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Saying No: The Negative Ramifications From Invitation Declines Are Less Severe Than We Think

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People are frequently invited to join others for fun social activities. They may be invited to lunch, to attend a sporting event, to watch the season finale of a television show, and so forth. Invitees—those who are on the receiving ends of invitations—sometimes accept invitations from inviters—those who extend invitations—but other times, invitees decline. Unfortunately, saying no can be hard, leading invitees to accept invitations when they would rather not. The present work sheds light on one factor that makes it so hard to decline invitations. We demonstrate that invitees overestimate the negative ramifications that arise in the eyes of inviters following an invitation decline. Invitees have exaggerated concerns about how much the decline will anger the inviter, signal that the invitee does not care about the inviter, make the inviter unlikely to offer another invitation in the future, and so forth. We also demonstrate that this asymmetry emerges in part because invitees exaggerate the degree to which inviters focus on the decline itself, as opposed to the thoughts ran through the invitee's head before deciding. Indeed, across multiple studies, we find support for this process through mediation and moderation, while simultaneously finding evidence against multiple alternative accounts. We conclude with a discussion of the contributions and limitations of this research, along with directions for future work.

Keywords: misprediction, perspective taking, introspection, social psychology, judgment and decision making

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People are often invited to participate in fun social activities with others. We may be invited to attend a friend's dinner party, see a movie with a family member, join someone for happy hour, and so forth. Sometimes we accept these invitations, whereas other times, we decline. But saying no can be hard. We worry about the negative ramifications that might arise. Will the person who offered the invitation be angry? Will they think I do not care about them? Will they invite me to do something again down the road? Questions like these run through our head, making it challenging to turn down invitations. In some cases, we even end up accepting invitations that we would rather decline, due to these concerns.[1] Indeed, in a pilot study (see online Supplemental Materials), we found that 77% of respondents had accepted an invitation to a social activity that they did not want to attend because they were concerned about the negative ramifications that would have emerged had they declined.

All that said, in the present work, we find that people tend to exaggerate the negative ramifications that arise from declining invitations to participate in fun social activities. In other words, invitees—those who are invited by someone to do something—overestimate how negatively inviters—those who extend the invitation—react to invitation declines. Drawing on research on introspection (e.g., Pronin, 2008, 2009), perceived perspective taking (e.g., Goldstein et al., 2014; Long & Andrews, 1990), the actor–observer bias (e.g., Jones & Nisbett, 1972; Pronin & Kugler, 2010), and related areas, we find that this misprediction is driven, in part, by invitees overestimating the degree to which inviters focus on the act of the invitee declining the invitation as opposed to the deliberations that went through the invitee's head prior to declining.

This research makes three main contributions. First, we study a behavior that is quite common in everyday life but has received limited attention by social psychologists: declining invitations to engage in fun social activities. Second, we document a new phenomenon that emerges in this context, demonstrating that invitees overestimate the negative ramifications of declining invitations. Shedding light on invitees' misguided concerns is important, as these worries can lead them to accept invitations when they would rather spend their time doing something else (as the aforementioned pilot demonstrates). In documenting this asymmetry, we add to the growing literature on self-other misprediction in the context of social behaviors (e.g., Kumar & Epley, 2018; Liu et al., 2023), particularly the domain involving requesters and requestees (e.g., Bohns, 2016). Much of the literature involving

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[1] Indeed, this is how the idea for this research came about.

requesters and requestees explores the (in)accuracy of requesters' predictions about requestees. By contrast, our work studies the (in)accuracy of requestees' predictions regarding requesters. Third, our research sheds light on one of the underlying psychological processes that cause invitees to overestimate the negative ramifications of invitation declines: Invitees exaggerate the extent to which inviters concentrate on the act of the invitee turning down the invitation (i.e., the invitee's behavior) as opposed to the thoughts that ran through the invitee's head before doing so. In other words, we show that invitees overestimate how much inviters focus on invitees declining them as opposed to the invitee's thoughts that preceded the decline. In doing so, we add to the limited body of work on perceived perspective taking (i.e., believing that another person has taken your perspective; e.g., Goldstein et al., 2014; Long & Andrews, 1990). To the best of our knowledge, our studies are the first to demonstrate this asymmetry in how much people believe others focus on their internal thoughts, as opposed to their external behaviors, relative to what others actually concentrate on.

Telling Others "No"

In our everyday lives, we often must tell others "no." When we are asked to perform a favor, we may not be able to for a variety of reasons, leaving us to decline the request (Lu et al., 2023). When we are faced with money or time shortages, we may regrettably have to turn invitations from others down (Donnelly et al., 2021). When faced with unrequited romantic advances, we must find it within ourselves to refuse the initiator, as awkward and uncomfortable as it may be (Bohns & DeVincent, 2019). When asked to complete a task at work that will not be valued or counted in our performance evaluations, we need to turn down our superiors, at least some of the time (Babcock et al., 2017). The list of examples is endless.

Situations like these involve two parties, requesters and requestees. The requester makes some ask, request, or advance, while the requestee either accepts or declines. Prior research on these types of circumstances has largely focused on the (in)accuracy of requesters' predictions regarding requestees' thoughts, feelings, and actions. For example, much research has shown that requesters generally underestimate a requestee's likelihood of complying with a request (Bohns, 2016), ranging from simple requests, such as completing a brief survey or allowing the requester to borrow a cell phone (Flynn & Lake, 2008), to requests that are questionable from a moral standpoint, such as vandalizing a library book or lying on a signed document (Bohns et al., 2014), to large requests, such as completing a long and elaborate questionnaire (Flynn & Lake, 2008). This same, lengthy, line of research demonstrates that requesters' tendency to underestimate compliance likelihood occurs largely because requesters underestimate how uncomfortable requestees feel declining requests (Bohns, 2016).

While much research has explored the (in)accuracy of requesters' predictions about requestees, there is surprisingly little research on the (in)accuracy of requestees' predictions concerning requesters. A couple of exceptions include Bohns and Flynn (2010), who demonstrated that requestees underestimate how uncomfortable requesters feel when they ask for help, and Lu et al. (2023), who showed that requestees overestimate the negative consequences they will face from requesters whenever they turn down a favor request. In the present work, we build on this nascent line of research by exploring situations in which invitees—a type of requestee—decline invitations from inviters—a kind of requester—to participate in everyday, fun social activities, such as dinners, outings, get-togethers, and the like.[2] We examine whether invitees are accurate in their assessments regarding the negative ramifications that arise in the eyes of inviters following invitation declines (e.g., how angry the inviter will be, how much the inviter will think the invitee does not care about them, how unlikely the inviter will be to invite the invitee to another event in the future) in which invitees choose to decline as opposed to have to decline because of a preexisting commitment or insufficient resources.

Our work builds on the limited literature studying invitation declines to fun social activities, namely the work of Donnelly et al. (2021). This prior work found that when an invitee cites time scarcity (i.e., a lack of time), as opposed to financial scarcity (i.e., a lack of money), as the reason they cannot attend a social activity, the inviter feels less close to the invitee following the decline. Whereas this prior research focused on inviters' responses to invitees' reasons for declining an invitation, in the present work, we examine both the inviter's and the invitee's perspective in every study and hold the reason (the invitee decides they just want to stay home[3]) constant. We therefore offer a new contribution.

Before continuing, it is worth noting how our work connects to, yet differs from, the aforementioned Lu et al. (2023) research. This prior research shows that people who reject requests to perform favors overestimate the negative consequences that emerge from doing so because they are motivated to avoid such negative consequences. While this research has a similar flavor as the present work, our research is unique for (at least) two reasons. First, we explore social invitations to fun activities, whereas this prior research explored requests to perform unenjoyable activities (i.e., favors). Second, the respective psychological mechanisms at the heart of the present work and this prior research are completely different, as will become evident. Indeed, in one of our studies (Study 3), we provide evidence suggesting that the motivational account documented in this prior work is not the primary driver of our findings.

