Self-Invitation Hesitation:

How and Why People Fail to Ask to Join the Plans of Others

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Abstract

Spending time with others affords numerous benefits. One way a person can spend time with others is through a self-invitation—asking to join the plans of others. We address the psychological processes involved with self-invitations to everyday social activities from both the self-inviter's perspective and the perspective of those with the plans ("plan-holders"). Across eight studies (seven preregistered), we demonstrate that potential self-inviters fail to ask to join the plans of others as often as plan-holders would prefer, because potential self-inviters overestimate how irritated plan-holders would be by such self-invitations. Further, we show that these asymmetries are rooted in differing viewpoints about the mindsets of plan-holders when they originally made the plans. Namely, potential self-inviters exaggerate the likelihood that plan-holders had already considered inviting them but decided against it (vs. made plans without considering inviting them). We conclude by discussing the various implications of our findings.

Keywords: invitations, self-invitations, misprediction, social psychology, judgment and decision making

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Imagine you are talking on the phone with a friend. During the conversation, your friend casually mentions that they have plans to go to an art festival the following weekend with a mutual friend. You want to go to the art festival as well, but you find yourself hesitant to ask to join as concerns run through your head: Will asking to join irritate my friends? My friends did not invite me when they made the plans, so would they even want me there? Ultimately, these fears keep you from asking. Yet, your friends did not think about inviting you to join and would have been more than happy for you to ask to come along.

We address this situation in the current article. We examine the psychological processes involved with self-invitations—when someone asks to join the plans of others. Although the self-invitation construct is largely known and recognized by the public, it has received minimal attention from the scientific community (see below). Our research thus serves as a foray into understanding people's thinking and behavior in the context of self-invitations.

Across eight studies, we demonstrate that "potential self-inviters" (those who consider requesting to join the plans of others) do not ask to be involved with the plans of others as often as "plan-holders" (those who have the plans) would prefer. We further illustrate that this phenomenon arises, in part, because potential self-inviters and plan holders hold divergent perspectives on two key aspects. First, potential self-inviters exaggerate the likelihood that plan-holders had already thought about inviting them but opted against it (vs. made plans without considering inviting them). Second, and consequently, potential self-inviters overestimate how irritated plan-holders would be by the potential self-inviter asking to join their plans. This ultimately results in self-invitations happening less frequently than plan-holders would like.

Our research makes three main contributions. First, we provide an initial exploration into the psychological processes characterizing self-invitations. Although self-invitations have received attention from non-academic communities (Foster, 2023; MacLeod, n.d.; Smothers, 2021), and standard invitations have garnered interest from academics (Donnelly et al., 2021;

Givi & Kirk, 2023; Lu et al., 2022), self-invitations have garnered minimal attention from the scientific community. Second, in studying how individuals think and behave in the self-invitation context, we add to and connect with multiple literatures, including those on invitation psychology (Givi & Kirk, 2023), self-other decision making (Polman & Wu, 2020), emotions (Lerner et al., 2015), and request compliance (Bohns, 2016). Of note, our work is the first to indicate that potential self-inviters (a) fail to engage in self-inviting as often as plan-holders would prefer, (b) overestimate how irritated plan-holders are by self-invitations, and (c) are misguided in their predictions regarding plan-holders' mindsets when they created the plans, erring on the side of believing that plan-holders had considered inviting them but decided against it (vs. made plans without thinking about inviting them). Third, our work is of practical importance. Self-invitations are prevalent in society and are a regular part of everyday lives. Yet, we show that individuals fail to engage in self-inviting as often as their friends, family, and loved ones would like. Plan-holders may not even realize that the potential self-inviter would like to join the activity nor think about inviting them. Thus, individuals' excessive concerns about self-inviting may keep them from participating in activities that could afford psychological and social benefits.

Invitations and Self-Invitations

A long line of social psychology research demonstrates the advantages of spending time with others. Doing so can increase a sense of belonging (Sandstrom & Dunn, 2014), render life more meaningful (Nelson et al., 2012), and improve well-being (Hudson et al., 2020). A main vehicle people use to spend time together is the invitation (Donnelly et al., 2021)—when one person asks another to engage in an activity. There is a small but growing literature on the psychological processes involved in extending or receiving invitations. For example, people overestimate the negative social outcomes associated with declining invitations to both pleasant activities (Givi & Kirk, 2023) and unpleasant engagements (i.e., favor requests; Lu et al., 2022), find others' excuses for declining invitations more acceptable when these involve a lack of money as opposed to time (Donnelly et al., 2021), and focus on different psychological processes

when receiving versus extending an invitation (e.g., invitees focus on their ultimate decision to accept or decline an invitation, whereas inviters focus on the thoughts that ran through the invitee's head before they decided; Givi & Kirk, 2023).

All the aforementioned literature addresses standard invitations, in which someone with plans (either made or considered) asks another person to join them. By contrast, we examine self-invitations, in which a self-inviter asks to join the plans of plan-holders.[1] Although research on psychological processes surrounding self-invitations is scarce, the concept of self-invitations is generally known by laypeople and discussed in other channels such as self-help articles (MacLeod, n.d.), popular press stories (Smothers, 2021), and newsletter columns (Foster, 2023).

Our principal question is whether potential self-inviters behave consistently with plan-holders' preferences. Are potential self-inviters equally likely, less likely, or more likely to engage in self-inviting relative to what plan-holders prefer? We focus on self-invitations to everyday social activities (e.g., seeing a movie, visiting a museum, going on a walk in a park) as opposed to large-scale, structured activities (e.g., a wedding ceremony, a birthday celebration, a baby shower), as the latter typically involve formal invitations rather than self-invitations.

Theoretical Framework

We contend that potential self-inviters fail to self-invite as often as plan-holders would prefer, because potential self-inviters exaggerate how irritated plan-holders are by self-invitations. Further, we argue that these mismatches stem, in part, from differing views regarding plan-holders' mindsets when initial plans were made. We suggest that, whereas plan-holders often make plans without explicitly thinking about inviting numerous people, potential self-inviters mistakenly believe that plan-holders had already considered inviting them but opted against it.

[1] A pilot study (Appendix A) revealed that self-invitations are far more likely to take the form of a person asking to join the plans of others versus stating that they are joining the plans of others. For this reason, we employ the former in our studies. However, we acknowledge that a self-invitation may, indeed, come in the form of a person stating that they are joining others' plans. Accordingly, we devote part of the General Discussion to this form of self-invitation and provide relevant data (Appendix B) to assuage potential concerns about generalizability.

