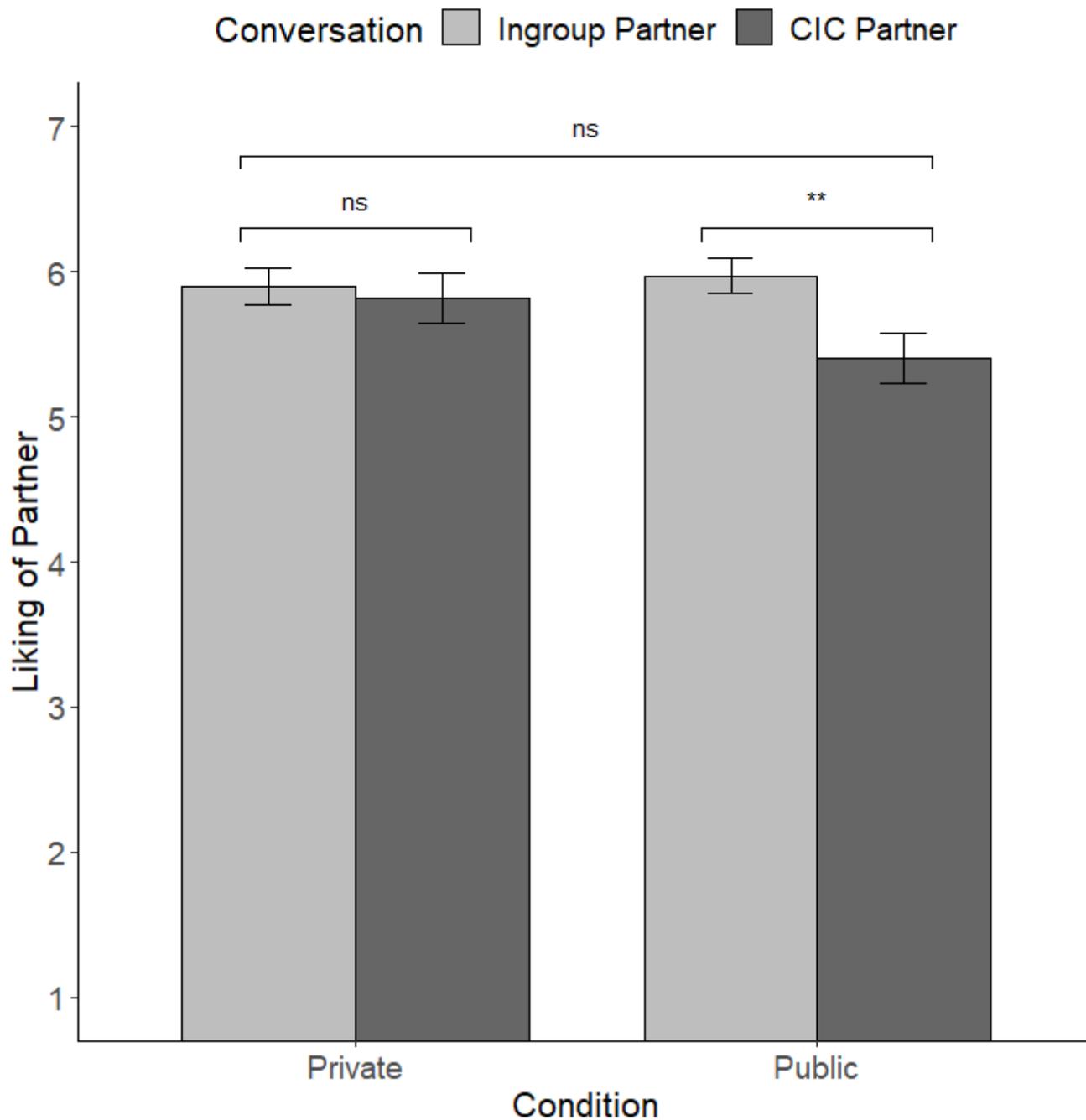
Figure 2

Shown here is liking of conversation partner, reported on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Driving the interaction of condition by partner (n = 122) is the difference in liking of conversation partner for the public condition, such that participants liked their ideological ingroup member from the initial conversation more than their CIC partner. **p < .01.

Supplementary Files

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