Thoughts Versus Actions

An invitee declining an inviter's invitation involves a two-stage process. First, there are the internal thoughts and deliberations that occur inside of the invitee's head as they consider whether to accept or decline the invitation. Second, there is the act of the invitee communicating to the inviter that they are declining the invitation. This same conceptualization applies to nearly all human behaviors: there are thoughts, and there are actions.

We suggest that invitees' predictions regarding the negative ramifications that arise in the eyes of an inviter following an invitation decline are guided, in part, by the degree to which the invitee thinks the inviter focused on the act of the invitee declining

[2] We focus on everyday fun activities, as opposed to infrequent, large-scale fun events (e.g., weddings, baby showers). Though, see the General Discussion section.

[3] A second pilot study (see online Supplemental Materials) confirmed that this is a reason people often reference when they decline invitations to fun social activities. Participants were asked (in random order) whether they had ever: (a) invited someone to a social activity but were turned down because the other person indicated that they just wanted to stay home, and (b) been invited by someone to a social activity but turned them down and indicated that they just wanted to stay home. For the former, 69% of participants answered in the affirmative, and for the latter, 75% did.

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as opposed to the thoughts that went through the invitee's head. Likewise, we posit that the negative feelings and ramifications that arise in the eyes of the inviter following an invitation decline are in part a function of how much they focus on the act of the decline versus the deliberation that went on inside of the invitee's head. Specifically, the greater the (anticipated or actual) focus on the act of the decline (vs. the invitee's internal thoughts), the more severe the (anticipated or actual) negative ramifications. This is because the act of declining involves delivering a relatively harsh message. Telling someone no, regardless of how friendly one tries to put it, is far from nice. This behavior entails the cold, hard truth that the invitee is declining the invitation. By contrast, deliberating, considering the possibility of accepting the invitation, and so forth take place because the invitee, indeed, has some desire to attend and wishes to please the inviter (e.g., Borresen, 2021) and show them they are important (e.g., Nguyen & Belk, 2012). It is the much warmer and friendlier step in the two-stage process. Thus, it follows that the greater the (expected or actual) focus on the act of the invitee declining (vs. the invitee's internal deliberations), the more severe the (expected or actual) negative ramifications.

Critically, we also propose that invitees err by overestimating the degree to which inviters focus on the act of the decline (vs. the invitee's internal thoughts). When it comes to people's own thoughts and actions, they are quite adept at introspection. It is natural for them to look internally and consider their own deliberations, intentions, considerations, motivations, and so forth (Pronin, 2008, 2009; Pronin & Kugler, 2010). Conversely, due in part to the limitations of the human visual system, it is challenging (and in some cases impossible) for people to view their own actions and behaviors (Pronin, 2008). By contrast, when it comes to the thoughts and actions of others, the opposite transpires: People are relatively less capable of considering others' thoughts (which are not easily accessible for them) but relatively more capable of observing their actions (which are easy for them to see; Pronin, 2008).

Recent research has expanded our understanding of these ideas by shedding light on the notion of perceived perspective taking (Goldstein et al., 2014), that is, believing that others have attempted to take your perspective and consider your thoughts, as opposed to exclusively considered your actions. Consistent with this work, we suggest that when invitees decline an invitation, they gauge the extent to which the inviter will be focused on the act of the invitee declining versus the thoughts that ran through the invitee's head prior to declining. There are a few reasons to suspect that invitees may overestimate the extent to which inviters focus on the act of the decline versus the invitee's internal thoughts. First, at a broader level, a long line of research spanning multiple domains shows that people generally struggle to accurately assess the mental processes and mindsets of others (e.g., Kardas et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2023; L. Ross et al., 1977). Second, consistent with the research discussed in the preceding paragraph (Pronin, 2008), invitees may anticipate that it will be quite easy for inviters to see their action (i.e., them declining the invitation), leading them to expect inviters to focus more on that action than inviters do. Third, prior research on perceived perspective taking shows that people generally think that others are poor at perspective taking (Goldstein et al., 2014). In other words, people think that others focus relatively little on another individual's thoughts as opposed to their behaviors. Thus, invitees may underestimate how much inviters consider the deliberations that ran through the invitee's head versus how much inviters focus on the act of the invitee declining. Last, when someone, such as an inviter, evaluates the actions that others perform toward them, they tend to focus more than the actor on warmth-related considerations (Givi et al., 2021; Kumar & Epley, 2018)—in this case, the thoughts and deliberations that ran through the invitee's head as they considered attending (e.g., Borresen, 2021). Thus, this finding suggests that inviters will likely focus relatively more on the thoughts that went through the invitee's head (vs. the act of the decline) compared to what invitees anticipate. In sum, there are multiple reasons to posit that people generally overestimate the extent to which others focus on individuals' actions versus thoughts.

The Present Research

To recap, we suggest that invitees overestimate the negative ramifications that arise in the eyes of inviters following an invitation decline. We also posit that this occurs, in part, because invitees exaggerate the degree to which inviters focus on the act of the invitee declining the invitation as opposed to the thoughts that passed through the invitee's head before declining. For tractability purposes, we will refer to these hypotheses as Hypotheses 1 and 2, respectively.

Transparency and Openness

In what follows, we present five studies (including two preregistered studies) that tested Hypotheses 1 and 2. In each study, we aimed for a (preexclusion) sample size of at least 100 participants per condition, making our sample sizes comparable to many of those used in prior, related studies (e.g., Kumar & Epley, 2018; Liu et al., 2023; Lu et al., 2023). All target sample sizes were chosen before data collection began. See Table 1 for our sensitivity power analyses. In Studies 1 and 3–5, we excluded participants who failed the attention check that we included at the end of the study (a straightforward, multiple-choice question about what the study involved) as well as those whose Internet Protocol addresses repeated in the data file (suggesting that the same participant completed the study

Table 1
Sensitivity Power Analyses

Study	Sensitivity power analyses
Study 1	In Study 1, each analysis (for immediate and delayed ramifications) had 80% power to detect an effect size of $f = .14$.
Study 2	In Study 2, the two analyses had 80% power to detect an effect size of $d_z = .32$ and .34, respectively (assuming a two-tailed test).
Study 3	In Study 3, each initial analysis (for overall differences in immediate and delayed ramifications across conditions) had 80% power to detect an effect size of $f = .13$.
Study 4	In Study 4, each analysis (for immediate and delayed ramifications, along with the difference score) had 80% power to detect an effect size of $f = .12$.
Study 5	In Study 5, the initial analysis for the interaction when it came to differences in immediate ramifications had 80% power to detect an effect size of $f = .05$, while the initial analysis for the interaction when it came to differences in delayed ramifications had 80% power to detect an effect size of $f = .06$.

Note. All power analyses assumed an α significance criterion of .05.

multiple times). Study 2 (a behavioral study) employed a unique and somewhat complex design, so we describe its exclusion protocol in its method section. Our results do not change in a conceptually meaningful way if we ignore these exclusion rules. All studies report all independent and dependent measures. Institutional review board approval from the first author's institution was obtained for all studies. All data and materials are available at https://osf.io/fwygj/?view_only=418663f460ba4f0b9a9709ebc93924fc.

Study 1

Study 1 served as an initial test of Hypothesis 1 (invitees overestimate the negative ramifications of declining an invitation). Some participants imagined turning down an invitation from a friend to visit a museum exhibit and then indicated the negative ramifications that would emerge in the eyes of the friend. Other participants imagined a friend turned down their own invitation to visit a museum exhibit and then indicated the negative ramifications that would arise from their own viewpoint. In this study and many of the others, we measured a wide range of negative ramifications and manipulated whether or not the invitee was the only person invited by the inviter. We included this manipulation for the sake of generalizability and did not expect that it would influence the results very much (there was no theoretical basis to assume it would). Last, in this study, prior to the invitee declining the invitation, it was made clear to participants that the inviter would still be able to undertake the activity (i.e., visit the museum) with another person or other people in the event the invitee declined the invitation. This allowed us to eliminate the alternative explanation that invitees overestimate the negative ramifications of declining invitations because they overestimate how much inviters desire to undertake a particular activity.