Planning Psychology

As mentioned, our research focuses on ordinary social activities such as grabbing lunch, visiting a mall, or catching a movie. Making plans for such activities can occur without much thought: two or more people discuss the activity and formulate the plans. Relative to less frequent and more formal events (e.g., holiday parties), there is less attention paid to the possibility of including other people in the activity. Moreover, plan-holders must think about additional factors, as a recent review (Liu & Kwon, 2022) indicated. These include what activity to do (Liu & Min, 2020), how long to do it (Mastroianni et al., 2021), and how frequently to do it (Sun et al., 2020). Plan-holders may also have additional logistical issues in mind such as how to get to and from the activity (Jou & Syu, 2021), when to do it (Tonietto & Malkoc, 2016), and how to handle paying for it (Lever et al., 2015).

We maintain that, when potential self-inviters consider asking to join the plans of others, they overestimate the likelihood that plan-holders already thought about inviting them but decided against it (vs. made plans without considering inviting them). Although plan-holders likely contemplate numerous factors or issues when creating plans (as just discussed), potential self-inviters may fail to fully appreciate all these aspects. Instead, they may focus predominantly on the *whom to invite* aspect, that is, the possibility that plan-holders had already pondered inviting them but decided against it. This is because the *whom to invite* component involves them. And, critically, the literature indicates that individuals are often egocentric, thinking that they factor more into other people's thought processes and decision making than is truly the case (Gilovich & Savitsky, 1999). For example, individuals overestimate how much attention others pay to their behaviors, clothing, and appearance (Gilovich et al., 2000), the degree to which others make inferences about them based on a one-off success or failure (Moon et al., 2020), and the extent to which others think about them when they are deciding how much to pay in pay-what-you-want settings (Roy et al., 2020).

Beyond egocentrism, there is another reason potential self-inviters may overly focus on the possibility that plan-holders considered inviting them but decided against it. Unlike the other

aspects that plan-holders may have contemplated when making the plans (e.g., what activity to do, when to do it), the *whom to invite* aspect can psychologically harm the potential self-inviter. If a plan-holder considered inviting them but explicitly chose not to, this social rejection could impair their self-view (Sedikides, 2012), social relationships (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), and social identity (Brewer, 1991). As individuals are sensitive to such unfavorable outcomes (Rozin & Royzman, 2001), potential self-inviters will be highly attentive to the possibility that plan-holders had already contemplated inviting them but chose not to.

Concerns About Irritating

To summarize, potential self-inviters may exaggerate the likelihood that plan-holders already considered inviting them but abstained from doing so (vs. made plans without considering inviting them). Believing that plan-holders had explicitly decided against inviting them, potential self-inviters may, consequently, overly worry about the type of reaction a self-invitation would garner from plan-holders. Might this annoy or irritate those with the plans? Indeed, message board posts on the topic of self-invitations reflect the concern that a self-invitation may irritate those holding the plans (void_Raptor, 2023). Relatedly, individuals are reluctant to engage in behaviors that might be construed as intruding on others (Bohns, 2016) in large part because they mispredict how others would feel if they did. For example, individuals hesitate asking others for help, because they think that providing help will be seen as more of an inconvenience to others than is the case (Zhao & Epley, 2022). As another example, they avoid starting unsolicited conversations with strangers, because they fail to realize how open strangers are to conversing (Epley & Schroeder, 2014). At a broader level, people often struggle to predict the emotions of others (Sun et al., 2021). Given the strong link between emotions and preferences (Lerner et al., 2015), overestimating how irritated plan-holders would be by a self-invitation would lead potential self-inviters to refrain from self-inviting as frequently as plan-holders would prefer.

When Do the Parties See Eye-to-Eye?

As mentioned, we suggest that potential self-inviters overestimate the chances that plan-holders already considered inviting them but decided not to (vs. created plans without thinking about inviting them), leading potential self-inviters to mispredict how irritated plan-holders are by self-invitations and thus shy away from self-inviting. One implication of this framework is that, in cases where potential self-inviters do not have to guess about whether or not plan-holders had already considered inviting them, there will not be a discrepancy between a potential self-inviter's likelihood of self-inviting and a plan-holder's likelihood of wanting a self-invitation to occur. A common example of such a situation is when a potential self-inviter previously declined an invitation from a plan-holder but is now willing or able to join. Here, it is clear that the plan-holder both considered offering an invitation and actually extended it. Imagine that a friend previously invited you to join them plus a mutual friend for an activity. You declined because you had plans with your partner, but those plans have been canceled. When mulling over whether to ask your friend if you can still join them and the mutual friend for the activity, both you and your friend know that they not only considered inviting you previously but also extended the invitation. In these cases, there is no guesswork for potential self-inviters regarding whether plan-holders considered inviting them but opted against it. Thus, there will be no asymmetry between potential self-inviters and plan-holders.

Overview

Below, we present our formal hypotheses. We also present them visually (Figure 1).

H1: Potential self-inviters do not engage in self-inviting as often as plan-holders would prefer.

H2: (a) Potential self-inviters overestimate how irritated plan-holders are by self-invitations; (b) This difference serves as the second stage in a serial mediation process for the relation between role (potential self-inviter vs. plan-holder) and self-invitation preference.

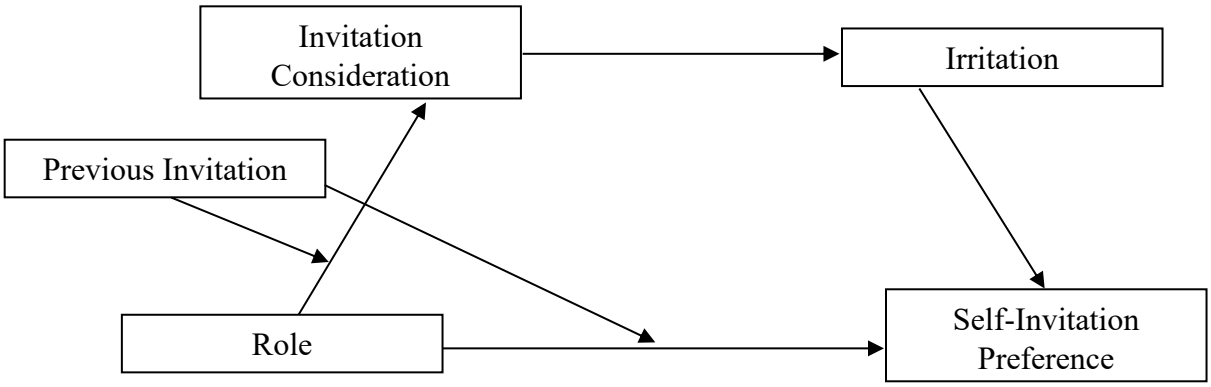
H3: (a) Potential self-inviters overestimate the likelihood that plan-holders considered inviting them but decided against it (vs. made plans without considering inviting them); (b) This

difference serves as the first stage in a serial mediation process for the relation between role (potential self-inviter vs. plan-holder) and self-invitation preference.