Method

A total of 406 Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) participants (382 after exclusions: 47% female; $M_{age} = 41.3$, $SD_{age} = 11.9$) completed the study. The study employed a 2 (role: *invitee* vs. *inviter*) × 2 (number of invitees: *one* vs. *multiple*) between-subjects design.

Participants in the *invitee* conditions read a vignette in which their friend, Alex, sent them a text inviting them to go see an exhibit at a local museum that weekend. In the *number of invitees—one* condition, the participant was the only person Alex invited, but the vignette specified that some of Alex's other friends would be able to go with them to the exhibit if the participant declined the invitation. In the *number of invitees—multiple* condition, Alex invited multiple other mutual friends in the text, and some of them agreed to go, so Alex would still be able to go to the exhibit with these friends if the participant declined the invitation. The vignette then had participants imagine that they decided to decline Alex's invitation and texted Alex explaining that they just wanted to stay home and relax that weekend.

Next, these participants responded to six, two-item measures[4] (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very*) assessing the negative ramifications that would arise from declining Alex's invitation: *Anger* (How angry would Alex be from you declining their invitation? How mad would Alex be from you declining their invitation?), *Lack of Care About Inviter* (How much would you declining Alex's invitation suggest to Alex that you do not care about them? How much would you declining Alex's invitation suggest to Alex that you do not see them as a priority?), *Disappointment* (How disappointed would Alex be from you declining their invitation? How sad would Alex be from you declining their invitation?), *Relationship Harm* (How much would you declining Alex's invitation harm the relationship between the two of you? How much would you declining Alex's invitation hurt the relationship between the two of you?), *Likelihood of Inviter Not Offering Future Invitations* (reverse-coded: How likely would Alex be to invite you to do something in the future, after you declined their invitation? How probable would Alex be to invite you to do something in the future, after you declined their invitation?), and *Likelihood of Inviter Not Accepting Future Invitations* (reverse-coded: How likely would Alex be to accept an invitation from you to do something in the future, after you declined their invitation? How probable would Alex be to accept an invitation from you to do something in the future, after you declined their invitation?). These constructs were adapted from related literature demonstrating the important roles that they play in relationships (e.g., Fehr et al., 1999; Lu et al., 2023; Ruth et al., 1999) and/or generated by the authors.

Participants in the two *inviter* conditions completed the study in the same manner, only from the opposite perspective. That is, they first read a vignette in which they invited Alex (either independently or as part of a group) to an exhibit but were declined. Next, they responded to six, two-item measures regarding negative ramifications (e.g., How angry would you be from Alex declining your invitation?).

After the main portion of the study, participants completed an attention check and reported their age and gender. These same components were included in Studies 3–5 and will not be discussed again in those studies.

Results

A factor analysis (see online Supplemental Materials for details) on the six measures revealed that four—Anger, Lack of Care About Inviter, Disappointment, and Relationship Harm—loaded onto one factor involving *Immediate Negative Ramifications*, while two—Likelihood of Inviter Not Offering Future Invitations and Likelihood of Inviter Not Accepting Future Invitations—loaded onto another factor involving *Delayed Negative Ramifications*. We thus created a single Immediate Negative Ramifications variable by averaging the items for Anger, Lack of Care About Inviter, Disappointment, and Relationship Harm, and we created a single Delayed Negative Ramifications variable by averaging the items for Likelihood of Inviter Not Offering Future Invitations and Likelihood of Inviter Not Accepting Future Invitations. We created the same two variables in Studies 3–5, given that factor analyses in those studies revealed the same two factors. In Study 2, we created a single variable for Immediate Negative Ramifications, given that it only asked about Anger, Lack of Care About Inviter, and Disappointment and returned a single factor solution.

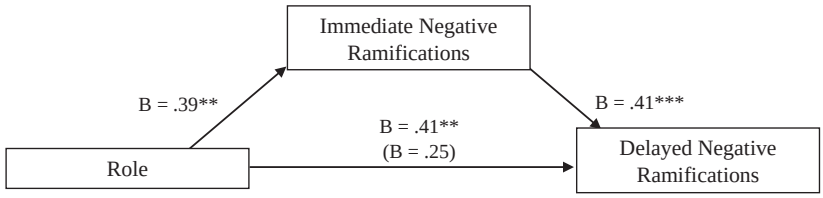
Due to the similarity of the results across the number of invitees manipulation (in this study and all other studies that used this manipulation; see online Supplemental Materials), we collapsed across this manipulation in subsequent analyses. We also did the same in the other studies that incorporated this manipulation (Studies 3 and 4).

Consistent with our theorizing, invitees tended to overestimate the negative ramifications of the invitation decline (see online

[4] In this and every other study, all the two-item measures showed high levels of reliability in every condition (all $rs > .77$, all $ps < .001$).

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Figure 1
Study 1 Mediation Analysis



Note. Role coded as: 1 = *Invitee*, 0 = *Inviter*. Values indicate unstandardized regression coefficients. Values in parentheses indicate results when role and Immediate Negative Ramifications are included in the regression.
** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Supplemental Table 3). This emerged for both Immediate Negative Ramifications, $M_{\text{Invitee}} = 2.91$, $SD_{\text{Invitee}} = 1.30$ versus $M_{\text{Inviter}} = 2.52$, $SD_{\text{Inviter}} = 1.29$; $F(1, 380) = 8.79$, $p = .003$, $\eta_p^2 = .023$, 95% CI [.13, .65], and Delayed Negative Ramifications, $M_{\text{Invitee}} = 3.35$, $SD_{\text{Invitee}} = 1.33$ versus $M_{\text{Inviter}} = 2.94$, $SD_{\text{Inviter}} = 1.43$; $F(1, 380) = 8.45$, $p = .004$, $\eta_p^2 = .022$, 95% CI [.13, .69]. Because perceptions of Immediate Negative Ramifications presumably inform perceptions of subsequent Delayed Negative Ramifications, we next conducted a mediation analysis using PROCESS Model 4 (Hayes, 2017). Role served as the independent variable, Immediate Negative Ramifications served as the mediator, and Delayed Negative Ramifications served as the dependent variable. Critically, the 95% confidence interval of the indirect effect was significant (indirect effect = .16, 95% CI [.05, .28]; the full results are displayed in Figure 1).

Discussion

This study provides initial support for Hypothesis 1. Invitees overestimated the negative ramifications that emerged following an invitation decline. In our next study, we again tested this hypothesis, only with real invitations and declines.

Study 2

Study 2 served to again test Hypothesis 1, only this time with real invitations and declines. While hypothetical studies (like Study 1 and the later studies) certainly have value, it is important to test Hypothesis 1 with a study involving real invitations and declines because people's anticipated reactions in hypothetical studies do not always match their true reactions (e.g., Kawakami et al., 2009; Pronin et al., 2008). Importantly, this has been documented in the context of social rejection (Joel et al., 2014). Thus, by testing Hypothesis 1 with real invitations and declines, we can improve the ecological and external validity of our work.

Method

A total of 208 CloudResearch/MTurk participants (160 after exclusions: 51% female; $M_{\text{age}} = 35.7$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 10.4$) completed the study, which was preregistered (https://aspredicted.org/4B6_7M2). Participants were recruited to participate in a "Couples Survey" and were informed they would need to complete the survey with their significant other.

Following methods used in prior research (Givi & Galak, 2017), the couple began by uploading a picture of the two of them together with the current time displayed in some fashion (e.g., on a cell phone). This verified that both members of the couple were present to start the study.

Participants then listed their first names. Next, one member of the couple (chosen at random) was asked to stay and complete part of the study. Unbeknownst to them, they were assigned to the *inviter* condition (and will be referred to as inviters). By contrast, the other member of the couple was asked to leave the room for a few moments. Unbeknownst to them, they were assigned to the *invitee* condition (and will be referred to as invitees). The inviter was instructed to continue only if the invitee was out of the room.

Next, inviters were asked to think of a social activity that they would like to do with their partner (the invitee) in the next 1–2 weeks (e.g., see a movie, eat at a restaurant, go hiking at a park, attend a festival coming to town) and to write an invitation to their partner asking them if they would like to do the activity with them.

After the inviter wrote the invitation, they were instructed to leave the room and to tell their partner (the invitee) to return (without communicating anything about the study). The invitee was then instructed to continue only if their partner was out of the room. Next, invitees read that their partner (the inviter) had been instructed to write them an invitation to do a social activity. The invitee then saw the invitation their partner had written. At that point, invitees were instructed to write a message back to their partner declining the invitation, with their reason being something along the lines of "I just want to stay home and relax." Invitees then read that in a few moments, they would leave the room and their partner would return. At that point, their partner would see their message declining the invitation (we reminded them that they would not be allowed to tell their partner they were instructed to decline the invitation). Invitees then predicted the negative ramifications of the decline by responding to Anger, Lack of Care About Inviter, and Disappointment measures, as in Study 1 (i.e., Immediate Negative Ramifications).[5]

[5] We did not measure Delayed Ramifications mainly because, in this study, we were measuring actual responses to real invitations and declines, posing a practicality issue. Inviters would have the opportunity to tell invitees that they were instructed to decline the invitation before the Delayed Ramifications could actually emerge. That is, the invitee could tell the inviter immediately following the study that they were instructed to decline the invitation, but Delayed Ramifications could not even occur until later on. We did not measure Relationship Harm for the same reason.

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After the invitee responded to the measures, they were instructed to leave the room and to tell their partner (the inviter) to return (without communicating anything about the study). The inviter was instructed to continue only if their partner was out of the room. Next, inviters read that their partner was shown the invitation they wrote and decided to decline the invitation. They then saw the message their partner wrote declining the invitation and indicated their responses to the Anger, Lack of Care About Inviter, and Disappointment measures.

Next, inviters were told to have their partner return to the room. The couple was then given a debrief and told that the invitee was instructed to decline the invitation. Next, following methods used in prior research (Givi & Galak, 2017), the couple uploaded a second picture of the two of them with the current time displayed in some fashion. This verified that both members of the couple were present after the main portion of the study.

To conclude the study, participants reported their age, gender (89% heterosexual couples, 8% homosexual couples, 4% of couples had at least one member not report gender), relationship status (24% dating, 6% engaged, 69% married, 1% other), and relationship length (4% less than 6 months, 1% 6–12 months, 21% 1–5 years, 74% more than 5 years). They also indicated whether they had actually followed all the instructions (e.g., to leave the room, to not communicate). They were encouraged to answer truthfully as they would be compensated regardless of their answer. Finally, they provided any comments they might have had.

In our preregistration, we preregistered three exclusion criteria: (a) The couple did not correctly upload two photographs of the two of them ($n = 22$ pairs of participants). (b) They indicated they did not follow the instructions ($n = 1$ pair). (c) They wrote nonsense answers for either the invitation or the decline ($n = 12$ pairs). That being said, upon cleaning the data, we realized there were two other valid exclusion criteria that, in hindsight, we wish we had preregistered: (d) The pair of participants was not a couple (e.g., a parent and child [$n = 5$ pairs]) and (e) The pair of participants completed the study more than once (e.g., identified through the photographs, Internet Protocol addresses, listed names, or some other manner [$n = 12$ pairs]). The latter two exclusion criteria result in the exclusion of only 11 more couples. In the interest of full disclosure, we report the results below following both our preregistered exclusion protocol and with the added two exclusion criteria.

Results

As in Study 1, invitees tended to overestimate the immediate ramifications of the invitation decline (see online Supplemental Table 4). This emerged regardless of whether we followed our preregistered exclusion protocol, $M_{\text{Invitee}} = 3.55$, $SD_{\text{Invitee}} = 1.57$ versus $M_{\text{Inviter}} = 2.91$, $SD_{\text{Inviter}} = 1.64$; $t(79) = 3.38$, $p = .001$, $d = .38$, 95% CI [.26, 1.01], or included the two additional exclusion criteria, $M_{\text{Invitee}} = 3.49$, $SD_{\text{Invitee}} = 1.52$ versus $M_{\text{Inviter}} = 2.93$, $SD_{\text{Inviter}} = 1.67$; $t(68) = 2.69$, $p = .009$, $d = .32$, 95% CI [.15, .98].

Discussion

This study provides more support for Hypothesis 1. In a context involving real invitations and declines, invitees once again overestimated the negative ramifications that would emerge following an invitation decline. Moreover, note that the pattern of results did not change much as a function of relationship status nor relationship length (see online Supplemental Materials). It is notable that our typical pattern of results emerges for couples in addition to friends (like in Study 1). Some may find this surprising. Romantic couples presumably possess lots of information about each other, are quite close with each other, and invite each other to participate in activities frequently. Thus, one might think that invitees in these cases would be relatively unconcerned with the negative ramifications of declining invitations or be capable of accurately predicting them. At the same time, however, note that our proposed mechanistic account (invitees erring when forecasting how much inviters focus on the act of the decline vs. the invitee's deliberations) applies to romantic couples, so the results of Study 2 are consistent with our theorizing. In our next study, we began to test various theoretical accounts that could explain why invitees tend to overestimate the negative ramifications of invitation declines.

Study 3

Study 3 served multiple purposes. First, it once again tested Hypothesis 1. Second, it served as initial test of Hypothesis 2 (invitees overestimate the negative ramifications of invitation declines because they exaggerate the degree to which inviters focus on the act of the decline as opposed to the thoughts that went through the invitee's head before declining). Third, it tested multiple alternative explanations.

The study employed two conditions that were qualitatively similar to the inviter and invitee conditions from Study 1, as well as a new "observer" condition in which participants did not take on either role. Instead, participants in the observer condition read the scenario about the invitation decline from the perspective of an outside observer and predicted the negative ramifications that would arise in the eyes of the inviter.[6] Including this condition allowed us to test two alternative accounts and indirectly test our proposed theoretical explanation.

One alternative explanation for why invitees overestimate the negative ramifications of invitation declines involves an inflated sense of importance (e.g., M. Ross & Sicoly, 1979; Sedikides, 1993). According to this account, invitees believe that they would have a notable impact on an inviter's experience and happiness during the social activity, whereas inviters do not see it this way. Invitees think that inviters will be mad, disappointed, and so forth because invitees believe that inviters would expect their own experience during the activity to be severely negatively affected by the invitee's absence. Of note, this account suggests that observers' predictions should mirror inviters' responses more than they reflect invitees' predictions. This is because observers are not involved in the scenario, making it impossible for them to see themselves as influencing the inviter's experience during the activity.

A second alternative explanation is that invitees overestimate the negative ramifications of invitation declines because of motivated reasoning (e.g., Lu et al., 2023). According to this account, invitees are motivated to avoid the negative ramifications that arise following an invitation decline. Invitees do not want their relationships with inviters to suffer, for inviters to be angry with them, and so forth.

[6] Prior research (e.g., Zhang & Epley, 2012) has used similar "observer" conditions, giving us a basis for assuming that participants are able to adopt this type of neutral perspective.

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Thus, they agonize over and exaggerate these ramifications because doing so would increase the likelihood that they accept the invitation and, consequently, avoid the negative ramifications of declining the invitation. Critically, this account also suggests that observers' predictions should mirror inviters' responses more than they parallel invitees' predictions. This is because observers are not involved in the scenario, making it impossible for them to experience the negative ramifications of the invitation decline.