H4: The mismatch between potential self-inviters and plan-holders regarding self-invitation preference attenuates when plan-holders previously invited potential self-inviters to participate in the activity.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework



We describe eight studies (seven preregistered) that tested these hypotheses. Study 1a tested H1 (with real self-invitations), Studies 1b-c tested H1-H2b, Study 2a tested H3a (with real self-invitations), Study 2b tested H1-H3b, and Study 3 tested H4. We also report studies in Appendices B (Study A1) and C (Study A2) that improved generalizability and addressed alternative explanations. We obtained ethical approval from the first author's institution. We present a sensitivity power analysis in Appendix D. We follow our preregistration in every preregistered study. In the sole non-preregistered study (Study 1b), we report all independent and dependent variables, and we decided in advance on the sample size and exclusion protocol. We chose our sample sizes based on relevant prior research (Givi & Kirk, 2023). We stored all data, materials, and analysis code at: https://osf.io/ewnsk/?view_only=f0f8a428273f491b917a937f30ca4381

Studies 1a-c

The primary aim of each of Studies 1a-c was to test H1 (i.e., our core effect) and/or H2a-b (i.e., the second stage in our proposed serial mediation pathway). Following best practices for external validity, we used different methods (e.g., recall vs. scenario) and procedures (e.g., when measuring constructs) across these studies. These variations allowed us to assess the robustness of our findings across different contexts and reduce the likelihood that our results are specific to any one methodological approach.

Study 1a

Study 1a served as a preliminary test of H1 using participants' recollections of real self-invitations. Some participants recalled a recent instance in which others had plans and they (i.e., the participant) asked to join the plans, whereas other participants recalled a recent instance in which they had plans and someone else asked to join. All participants then discussed how they felt when thinking about asking to join or when being asked. We used text analysis software (Berger et al., 2020) to code these responses for overall emotional valence, allowing for a preliminary test of H1. That is, according to H1, potential-self inviters do not engage in self-inviting as often as plan-holders would prefer. Given this, we would expect the emotional experience associated with a self-invitation to be more negative on the potential self-inviter's side—as they hesitate to ask—than on the plan-holder's—as they are welcoming of the ask.[2]

Study 1a Method

We preregistered this study (https://aspredicted.org/ryj4-y8y6.pdf), for which we recruited 452 U.S. Prolific workers. We excluded four (one from the potential self-inviter condition, and three from the plan-holder condition) for failing the attention check and 108 (54 from the potential self-inviter condition, and 54 from the plan-holder condition) for not being able to recall the self-invitation situation they were asked about (see below). The final sample comprised 340 participants (221 women, 111 men, 7 non-binary/other, 1 prefer not to answer),

[2] We could not ask participants to recall a time in which a potential self-inviter was merely considering asking to join plans (and then assess whether potential self-inviters asked and whether plan-holders wanted them to ask), because those in the plan-holder role would have no way of knowing that the potential self-inviter was considering asking. Thus, the method we chose is a sound way to use participants' recollections of real-life experiences.

ranging in age from 19 to 78 years (M = 38.3, SD = 11.7). We randomly assigned them to the two conditions of the role manipulation: potential self-inviter (n = 177) versus plan-holder (n = 163).

We instructed participants assigned to the potential self-inviter condition to recall a time in the last five years when other people in their social circle had plans to do an everyday activity and they (i.e., the participant) asked one of them if they could join the activity. We filtered those who could not recall any such time to the concluding portions of the study, meaning that they did not provide any data for analyses purposes. The remaining participants described the most recent instance of this kind of self-invitation. Next, they explained how they felt when they were thinking about asking the other person if they could join the activity. Finally, they indicated how the person they asked responded (i.e., said "no" or "yes").

We instructed participants assigned to the plan-holder condition to recall a time in the last five years when they had plans with another person or other people to do an everyday activity and someone else in their social circle asked them (i.e., the participant) if they could join the activity. We filtered those who could not recall such a time to the concluding portions of the study, meaning that they did not provide any data for analyses purposes. The rest of the participants described the most recent instance of this kind of self-invitation. Next, they explained how they felt when they were asked by the other person if they could join the activity. Finally, they indicated how they responded when asked ("no" or "yes"). An attention check and demographic questions followed in both conditions.

Study 1a Results and Discussion

We coded participants' open-ended responses about how they felt using Lexica text analysis software (Berger et al., 2020). This software assessed the overall emotional valence of the responses (Rocklage et al., 2018; 0 = *highly negative*, 9 = *highly positive*). In line with H1, the responses of participants in the potential self-inviter condition (M = 3.26, SD = 3.15) were more negative (vs. positive) than the responses of participants in the plan-holder condition (M = 4.29, SD = 3.17), $F(1, 338) = 8.93$, $p = .003$, $\eta_p^2 = .026$, $CI_{95\%}$ for difference = [.35, 1.70].

Moreover, these results emerged even though participants in the potential self-inviter condition were more likely (96%) to recall an instance in which the plan-holder responded by saying yes (vs. no) to the potential self-inviter's request to join compared to participants in the plan-holder condition (87%), χ^2 (1, N = 340) = 9.90, p = .002, φ = .17; $CI_{95\%}$ for difference = [4%, 16%]. That is, potential self-inviters (vs. plan-holders) experienced more negative emotions even though they recalled more favorable situations. In sum, these results provide preliminary support for H1 using participants' recollections of real self-invitations.

Study 1b

Although Study 1a added utility, given that it involved real self-invitations, participants' emotional experiences allow for, admittedly, only a proxy testing of H1. There are also some known drawbacks with recollection studies (e.g., memory distortion; Akhtar et al., 2018). Thus, in Study 1b, we aimed to provide a more systematic test of H1. We also tested H2a-b. Participants assumed the role of either a potential self-inviter or a plan-holder. Potential self-inviters indicated whether they would ask to join plan-holders for an activity in which they wanted to participate and predicted how irritated plan-holders would be by such a self-invitation, whereas plan-holders indicated whether they would want potential self-inviters to ask to join them for the activity and indicated how irritated they would be by such a self-invitation.

Study 1b Method

We recruited 160 U.S. and Canadian Prolific workers and excluded one (from the plan-holder condition) for failing the attention check. The final sample comprised 159 participants (80 women, 79 men), ranging in age from 18 to 77 years (M = 36.6, SD = 11.4). We randomly assigned them to the two conditions of the role manipulation: potential self-inviter (n = 80) versus plan-holder (n = 79).