Finally, our proposed account suggests that invitees overestimate the negative ramifications of invitation declines because they exaggerate the degree to which inviters concentrate on the act of the decline rather than the thoughts that went through the invitee's head before deciding. Unlike the accounts discussed in the two preceding paragraphs, this account suggests that observers' predictions should mirror invitees' predictions more than they align with inviters' responses. Overestimating how much others focus on a person's actions relative to their thoughts is something that applies regardless of whether someone is involved with a scenario. In other words, just like invitees, observers should also tend to exaggerate how much inviters focus on the invitee's actions versus thoughts, even though observers are not part of the scenario themselves.

Method

A total of 597 MTurk participants (560 after exclusions: 53% female; $M_{age} = 41.6$, $SD_{age} = 12.6$) completed the study. The study employed a 3 (role: *invitee* vs. *inviter* vs. *observer*) × 2 (number of invitees: *one* vs. *multiple*) between-subjects design.

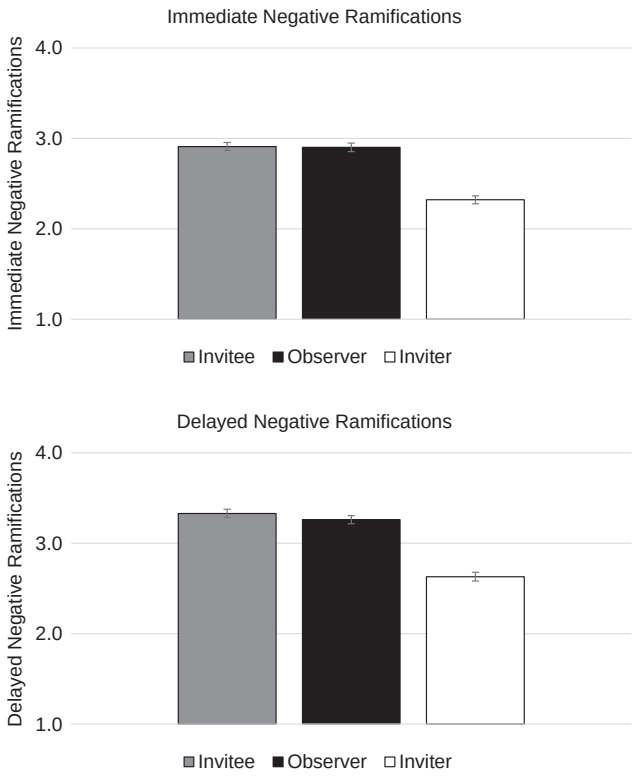
Participants in the *invitee* and *inviter* conditions completed the study in a very similar manner to participants in the corresponding Study 1 conditions such that they first read a vignette in which the invitee declined the inviter's invitation to an event, and then they indicated the negative ramifications of the decline. However, there were two differences from Study 1. First, the event was dinner on Saturday night at a local restaurant where a celebrity chef was cooking. Second, the invitee declined the invitation because they already had a lot going on during the day, Saturday, so they just wanted to spend Saturday night at home.

Participants in the *observer* conditions completed the study in a similar manner, except that the vignette did not have them imagine that they were part of the scenario. Instead, the vignette had them take the perspective of an outside observer and imagine a scenario in which one friend declined an invitation from another. After reading the vignette, they indicated the negative ramifications of the decline (e.g., how angry the inviter would be, how mad the inviter would be).

Results

Both invitees and observers tended to overestimate the negative ramifications of the invitation decline (see online Supplemental Table 5). When it came to Immediate Negative Ramifications, there were differences across conditions, $F(2, 557) = 13.98$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .048$. Both invitees, $M_{Invitee} = 2.91$, $SD_{Invitee} = 1.20$ versus $M_{Inviter} = 2.32$, $SD_{Inviter} = 1.21$; $F(1, 557) = 21.43$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .037$, 95% CI [.34, .84], and observers, $M_{Observer} = 2.90$, $SD_{Observer} = 1.29$ versus $M_{Inviter} = 2.32$, $SD_{Inviter} = 1.21$; $F(1, 557) = 20.54$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .036$, 95% CI [.33, .83] overestimated these ramifications (see Figure 2 top panel). Of note, invitees and observers did not differ in their predictions, $M_{Invitee} = 2.91$, $SD_{Invitee} = 1.20$ versus $M_{Observer} = 2.90$, $SD_{Observer} = 1.29$; $F(1, 557) < .01$, $p = .951$, $\eta_p^2 < .001$, 95% CI [−.24, .26].

Figure 2
Study 3 Results



Note. Error bars represent standard errors of the means.

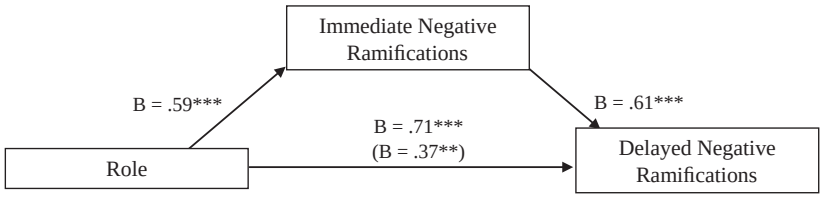
The same was true for Delayed Negative Ramifications. There were differences across conditions, $F(2, 557) = 17.66$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .060$. Both invitees, $M_{Invitee} = 3.33$, $SD_{Invitee} = 1.27$ versus $M_{Inviter} = 2.63$, $SD_{Inviter} = 1.31$; $F(1, 557) = 29.27$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .050$, 95% CI [.45, .96], and observers, $M_{Observer} = 3.26$, $SD_{Observer} = 1.21$ versus $M_{Inviter} = 2.63$, $SD_{Inviter} = 1.31$; $F(1, 557) = 23.42$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .040$, 95% CI [.38, .89], overestimated these ramifications (see Figure 2, bottom panel). Again, invitees and observers did not differ in their predictions, $M_{Invitee} = 3.33$, $SD_{Invitee} = 1.27$ versus $M_{Observer} = 3.26$, $SD_{Observer} = 1.21$; $F(1, 557) = .28$, $p = .596$, $\eta_p^2 = .001$, 95% CI [−.19, .33].

We next conducted a mediation analysis using PROCESS Model 4 (Hayes, 2017). Role served as the independent variable (with *inviter* as the reference category), Immediate Negative Ramifications served as the mediator, and Delayed Negative Ramifications served as the dependent variable. Critically, the 95% confidence interval of the indirect effect was significant for both the invitee versus inviter comparison (indirect effect = .31, 95% CI [.18, .44]) and the observer versus inviter comparison (indirect effect = .30, 95% CI [.17, .44]; the full results are displayed in Figures 3 and 4).[7]

[7] The mediation was not significant for the invitee versus observer comparison (indirect effect < −.001, 95% CI [−.14, .13]).

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Figure 3
Study 3 Mediation Analysis for Invitee Versus Inviter



Note. Role coded as: 1 = *Invitee*, 0 = *Inviter*. Values indicate unstandardized regression coefficients. Values in parentheses indicate results when role and Immediate Negative Ramifications are included in the regression.
** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Discussion

This study provides more support for Hypothesis 1 and initial evidence supporting Hypothesis 2, while simultaneously providing evidence against two alternative accounts. Both invitees and observers overestimated the negative ramifications of an invitation decline, which is consistent with Hypothesis 2 but inconsistent with the previously discussed alternative explanations related to motivated reasoning and invitees possessing an inflated sense of self-importance. In Study 4, we once again tested Hypothesis 2.

Study 4

Study 4 had multiple aims. First, the study once again tested Hypothesis 1. However, unlike the previous scenario-based studies, Study 4 had participants consider a real (vs. hypothetical) friend. Second, the study tested Hypothesis 2, only this time, through mediation analysis. Thus, in addition to responding to questions assessing the negative ramifications of the invitation decline, participants responded to questions examining the inviter's focus on the act of the decline versus the invitee's thoughts.

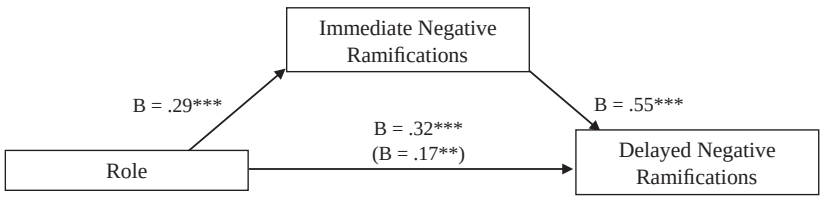
Method

A total of 606 MTurk participants (578 after exclusions: 51% female; $M_{age} = 41.6$, $SD_{age} = 12.7$) completed the study. The study employed a 2 (role: *invitee* vs. *inviter*) × 2 (number of invitees: *one* vs. *multiple*) between-subjects design.

Participants in the *invitee* conditions completed the study in a very similar manner to participants in the corresponding Study 3 conditions, except for two differences. First, they listed the name of a friend who was then used in the vignette (instead of the hypothetical friend, Alex). Second, after indicating the negative ramifications of the decline, they responded to two, two-item measures (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very*): *Focus on Internal Thoughts* (How much would <friend> think about the deliberation that went on inside your head as you were deciding whether to accept their invitation? How much would <friend> consider the debate that went through your head as you were deciding whether to accept their invitation?) and *Focus on Act of Declining* (How much would <friend> focus on the fact that you declined their invitation? How much would <friend> concentrate on the ultimate outcome of you declining their invitation?). To create a single difference score for "Focus on Behavior vs. Thoughts," we subtracted responses to Focus on Internal Thoughts from responses to Focus on Act of Declining.

Participants in the *inviter* conditions completed the study in the same manner, only from the opposite perspective. That is, they named a friend and read a vignette in which they extended an invitation to the friend but were declined. Next, they responded to six, two-item measures regarding the negative ramifications and two-item measures regarding Focus on Internal Thoughts (e.g., How much would you think about the deliberation that went on inside <friend>'s head as they were deciding whether to accept your invitation?) and Focus on Act of Declining (e.g., How much

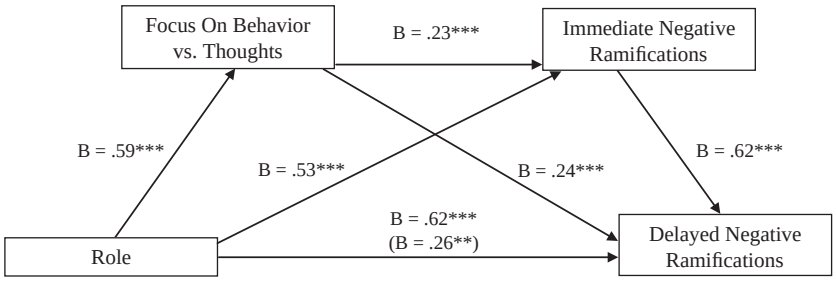
Figure 4
Study 3 Mediation Analysis for Observer Versus Inviter



Note. Role coded as: 1 = *Observer*, 0 = *Inviter*. Values indicate unstandardized regression coefficients. Values in parentheses indicate results when role and Immediate Negative Ramifications are included in the regression.
** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

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Figure 5
Study 4 Mediation Analysis



Note. Role coded as: 1 = *Invitee*, 0 = *Inviter*. Values indicate unstandardized regression coefficients. Values in parentheses indicate results when role, Focus on Behavior versus Thoughts, and Immediate Negative Ramifications are included in the regression.
** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

would you focus on the fact that <friend> declined your invitation?).

Results

Invitees tended to overestimate the negative ramifications of the invitation decline (see online Supplemental Table 6). This was true for both Immediate Negative Ramifications, $M_{\text{Invitee}} = 2.77$, $SD_{\text{Invitee}} = 1.30$ versus $M_{\text{Inviter}} = 2.24$, $SD_{\text{Inviter}} = 1.10$; $F(1, 576) = 28.22$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .047$, 95% CI [.34, .73], and Delayed Negative Ramifications, $M_{\text{Invitee}} = 2.81$, $SD_{\text{Invitee}} = 1.40$ versus $M_{\text{Inviter}} = 2.19$, $SD_{\text{Inviter}} = 1.28$; $F(1, 576) = 30.75$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .051$, 95% CI [.40, .84]. Moreover, invitees had higher Focus on Behavior versus Thoughts difference scores than inviters, $M_{\text{Invitee}} = +0.08$, $SD_{\text{Invitee}} = 1.64$ versus $M_{\text{Inviter}} = -0.51$, $SD_{\text{Inviter}} = 1.77$; $F(1, 576) = 17.58$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .030$, 95% CI [.32, .87], meaning that invitees overestimated the extent to which inviters focused on the act of the decline as opposed to the deliberation that went on inside of invitees' heads.

Next, we conducted a mediation analysis using PROCESS Model 6 (Hayes, 2017). Role served as the independent variable, Focus on Behavior versus Thoughts served as the initial mediation stage, Immediate Negative Ramifications served as the second mediation stage, and Delayed Negative Ramifications served as the dependent variable. Critically, the 95% confidence interval of the Focus on Behavior versus Thoughts → Immediate Negative Ramifications indirect effect was significant (indirect effect = .07, 95% CI [.03, .11]; the full results are displayed in Figure 5). Moreover, note that Focus on Behavior versus Thoughts also directly mediated the effect of role on Delayed Negative Ramifications (indirect effect = .06, 95% CI [.02, .12]) and mediated the effect of role on Immediate Negative Ramifications (indirect effect = .12, 95% CI [.06, .19]).

Discussion

This study provides additional support for Hypotheses 1 and 2. Invitees overestimated the negative ramifications that emerged following an invitation decline because they exaggerated the extent to which inviters focused on the act of the decline as opposed to the thoughts that went through the invitee's head. In Study 5, we used a new approach to once again test Hypothesis 2.

Study 5

Like Studies 3–4, Study 5 tested Hypothesis 1 and sought to provide evidence supporting Hypothesis 2. Unlike the prior studies, however, Study 5 used a moderation approach. In this study, participants first read and responded to an invitation decline scenario as either an invitee or an inviter. Next, they read and responded to the same scenario, only from the opposite perspective. In other words, some participants first acted and responded as an invitee and then as an inviter (the "invitee-then-inviter" condition), whereas others first acted and responded as an inviter and then as an invitee (the "inviter-then-invitee" condition).

Consistent with Hypothesis 1 and the prior studies, we predicted that invitees and inviters would provide different responses in the first scenario, with invitees overestimating the negative ramifications of the invitation decline. However, in the second scenario, we expected that because invitees (in the inviter-then-invitee condition) had taken the perspective of inviters first, they would be less inclined to indicate that the negative ramifications were severe. That is, taking an inviter's perspective beforehand should improve invitees' assessments of the degree to which inviters focus on invitees' thoughts as opposed to actions, thereby leading invitees to indicate relatively mild negative ramifications. At the same time, inviters in the second scenario (in the invitee-then-inviter condition) should not be influenced by previously assuming the invitee's perspective. Therefore, in the second scenario, both groups should see eye-to-eye regarding the inviter's focus on the invitee's thoughts versus actions, leading both to indicate similar, lower levels of negative ramifications.

Method

A total of 400 MTurk participants (396 after exclusions: 56% female; $M_{\text{age}} = 43.1$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 12.6$) completed the study. The study employed two conditions (condition: *invitee-then-inviter* vs. *inviter-then-invitee*) and was preregistered (https://aspredicted.org/blind.php?x=QK3_SQL).