Participants first indicated whether they had more female or male friends. A following vignette then incorporated either a female or male friend (Jordan, below[3]), depending on the

[3] The gender of the other friend, Alex, was not specified.

participant's response. Subsequently, participants assigned to the potential self-inviter condition read a vignette in which they video chatted with two of their friends, Alex and Jordan. During the call, Jordan mentioned having plans with Alex to visit a nearby museum the following weekend. The vignette explained that this sounded like fun to the participant, so they considered asking to join. Next, participants indicated whether they would ask to join ("no" or "yes"). Finally, they indicated how irritated, annoyed, and offended their friends would be if they asked to join (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*[4]). We averaged responses to form an irritation index (α = .95).

Participants assigned to the plan-holder condition also read a vignette in which they video chatted with two of their friends, Alex and Jordan. During the call, Jordan mentioned having plans with the participant to visit a nearby museum the following weekend. The vignette explained that this sounded like fun to Alex, so Alex considered asking to join. Participants then indicated whether they would want Alex to ask to join and indicated how irritated, annoyed, and offended they would be if Alex asked to join (α = .97).

Study 1b Results and Discussion

Consistent with H1, participants in the potential-self inviter condition (59%) did not ask to join the plans as often as those in the plan-holder condition would have preferred (92%), χ^2 (1, N = 159) = 24.32, $p < .001$, φ = .39; $CI_{95\%}$ for difference = [21%, 46%]. In accord with H2a, participants in the potential-self inviter condition (M = 2.08, SD = 1.18) overestimated how irritated participants in the plan-holder condition would have been had they asked to join the plans (M = 1.47, SD = 0.97), $F(1, 157) = 12.80$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .075$, $CI_{95\%}$ for difference = [.28, .96].

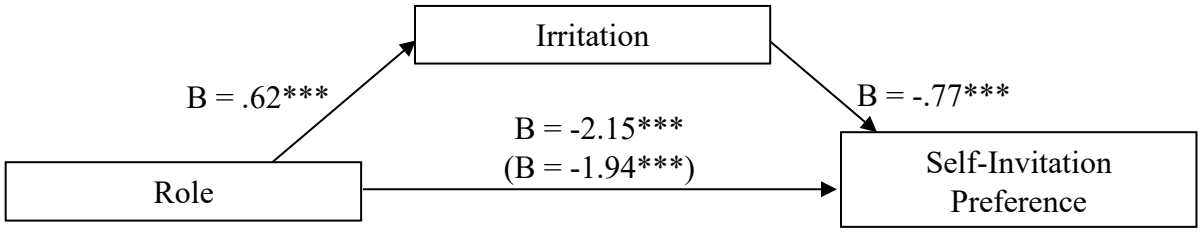
We conducted a mediation analysis using PROCESS model 4 (Hayes, 2017), with role as the independent variable, self-invitation preference as the dependent variable, and irritation as the mediator. Consistent with H2b, the 95% confidence interval for the indirect effect was

[4] We used "very" as opposed to "very much" in Studies 1c and 2b.

significant (indirect effect = -.38, $CI_{95\%}$ = [-.70, -.12]; Figure 2). That is, potential self-inviters overestimating how irritated plan-holders are by self-invitations is part of the reason why they do not self-invite as often as plan-holders would prefer.

Figure 2

Mediation Analysis in Study 1b



Note. Role coded as: 1 = potential self-inviter, 0 = plan-holder. Values indicate unstandardized regression coefficients. Value in parentheses indicates results when we included role and irritation in the regression. *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

Study 1c

Study 1c, like Study 1b, tested H1-H2b. The key difference between the two studies is that, in Study 1b, potential self-inviters simultaneously predicted the irritation of two plan-holders, whereas in Study 1c, potential self-inviters predicted the irritation of one plan-holder. We conducted Study 1c to ensure that the discrepancy in irritation in Study 1b was not due to potential self-inviters predicting the emotions of multiple people and plan-holders reporting the emotions of a singular person (i.e., themselves).

Study 1c Method

We preregistered this study (https://aspredicted.org/xrds-cd8p.pdf). We recruited 160 U.S. and Canadian Prolific workers and excluded one (from the potential self-inviter condition) for failing the attention check. The final sample comprised 159 participants (90 women, 67 men, 1 non-binary/other, 1 prefer not to answer), ranging in age from 18 to 75 years (M = 37.8, SD = 12.5). We randomly assigned them to the two conditions of the role manipulation: potential self-inviter (n = 79) versus plan-holder (n = 80).

Study 1c was similar to Study 1b, except for the following. First, we did not include the initial question on whether the participant had more female or male friends, as we did not specify the friend's gender in the vignette. Second, the video chat involved only one friend, Jordan. Participants in the potential self-inviter condition read that, during the call, Jordan mentioned having plans with Alex—a mutual friend—to visit a nearby museum the following weekend. The vignette explained that this sounded like fun to the participant, so they considered asking to join. These participants then indicated whether they would ask to join and predicted how irritated, annoyed, and offended Jordan would be if they asked to join ($\alpha = .91$). Participants in the plan-holder condition read that, during the call, the participant mentioned having plans with Alex to visit a nearby museum the following weekend. The vignette explained that this sounded like fun to Jordan, so Jordan considered asking to join. These participants subsequently indicated whether they would want Jordan to ask to join and indicated how irritated, annoyed, and offended they would be if Jordan asked to join ($\alpha = .92$).

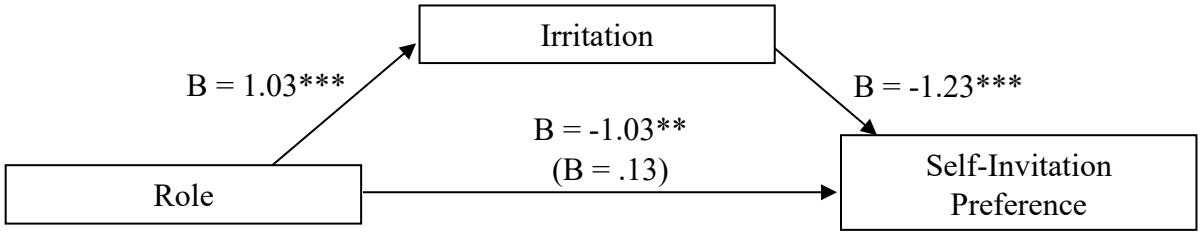
Study 1c Results and Discussion

In line with H1, participants in the potential-self inviter condition (57%) did not ask to join the plans as often as those in the plan-holder condition would have preferred (79%), χ^2 (1, N = 159) = 8.66, $p = .003$, $\varphi = .23$; $CI_{95\%}$ for difference = [8%, 36%]. As per H2a, participants in the potential-self inviter condition ($M = 2.52$, $SD = 1.25$) overestimated how irritated participants in the plan-holder condition would have been had they asked to join the plans ($M = 1.49$, SD = 0.87), $F(1, 157) = 36.24$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .188$, $CI_{95\%}$ for difference = [.28, .96].