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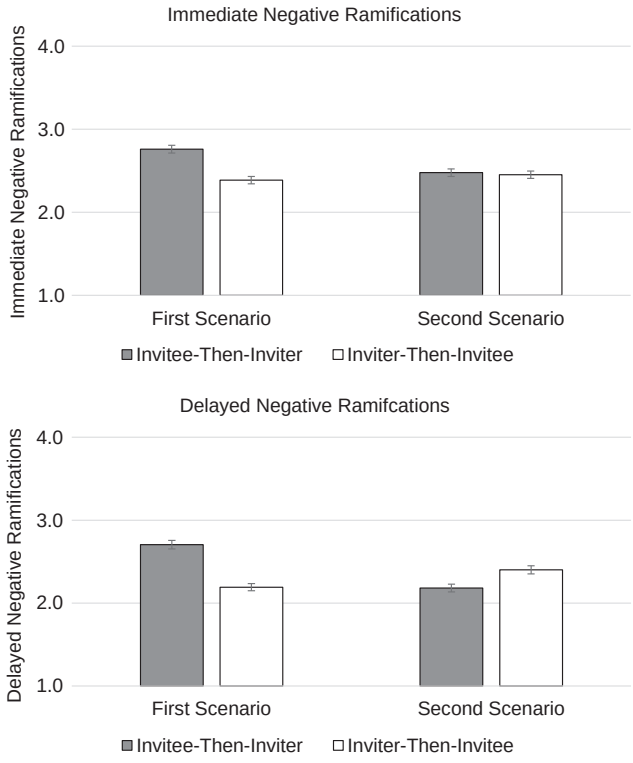
Participants in the *invitee-then-inviter* condition first read the scenario from the *invitee—one* condition[8] from Study 4 (i.e., they were the only person invited to a dinner by a friend and declined the invitation). Next, they responded to six measures assessing the negative ramifications that would arise from declining their friend's invitations. To avoid fatigue (given that participants would assume both roles over the course of the study), we had participants only respond to one item for each ramification (How angry would <friend> be from you declining their invitation? How much would you declining <friend>'s invitation suggest to <friend> that you do not care about them? How disappointed would <friend> be from you declining their invitation? How much would you declining <friend>'s invitation harm the relationship between the two of you? How likely would <friend> be to invite you to do something in the future, after you declined their invitation? How likely would <friend> be to accept an invitation from you to do something in the future, after you declined their invitation?). Next, these participants read the same scenario and responded to the same measures, only from the inviter's perspective.

Participants in the *inviter-then-invitee* condition did the same, only in the opposite order. That is, they first assumed the inviter's role and responded as the inviter. Next, they assumed the invitee's role and responded as the invitee.

Results

As can be seen in Figure 6 (see online Supplemental Table 7), when it came to participants' responses for the first scenario, invitees overestimated the negative ramifications of the invitation decline. However, when participants assumed the opposite role in the second scenario, invitees and inviters did not differ in their responses.

Figure 6
Study 5 Results



Note. Error bars represent standard errors of the means.

Beginning with Immediate Negative Ramifications, a 2 (condition: *invitee-then-inviter* vs. *inviter-then-invitee*; between-subjects) × 2 (scenario: *first* vs. *second*; within-subjects) mixed analysis of variance on these ramifications revealed a significant interaction, $F(1, 394) = 16.66$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .041$; see Figure 6 top panel. Consistent with our theorizing, when providing responses for the first scenario, invitees overestimated Immediate Negative Ramifications, $M_{\text{Invitee-Then-Inviter}} = 2.76$, $SD_{\text{Invitee-Then-Inviter}} = 1.34$ versus $M_{\text{Inviter-Then-Invitee}} = 2.39$, $SD_{\text{Inviter-Then-Invitee}} = 1.26$; $F(1, 394) = 8.18$, $p = .004$, $\eta_p^2 = .020$, 95% CI [.12, .63]. However, when providing responses for the second scenario, the two groups saw eye-to-eye and agreed that the immediate ramifications were not that severe, $M_{\text{Invitee-Then-Inviter}} = 2.48$, $SD_{\text{Invitee-Then-Inviter}} = 1.29$ versus $M_{\text{Inviter-Then-Invitee}} = 2.45$, $SD_{\text{Inviter-Then-Invitee}} = 1.23$; $F(1, 394) = .04$, $p = .842$, $\eta_p^2 < .001$, 95% CI [−.22, .27].

Turning next to Delayed Negative Ramifications, a 2 (condition: *invitee-then-inviter* vs. *inviter-then-invitee*; between-subjects) × 2 (scenario: *first* vs. *second*; within-subjects) mixed analysis of variance on these ramifications revealed a significant interaction, $F(1, 394) = 45.86$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .104$; see Figure 6, bottom panel. Consistent with our theorizing, when providing responses for the first scenario, invitees overestimated Delayed Negative Ramifications, $M_{\text{Invitee-Then-Inviter}} = 2.71$, $SD_{\text{Invitee-Then-Inviter}} = 1.45$ versus $M_{\text{Inviter-Then-Invitee}} = 2.19$, $SD_{\text{Inviter-Then-Invitee}} = 1.23$; $F(1, 394) = 14.38$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .035$, 95% CI [.25, .78]. However, when providing responses for the second scenario, the two groups saw eye-to-eye and agreed that the delayed ramifications were not that severe, $M_{\text{Invitee-Then-Inviter}} = 2.18$, $SD_{\text{Invitee-Then-Inviter}} = 1.34$ versus $M_{\text{Inviter-Then-Invitee}} = 2.40$, $SD_{\text{Inviter-Then-Invitee}} = 1.40$; $F(1, 394) = 2.56$, $p = .111$, $\eta_p^2 = .006$, 95% CI [−.49, .05].

Last, as in prior studies, we conducted a mediation analysis using PROCESS Model 4 (Hayes, 2017) for participants' responses in the first scenario.[9] Role served as the independent variable, Immediate Negative Ramifications served as the mediator, and Delayed Negative Ramifications served as the dependent variable. Critically, the 95% confidence interval of the indirect effect was significant (indirect effect = .19, 95% CI [.06, .33]; the full results are displayed in Figure 7).

Discussion

This study continues to provide support for Hypotheses 1 and 2. Consistent with our theorizing, assuming the role of the inviter initially allowed invitees (in the subsequent scenario) to realize that inviters focus on invitees' thoughts as opposed to their actions, which made invitees recognize that inviters do not see invitation declines as producing severe negative ramifications.

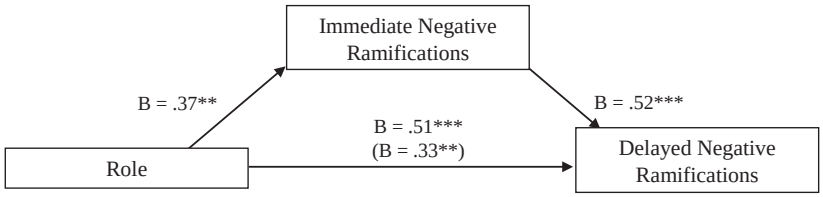
In addition, note that this study rules out another alternative explanation for our findings, social desirability bias. That is, one

[8] Given the similar results across the Number Of Invitees conditions in prior studies, we did not think it was necessary to include this manipulation in this study.

[9] In the second scenario, the mediation was not significant, as would be expected, given the lack of differences across conditions in the second scenario (indirect effect = .01; 95% confidence interval of the indirect effect: 95% CI [−.11, .14]).

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Figure 7
Study 5 Mediation Analysis



Note. Role coded as: 1 = *Invitee*, 0 = *Inviter*. Values indicate unstandardized regression coefficients. Values in parentheses indicate results when role and Immediate Negative Ramifications are included in the regression.
** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

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could argue that it is possible that even though inviters in our studies provided completely anonymous responses, they could have wanted to respond in a socially acceptable manner. According to this account, inviters indicated lower negative ramifications than invitees in prior studies because it would have been socially unacceptable for inviters to say that the negative ramifications would be severe (but not socially unacceptable for invitees to say this). Critically, this account predicts that inviters always indicate less severe negative ramifications than inviters, regardless of whether they offer their responses after previously assuming the other role, like in Study 5. Of course, that is not what we observed in Study 5, which argues against a social desirability account for our findings.

General Discussion

Theoretical Contributions

Across five studies, we examined a situation that is quite common in everyday life: when people decline invitations from others to engage in fun social activities. We showed that invitees overestimate the negative ramifications that emerge following an invitation decline, in part, because invitees exaggerate the degree to which inviters focus on the act of the invitee declining the invitation as opposed to the deliberations that ran through the invitee's head before deciding. Of note, across studies, we employed multiple kinds of activities (visiting a museum exhibit, going out to dinner), incorporated both hypothetical scenarios as well as real invitations and declines, used multiple manipulations to rule out several alternative accounts, and found evidence for our proposed process through both moderation and mediation.

Our work offers novel contributions to the literature on self-other misprediction (e.g., Kumar & Epley, 2018; Liu et al., 2023), specifically the area involving requesters and requestees (e.g., Bohns, 2016; Lu et al., 2023). We provide three main contributions to this line of research. First, we explore a situation that has received limited attention from researchers but is rather common: when invitees decline invitations from inviters to participate in everyday, fun activities. Second, we document a new self-other misprediction phenomenon by showing that invitees overestimate the negative ramifications of invitation declines. Notably, most of the literature involving requester–requestee misprediction investigates the (in)-accuracy of requesters' predictions about requestees (Bohns, 2016). By contrast, we document an instance in which requestees (i.e., invitees) are inaccurate in their predictions about requesters (i.e., inviters). Third, we shed light on a new psychological process by demonstrating that people believe others focus on their actions, as opposed to their thoughts, to a greater extent than others truly do. Specifically, we show that invitees overestimate the extent to which inviters focus on the act of the invitee declining the invitation as opposed to the deliberations that went through the invitee's head before deciding.

To that end, our work also connects to the limited literature on perceived perspective taking—people's beliefs about others attempting to take their own perspective (e.g., Goldstein et al., 2014; Long & Andrews, 1990). While a great deal of research has explored perspective taking—when someone attempts to take the perspective of another person—there is limited work on perceived perspective taking. Despite the limited attention perceived perspective taking has received from scholars, it has multiple social benefits. For example, believing that someone else has taken one's perspective leads to a greater sense of self-other overlap and liking of that person (Goldstein et al., 2014) and correlates with higher levels of relationship quality among married couples (Long & Andrews, 1990). Our studies suggest that when it comes to perceived perspective taking, people tend to underestimate the degree to which others strive to focus on their internal thoughts relative to their actions. To the best of our knowledge, our work is the first to demonstrate this idea.

Practical Implications

Our research is also important at a practical level. People, now more than ever, feel burned out and that their time is stretched too thin (Ho, 2022; Moyer, 2022). Social activities are part of the reason why. Indeed, on the invitation platform Evite alone, over 25,000 invitations are sent per hour (Barr, 2017). Saying no to invitations can be challenging, leading people to accept invitations when they would rather not (as our first pilot demonstrated). Our work sheds light on one reason why it is so difficult to decline invitations to social activities: Invitees overestimate the negative ramifications of turning down invitations. Our studies suggest that the negative ramifications of invitation declines are not as bad as invitees think and that they likely could pass on more invitations than they currently do. Fortunately, Study 5 shows a way in which invitees can be more accurate in their predictions regarding the negative ramifications that arise following invitation declines: by first assuming the inviter role and imagining that they were the one

extending the invitation. The results of Study 5 indicate that doing so can bring invitee's predictions more in line with inviter's views. However, do note that we are not advocating for people to *always* decline invitations. Social relationships are a crucial component of life (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), and spending time with others is how relationships are cultivated and strengthened. Thus, always saying no would certainly do more harm than good. That said, in the cases where people must say no or decide an activity is something they would rather pass on, our results suggest that the negative ramifications may not be as bad as they might think.

Limitations and Future Research

Despite its strong points, our research certainly has some limitations. For one, we used participants from online panels in each of our studies, which raises questions about generalizability (e.g., McGorray et al., 2023). For example, one might wonder whether our findings extend to other cultures, especially given prior research on cultural differences in reactions to social exclusion (Uskul & Over, 2014). Invitees in collectivist cultures may be less likely to anticipate intense reactions from inviters following invitation declines given that those from collectivist cultures should see the dyad as connected rather than detached (e.g., Brewer & Chen, 2007). In addition, while we ruled out multiple alternative explanations for our results, it is certainly possible that other psychological mechanisms may play a role in our findings (e.g., Pham, 2013). Indeed, the fact that the direct effect remained significant in Study 4 when the mediators were included in the regression (see Figure 5) suggests that other processes may be operating as well (Zhao et al., 2010). Finally, we limited our inquiry to small-scale, everyday fun events, so our findings may not extend to large-scale but infrequent events (e.g., weddings, baby showers). In these cases, the negative ramifications are presumably far more severe in the eyes of the inviter. Thus, invitees and inviters may see eye-to-eye in such cases.

Our work generates several opportunities for future research. For example, future work could examine some of the aforementioned limitations by testing our predictions with different samples, exploring additional mechanisms, and/or investigating more substantial events. Doing so would help gain a better theoretical grasp on the psychology involved with invitation declines. Alternatively, future work could explore whether the reason as to why an invitee declines an invitation influences our findings. In our studies, the reason always involved the invitee opting to relax at home, but there are other reasons people decline invitations. For example, people may have already committed to another activity or not have the money or time to participate in an activity (Donnelly et al., 2021). Indeed, as mentioned, in one of the only other research programs on invitation declines, Donnelly et al. (2021) found that inviters feel less close to invitees following declines in which a lack of time (vs. money) is given as the excuse. This suggests our effects should be larger in cases where invitees cite a lack of money (vs. time). Also, while we used different types of relationships across studies yet observed similar patterns of results, this does not allow us to conclude that the nature of the relationship does not matter. The studies differed in other important ways (e.g., the activities involved with the invitations, whether the studies used vignettes or real situations). Thus, future work might consider manipulating the type of relationship (e.g., close vs. distant friends) to systematically explore the potential influence of the nature of the relationship.

Another option for future research is to explore other instances in which people exaggerate the extent to which others focus on their behaviors as opposed to their thoughts. For example, when someone is sick and must cancel a work video call with a colleague, they may believe that their colleague focuses predominantly on the act of them canceling (vs. the deliberations that went through their head as they tried to muster up the energy to do the call). This, in turn, could lead them to think their colleague is more upset than they truly are. Relatedly, future work could examine extensions of our core finding. For example, invitees may overestimate not only the negative ramifications of invitation declines but also the negative ramifications of canceling plans for social activities to which they already committed. Also, exploring repeated declines (vs. a single decline, like in the present work) would make for a fascinating extension of the present research. Finally, it would be interesting to explore invitation declines involving utilitarian (as opposed to fun) activities. For example, consider a reviewer who contemplates declining an editor's invitation to review a article. Might the reviewer overestimate how disappointed the editor would be if they decline? Or is there something unique about utilitarian activities that causes a different outcome than what we observed for fun activities?

Conclusion

In closing, we hope that readers consider our findings the next time they are extended an invitation but feel uncertain about the prospect of declining. While it might seem like all the inviter will consider is the fact that you declined, they will likely consider much more, making the negative ramifications less severe than you think.

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