We proceeded with a mediation analysis using PROCESS model 4 (Hayes, 2017). In accordance with H2b, the 95% confidence interval for the indirect effect was significant (indirect effect = -1.29, $CI_{95\%}$ = [-2.03, -.81]; Figure 3). That is, potential self-inviters exaggerate how irritated plan-holders are by self-invitations, which is part of the reason why they fail to self-invite as often as plan-holders would prefer.

Figure 3

Mediation Analysis in Study 1c



Note. Role coded as: 1 = potential self-inviter, 0 = plan-holder. Values indicate unstandardized regression coefficients. Value in parentheses indicates results when we included role and irritation in the regression. *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

Studies 1a-c Summary

Potential self-inviters fail to ask to join the plans of others as often as plan-holders would prefer (H1). Indeed, across different methodologies, we found support for this hypothesis. Of note, across Studies 1b-c, potential self-inviters were only about two-thirds to three-fourths as likely to engage in self-inviting as plan-holders would have liked (59% vs. 92% in Study 1b, 57% vs. 79% in Study 1c). Moreover, irritating plan-holders is a central concern that leads potential self-inviters to shy away from self-inviting (H2a-b).

Studies 2a-b

In the next set of studies, Studies 2a-b, we focused primarily on testing H3a-b (i.e., the first stage in our proposed serial mediation pathway). As with the earlier studies, we used different methodologies across these two studies. Once again, this improved the external validity of our work.

Study 2a

In Study 2a, we relied on participants' recollections of real self-invitations, as in Study 1a. Unlike Study 1a, however, we aimed to test H3a: potential self-inviters overestimate the likelihood that plan-holders considered inviting them but decided against it (vs. made plans without considering inviting them). We followed a similar procedure to Study 1a's, except that,

rather than report their emotional experiences, participants answered questions tied to the notions that the plan-holders (a) had already considered inviting the potential self-inviter but opted against it, and (b) made plans without considering inviting the potential self-inviter.

Study 2a Method

We preregistered this study (https://aspredicted.org/khhr-s86c.pdf), for which we recruited 449 U.S. Prolific workers. We excluded one (from the potential self-inviter condition) for failing the attention check, and 107 (59 from the potential self-inviter condition, and 48 from the plan-holder condition) for not being able to recall the self-invitation situation they were asked about (see below). The final sample comprised 340 participants (203 women, 135 men, 3 non-binary/other), ranging in age from 18 to 77 years (M = 39.5, SD = 12.5). We randomly assigned them to the two conditions of the role manipulation: potential self-inviter (n = 165) versus plan-holder (n = 176).

Study 2a was similar to Study 1c, except that, rather than write about the feelings that emerged during a recollected self-invitation, participants completed two sets of 2-item measures administered in random order. One set involved the notion that those with the plans thought about inviting the potential self-inviter but decided against it (potential self-inviter: "They already thought about inviting me but chose not to," "They already considered inviting me but intentionally decided against it"; $r(163) = .81$, $p < .001$; plan-holder: "We already thought about inviting the person who asked me but chose not to," "We already considered inviting the person who asked me but intentionally decided against it"; $r(174) = .68$, $p < .001$; 1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). The other set involved the notion that those with the plans made plans without considering inviting the potential self-inviter (potential self-inviter: "They just made plans without thinking about inviting me," "They just made plans without considering inviting me"; $r(163) = .91$, $p < .001$; plan-holder: "We just made plans without thinking about inviting the person who asked me," "We just made plans without considering inviting the person who asked me"; $r(174) = .82$, $p < .001$; 1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). Conceptually, these are two opposing beliefs. Therefore, following our preregistration, we subtracted

participants' scores for the latter set from their scores for the former set to create an invitation consideration index.

Study 2a Results and Discussion

In accordance with H3a, participants in the potential-self inviter condition (M = -3.10, SD = 2.58) overestimated the likelihood that those in the plan-holder condition had thought about inviting them but decided against it (vs. made plans without considering inviting them; M = -1.67, SD = 2.41), $F(1, 339) = 27.88$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .076$, $CI_{95\%}$ for difference = [.90, 1.96]. Moreover, as in Study 1a, these results emerged even though participants in the potential self-inviter condition were more likely (96%) to recall an instance in which the plan-holder responded by saying yes (vs. no) to the potential self-inviter's request to join compared to participants in the plan-holder condition (88%), χ^2 (1, N = 341) = 8.04, p = .005, φ = .15; $CI_{95\%}$ for difference = [3%, 14%]. In sum, these results provide preliminary support for H3a using real self-invitations.

Study 2b

Once again, given the limitations of the recollection method, we opted for a more tightly controlled design in Study 2b. This study was akin to Studies 1b-c, however, it also included measures tied to H3a-b. This allowed for systematic and tightly controlled testing of these hypotheses.

Study 2b Method

We preregistered this study (https://aspredicted.org/dcx9-p9zg.pdf). We recruited 161 U.S. and Canadian Prolific workers (no exclusions: 84 women, 74 men, 2 non-binary/other, 1 prefer not to answer), ranging in age from 18 to 79 years (M = 37.2, SD = 12.9). We randomly assigned them to the two conditions of the role manipulation: potential self-inviter (n = 80) versus plan-holder (n = 81).

Study 2b was similar to Study 1b, with a few exceptions. First, the vignette explained that the conversation between the three friends took place in person over lunch. Second, the plans involved two of the friends attending a movie the following weekend. Third, after responding to

the irritation items (α = .91 and .90 in the potential self-inviter and plan-holder conditions, respectively), participants completed two sets of 2-item measures administered in random order. One set involved the notion that the two planning friends thought about inviting the third but decided against it (potential self-inviter: "Jordan and Alex likely already thought about inviting me but chose not to," "Jordan and Alex likely already considered inviting me but intentionally decided against it"; $r(78) = .94$, $p < .001$; plan-holder: "Alex and I likely already thought about inviting Jordan but chose not to," "Alex and I likely already considered inviting Jordan but intentionally decided against it"; $r(79) = .86$, $p < .001$; 1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). The other set involved the notion that the two planning friends made plans without considering extending additional invitations (potential self-inviter: "Jordan and Alex likely just made plans with each other without thinking about inviting others," "Jordan and Alex likely just made plans with each other without considering inviting others"; $r(78) = .88$, $p < .001$; plan-holder: "Alex and I likely just made plans with each other without thinking about inviting others," "Alex and I likely just made plans with each other without considering inviting others"; $r(79) = .80$, $p < .001$; 1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). Following our preregistration, we subtracted participants' scores for the latter set from their scores for the former set to create an invitation consideration index.

Study 2b Results and Discussion

Consistent with H1, participants in the potential-self inviter condition (41%) did not ask to join the plans as often as those in the plan-holder condition would have preferred (77%), χ^2 (1, $N = 161$) = 20.73, $p < .001$, $\varphi = .36$; $CI_{95\%}$ for difference = [21%, 49%]. In line with H2a, participants in the potential-self inviter condition ($M = 2.59$, $SD = 1.40$) overestimated how irritated participants in the plan-holder condition would have been had they asked to join the plans ($M = 1.86$, $SD = 1.12$), $F(1, 159) = 13.42$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .078$, $CI_{95\%}$ for difference = [.34, 1.13]. In accordance with H3a, participants in the potential-self inviter condition ($M = -1.99$, $SD = 2.24$) overestimated the likelihood that participants in the plan-holder condition had thought

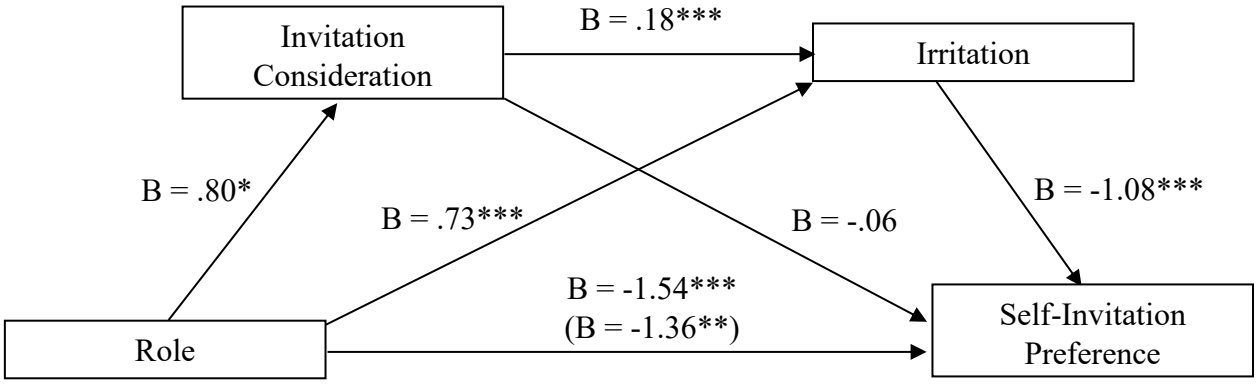
about inviting them but decided against it (vs. made plans without considering inviting them; M = -2.79, SD = 2.04), $F(1, 159) = 5.67$, $p = .018$, $\eta_p^2 = .034$, $CI_{95\%}$ for difference = [.14, 1.47].

We conducted a mediation analysis using PROCESS model 6 (Hayes, 2017), with role as the independent variable, self-invitation preference as the dependent variable, invitation consideration as the first stage in the mediation pathway, and irritation as the second stage in the mediation pathway. As per H2b and H3b, the 95% confidence interval for the serial indirect effect was significant (indirect effect = -.15, $CI_{95\%}$ = [-.37, -.02]; Figure 4).[5] That is, potential self-inviters exaggerate how irritated plan-holders would be by self-invitations, as they overestimate the likelihood that plan-holders had thought about inviting them but decided against it (vs. made plans without considering inviting them). This two-step process appears to be part of the reason that potential self-inviters do not self-invite as often as plan-holders would prefer.

[5] An alternative serial mediation model with the mediator order flipped did not have a significant serial indirect effect ($CI_{95\%}$ = [.00, .23]). This is unsurprising, given that this order makes little conceptual sense.

Figure 4

Mediation Analysis in Study 2b



Note. Role coded as: 1 = potential self-inviter, 0 = plan-holder. Values indicate unstandardized regression coefficients. Value in parentheses indicates results when we included role, irritation, and invitation consideration in the regression. *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$. $r_{\text{InvitationConsideration-Irritation}} = .30$, $p < .001$.

Studies 2a-b Summary

These results offer support for H1-H3b. As before, we found mismatches in potential self-inviters' and plan-holders' self-invitation preference and how irritating the two parties consider a self-invitation to be. Moreover, we demonstrated that these asymmetries are rooted in potential self-inviters believing that plan-holders had already considered inviting them but decided against it (vs. made plans without considering inviting them). In the final study, we once again test this framework, only this time through a moderation approach.

Study 3

In Study 3, we sought to identify a theoretically relevant moderator. Specifically, we tested the hypothesis that the mismatch between potential self-inviters and plan-holders regarding self-invitation preference attenuates when plan-holders previously invited potential self-inviters to participate in the activity (H4). We crossed the role manipulation (i.e., potential self-inviter vs. plan-holder) with a manipulation that involved whether or not the self-inviter was previously invited to participate in the activity. We hypothesized that the self-invitation

preference asymmetry would emerge when an invitation was not previously extended but would weaken when it was previously extended because there would be no guesswork for potential self-inviters regarding whether the plan-holders had already considered inviting them.

Method

We preregistered the study (https://aspredicted.org/vq2q-chnh.pdf). We recruited 403 U.S. and Canadian Prolific workers and excluded four for failing the attention check (one from the potential self-inviter–no condition, two from the plan-holder–no condition, and one from the plan-holder–yes condition). The final sample comprised 399 participants (213 women, 186 men), ranging in age from 19 to 78 years (M = 38.5, SD = 12.6). We randomly assigned them to a condition of a 2 (role: potential self-inviter vs. plan-holder) × 2 (previous invitation: no vs. yes) between-subjects design.

In the previous invitation–no conditions, Study 3 was similar to Study 2b, except for the following. First, we included an initial question on whether the participant had more female or male friends, and we adjusted the vignette for each participant accordingly. Second, participants responded to only one measure asking them their self-invitation preference (1 = *definitely no*, 7 = *definitely yes*). Using an interval (vs. binary) measure gave us more statistical power (Schmitz et al., 2012), which was critical given our hypothesized interaction.

In the previous invitation–yes conditions, the current study deviated from Study 2b in an additional manner. The vignette explained that the two planning friends had previously invited the potential self-inviter to the museum, but the potential self-inviter declined due to another engagement. However, that engagement had been cancelled, so the potential self-inviter was now free to go.

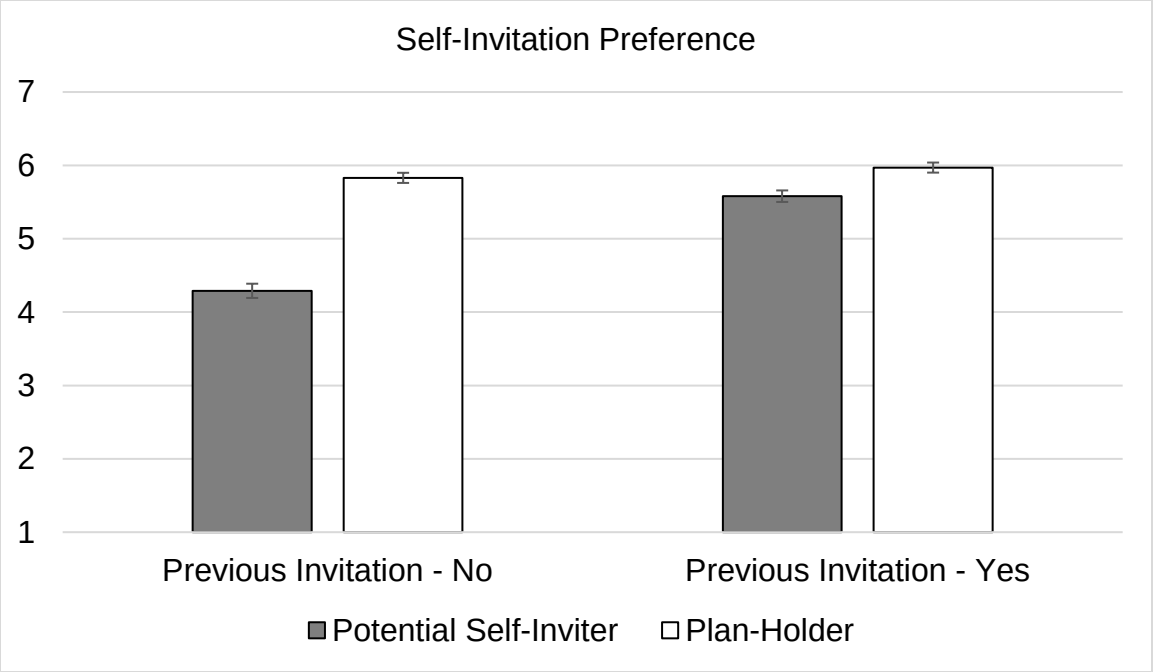
Results and Discussion

An ANOVA on self-invitation preference, with role, previous invitation, and their interaction as independent variables revealed a significant main effect of both role, $F(1, 395) = 36.93$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .086$, and previous invitation, $F(1, 395) = 20.35$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .049$. Critically, and in line with H4, it also revealed a significant interaction, $F(1, 395) = 13.00$, $p <$

.001, $\eta_p^2 = .032$ (Figure 5). As before, in the case of the previous invitation–no conditions, participants in the potential-self inviter condition ($M = 4.29$, $SD = 1.93$, $n = 99$) did not ask to join the plans as often as those in the plan-holder condition would have preferred ($M = 5.83$, $SD = 1.37$, $n = 98$), $F(1, 159) = 46.29$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .105$, $CI_{95\%}$ for difference = [1.09, 1.98]. However, in the case of the previous invitation–yes conditions, the difference attenuated ($M_{PotentialSelf\text{-}Inviter} = 5.58$, $SD_{PotentialSelf\text{-}Inviter} = 1.58$, $n = 102$ vs. $M_{Plan\text{-}Holder} = 5.97$, $SD_{Plan\text{-}Holder} = 1.37$, $n = 100$), $F(1, 159) = 3.09$, $p = .079$, $\eta_p^2 = .008$, $CI_{95\%}$ for difference = [-.05, .83].

Figure 5

Study 3 Results



Note. Each error bar represents the standard error of the mean.

The results provide additional support for our theoretical framework. Consistent with H4, the self-invitation preference asymmetry attenuated when plan-holders had previously asked potential self-inviters to join the activity. In this case, potential self-inviters no longer had to fear

that plan-holders may have considered inviting them but decided against it, thus making them more comfortable with self-inviting.

General Discussion

Across six studies (with two more discussed below), we examined the psychological processes involved with self-invitations. We showed that potential self-inviters do not self-invite as often as plan-holders would prefer, because potential self-inviters exaggerate how irritated plan-holders would be by such self-invitations (Studies 1a-c). Further, we demonstrated that these discrepancies stem from the two parties holding diverging views about the mindsets of plan-holders when they originally made the plans. Potential self-inviters exaggerate the likelihood that plan-holders had already thought about inviting them but decided against it (vs. made plans without considering inviting them; Studies 2a-b). Consistent with this framework, we also showed that when there is no guesswork involved for potential self-inviters regarding plan-holders' mindsets—such as when a plan-holder previously invited a potential self-inviter—potential self-inviters invite themselves as often as plan-holders would prefer (Study 3).

Theoretical Contributions

Our work contributes to the growing literature on the psychological processes encompassing invitations. Whereas extant research in this area has concentrated on standard invitations (Donnelly et al., 2021; Givi & Kirk, 2023; Lu et al., 2022), in which someone with plans asks another individual to join them, our work instead focused on self-invitations, in which a person asks to join the plans of others. Self-invitations occur regularly in everyday life, yet they have not attracted the attention of social psychologists. Our work thus bridges a notable gap in the literature. In doing so, we documented a novel asymmetry, namely that potential self-inviters are less likely to engage in self-inviting than plan-holders would prefer. This is less than ideal. Spending time with others provides numerous benefits, ranging from increasing well-being (Hudson et al., 2020) to making life more meaningful (Nelson et al., 2012). When someone refrains from self-inviting, they miss out on these positive outcomes. Moreover, plan-holders may not recognize that a potential self-inviter would like to join an activity nor think about

inviting them, thus keeping them from extending an invitation and keeping these benefits from emerging.

Beyond exploring a new context and documenting a novel phenomenon, we also explored this phenomenon's psychological underpinnings. We showed that potential self-inviters and plan holders disagree on two fronts. First, potential self-inviters exaggerate how irritated plan-holders would be by a self-invitation. Second, whereas plan-holders oftentimes make plans without considering inviting others, potential self-inviters exaggerate the relative likelihood that plan-holders had instead already considered inviting them but refrained from doing so. Thus, our work adds to the literature at the intersection of invitations and emotions (Givi & Kirk, 2023; Lu et al., 2022) as well as the literature documenting people's aversion to engaging in behaviors that might seem intrusive (Epley & Schroeder, 2014; Bohns, 2016; Zhao & Epley, 2022). Moreover, recall that we drew on two literatures in developing our rationale for why potential self-inviters are sensitive to the possibility that plan-holders thought about inviting them but decided against it. One literature was on egocentrism (Gilovich & Savitsky, 1999). The other literature was on people's particular sensitivity to negative outcomes (Rozin & Royzman, 2001). Our findings bolster the prevalence and relevance of these two conceptual frameworks.

Our findings also indicate that there are cases when potential self-inviters are more likely to behave in manners that are consistent with plan-holders' preferences. That is, when there is no uncertainty involved for potential self-inviters concerning plan-holders' mindsets at the time they made the plans—such as when a plan-holder previously invited a potential self-inviter—the discrepancy between potential-self-inviters and plan-holders diminishes. Although a prior invitation from a plan-holder can make potential self-inviters more comfortable with self-inviting, our work suggests an additional strategy for plan-holders. Whenever a plan-holder mentions plans to a potential self-inviter, they should be sure to offer an invitation to the potential self-inviter, rather than presume that the potential self-inviter assumes they are invited or leave it to the potential self-inviter to self-invite. Our studies demonstrate that potential self-

inviters are relatively averse to self-inviting; so, plan-holders can render this aversion moot by taking matters into their own hands.

Limitations and Future Research

Our work is not without limitations. Analyzing cross-sectional data with mediation models has its drawbacks (Maxwell & Cole, 2007; O'Laughlin et al., 2018). That said, we tested a specific set of hypotheses, derived from sound theoretical rationale. Moreover, by empirically testing the hypotheses, we placed them at risk (i.e., we could have found that they were not supported), making the tests informative (Anderson & Bushman, 1997; Fiedler et al., 2011). Finally, we also demonstrated theory-relevant moderation, thus providing support for our theorizing in an additional manner.

In addition, in Studies 1a and 2a, approximately three-fourths of participants could recall a recent real-life self-invitation scenario, meaning that about one-fourth of them could not. This raises questions about the prevalence of self-invitations. But, of course, part of the objective of this article is to demonstrate that self-invitations are rather rare. Relatedly, our studies were restricted to instances in which the potential self-inviter would self-invite by asking to join the activity, rather than by stating that they are joining. Although the former is more common (see pilot study), we felt it was worthwhile to test our main hypothesis (H1) with the latter for the sake of generalizability. Accordingly, we ran Study A1 (Appendix B), which employed Study 1c's vignette but indicated that the potential self-inviter would state "I'll join you" (rather than ask to join). Again supporting H1, potential self-inviters were less likely to self-invite relative to what plan-holders would have preferred.

Like most findings in social psychology, it is possible that H1 is driven by multiple psychological mechanisms. We deemed that three were worth examining empirically. First, there is a wide body of research demonstrating that people underestimate the likelihood that others will comply with requests (Bohns, 2016). This suggests that, in the present setting, potential self-inviters may not ask to join the plans of others because they underestimate the likelihood that they will be told yes. Second, it is possible that potential self-inviters may not ask to join plans in

some cases because they excessively worry that they will cause logistical problems by joining (e.g., a need to re-think transportation plans or purchase an additional ticket to an event). Third, it is possible that, due to social desirability, plan-holders in our studies reported that they would want the potential self-inviter to ask to join when they did not actually prefer this. Accordingly, we conducted Study A2 (Appendix C) to examine these accounts. A vignette explicitly stated that, because of how socially close the potential self-inviter and plan-holder were, the plan-holder would say yes if they were asked by the potential self-inviter to join (thereby addressing an underestimation of compliance possibility). Further, the activity that the potential self-inviter would join was a walk in the park, and the potential self-inviter would meet the plan-holders at the park (thereby addressing a worry about logistical problems possibility). Finally, we included the Impression Management Scale (IMS; Paulhus, 1991), an individual difference measure of socially desirable responses. In line with H1, our results revealed that potential self-inviters were less likely to self-invite relative to what plan-holders would have preferred. Moreover, this pattern of results did not change when accounting for social desirability. In summary, this study addresses some alternative explanations and differentiates our work from prior literature (Bohns, 2016).

There are also other interesting and potentially relevant elements that we did not address. For example, we examined ordinary, everyday social activities rather than large-scale, structured activities. We also focused on situations in which two plan-holders had plans, as opposed to more than two or only one. These open ends provide opportunities for follow-up research. Might our effects attenuate when the activity in question is more significant, or when a plan-holder has plans with either multiple other people or only themselves? For example, when a plan-holder has plans to do something by themselves, it is possible that a potential self-inviter may think that the plan-holder did *not* consider inviting them or anyone else at all, thus making them more likely to self-invite. It is also possible that plan-holders may be even more welcoming of self-invitations in these cases, because a self-invitation would give them a companion for the activity.

Another future direction involves identifying strategies that are most effective when a person engages in self-inviting. If they are planning to self-invite by asking, should they simply ask to join or should they preface the question in some way (e.g., flattery, guilt-tripping)? Alternatively, future work could examine the strategies that plan-holders use to turn down a self-inviter who is not welcome. Which strategies are most prevalent? Which are most effective? Which do the best job of keeping the relationship from being harmed? The systematic examination of the factors that make someone more or less likely to self-invite is also worth undertaking. There could be cultural differences (Lee et al., 2023), personality traits (Sedikides, 2021), and many other aspects that influence one's proclivity for self-inviting. Conversely, various factors may influence how receptive a plan-holder is to another person self-inviting. For example, plan-holders may be less receptive to self-invitations when a potential self-inviter is merely an acquaintance (vs. friend) or when the plan-holder is excited to spend quality one-on-one time with the person with whom they made the plans.

It would also be interesting to explore the degree to which potential self-inviters think that plan-holders like them. Some research suggests that people generally underestimate how much they are liked by others (Boothby et al., 2018), but other research indicates the opposite (Sedikides & Gregg, 2008). In the present context, it is possible that as a byproduct of potential self-inviters overestimating the likelihood that plan-holders had thought about inviting them but decided against it (vs. made plans without considering inviting them), potential self-inviters also underestimate how much plan-holders like them. It is also possible that the process works the other way, with potential self-inviters underestimating how much others like them, leading them to overestimate the likelihood that plan-holders had thought about inviting them but decided against it. Empirical verification of these possibilities are needed.

Finally, Study 3 has some limitations that follow-up work could address. First, although it seems a reasonable presumption, we could have confirmed with a manipulation check participants' understanding that the prior invitation from the plan-holders to the potential self-inviter eliminated the possibility that the plan-holders thought about inviting the potential self-

inviter but decided against it. Second, though potential self-inviters in both conditions would have missed out on attending a social event if they did not ask to join the plans, those in the previous invitation–yes condition had declined the prior invitation because of another engagement that was ultimately cancelled. It is thus possible that because potential self-inviters in this condition had already planned to engage in an activity, they were more averse to missing out on the opportunity for social interaction (although we did not specify whether their prior engagement was social in nature).

Concluding Remarks

We hope that readers take our findings to heart. The next time you find yourself wanting to join the plans of others, do not be afraid to ask to do so. Our studies show that they will not be nearly as irritated as you might expect and that there is a good chance that the prospect of inviting you merely simply slipped their mind.

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