Rejecters Overestimate the Negative Consequences They Will Face From Refusal

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People often find it difficult to refuse requests from others partially because they are concern about the negative consequences they will face from saying "no." However, are these concerns well founded? The results from seven studies ($N = 2,132$) and four supplementary studies ($N = 1,470$) showed that rejecters overestimated these negative consequences. This overestimation persisted in hypothetical (Studies 1 and 3), real-life (Study 2), and incentivized (Study 4) settings. We also found that this overestimation resulted from a desire to avoid negative consequences. As the cost was sometimes larger for underestimation than for overestimation in refusal, exaggerating the negative outcomes of refusal faced by rejecters may help prepare for or even eliminate them, and eventually satisfy people's desire to avoid negative consequences. If the desire to avoid negative consequences weakened, this overestimation reduced or disappeared (Studies 5–7).

Public Significance Statement
This study suggests that people may overestimate the negative outcomes they will face from saying "no" because they are worried that the rejectees might cause harm to them in the future. Exaggerating the negative outcomes of refusal may help prepare for or even eliminate them. When rejectees are less likely to act unfriendly toward rejecters, rejecters can predict the outcomes of refusal more accurately.

Keywords: misprediction, refusal, motivated reasoning, worryful thinking, judgment and decision-making

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Saying "no" is difficult. Many people avoid refusing others even when faced with excessive requests that they cannot accommodate. For example, friends sometimes ask people for money to deal with mounting debts. Although the responders hardly expect a return, they still choose to comply. Many employees dare not to say "no" when asked to take on additional responsibilities unrelated to their core competencies. However, avoiding saying "no" can be detrimental to both responders and requesters. Due to constraints on

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time, energy, and ability, making commitments unwillingly can hinder responders' priorities and hurt their well-being. In the above examples, those who do not say "no" have to incur expenses to support their friends. Employees are stressed when performing off-duty tasks. Additionally, agreeing to do something that responders are unqualified to do also creates problems for the requesters.

Given these repercussions, why do people find it difficult to refuse others? In the decision-making process, responders consider the negative and positive consequences of their response. In the case of an academic journal editor asking a scholar to review an article, the negative outcome of refusal may be that the editor will be less likely to accept the scholar's submissions in the future. Positive outcomes of refusal include saving time and effort. Negative outcomes of compliance involve exerting additional time and effort. Positive outcomes of compliance include gaining the satisfaction of the editor. If the scholar overestimates the negative consequences of refusal, they will tend to accept the review request.

A quick survey ($N = 244$) suggested the potential relationship between the concerns about the negative outcomes of refusal and the tendency not to say "no." In deciding whether to accept or reject a request, 62.70% of the participants chose to comply, among which 53.59% worried about negative consequences if they refused others, including being badmouthed, judged as unhelpful, and not helped in return by rejectees (Supplemental Material A). These concerns were aligned with rejection reactions found in the literature (Buckley et al., 2004; Leary et al., 2006). We term these behaviors by rejectees as "unfriendly behaviors," which are harmful to

rejecters. In summary, responders may anticipate these negative outcomes (i.e., unfriendly behaviors from rejectees) when faced with requests for help.

However, are these concerns accurate? People are notorious for their mispredictions of others (Epley et al., 2004). For example, those who need help underestimate the likelihood of others agreeing to offer help (Flynn & Lake, 2008). Those who have been rejected in the past underestimated the compliance rate of a second request by those who have previously declined to help (Newark et al., 2014). Those who request help underpredict the amount of help others will offer (Newark et al., 2017).

Although research has extensively focused on requesters and has revealed their mispredictions regarding responders (Bohns, 2016), there is a lack of literature regarding responder mispredictions about requesters. Bohns and Flynn (2010) found that responders underestimated the feelings of embarrassment associated with requesting help and thus overestimated the possibility of someone requesting assistance. However, little is known about whether responders accurately predict requester reactions after rejection. Investigating this question is important, both theoretically and practically, as it can help reveal the psychological mechanisms of these predictions. Moreover, responders may make informed decisions regarding accepting or rejecting a request, according to the observed results.

In this study, we aimed to test whether the rejecter's predicted consequence faced by themselves from refusal is as serious as anticipated by using the actual evaluation made by the requester as a benchmark. We show that rejecters overestimate negative outcomes of rejection. The results suggest that this tendency may be due to rejecters' desire to avoid negative consequences.

Desire and Motivated Reasoning

Judgment is malleable and sometimes shaped by motivational states (Kunda, 1990). Wishful thinking and worryful thinking are two types of motivated reasoning. Wishful thinking biases people's judgments toward the optimistic direction, whereas worryful thinking biases judgments in the opposite direction (Dai & Hsee, 2013). These two types of thinking are usually treated as states (Dai & Hsee, 2013; Krizan & Windschitl, 2007; Rose & Aspiras, 2020). Thus, the same person can have wishful thoughts in one particular context, yet worryful ones in another.

Whether people adopt wishful or worryful thinking depends on their desires. People who are motivated to achieve a good state are more likely to adopt wishful thinking because it helps satisfy the positivity-seeking motive (Bar-Hillel & Budescu, 1995; Chambers & Windschitl, 2004; Krizan & Windschitl, 2007). If a person is hungry and desires apples, this situation triggers a positivity-seeking motive. Now, an apple tree is 1 km ahead. How will one perceive the distance between the tree and themselves? They may adopt wishful thinking and perceive the tree as close. This wishful thinking motivates them to get apples. Likewise, impoverished children desired more money. Driven by this positivity-seeking motive, they perceived coins as larger than rich children (Bruner & Goodman, 1947). Hungry participants who *did not own a cake yet* desired food. To pursue the positive state, they adopted wishful thinking and perceived a cake *not owned by them* to be larger than satiated participants did (Dai & Hsee, 2013).

In contrast, people motivated to avoid an undesirable state are more likely to adopt worryful thinking (Dai & Hsee, 2013; Shepperd et al., 2000; Sweeny & Shepperd, 2007). Imagine that a person is afraid of spiders and desires to live in an environment without them. Now, the spider is 2 m away. People who adopt worryful thinking may underestimate the distance and perceive the spider as closer to them. Worryful thinking confers both benefits and costs. It promotes awareness of potential dangers and activates actions to eliminate their negative influences (e.g., fighting against the spider or flight away; Norem & Cantor, 1986). However, it also induces emotional suffering. People who adopt worryful thinking are likely to be unnecessarily anxious (Sweeny & Shepperd, 2007). Given these benefits and costs, it is better to adopt worryful (vs. wishful) thinking when people are motivated to avoid negative outcomes because worryful thinking is beneficial for eliminating harm (Dai & Hsee, 2013; Lim, 2009; Shepperd et al., 1996).

Research has provided empirical evidence for this reasoning. For example, one study informed students that some would be selected to pay an extra bill. The financially needy students (vs. financially secure students) had a stronger desire to avoid the expenses of an extra bill. Hence, they predicted a higher likelihood of receiving a bill than financially secure students (Sweeny & Shepperd, 2007). Similarly, hungry (vs. satiated) participants who *already owned a cake* were more worried that *their cake* was not sufficiently large to satisfy them. This desire to avoid an undesirable state caused a smaller perception of their cake (Dai & Hsee, 2013).

Rejecters' Worryful Thinking and Overestimation of Negative Outcomes

As rejecters are subject to negative consequences from rejectees (i.e., unfriendly behaviors), rejecters desire to avoid these negative outcomes. Given that it is difficult to accurately predict the exact level of these negative consequences, rejecters need to compare the costs of wishful thinking (i.e., underestimation) and worryful thinking (i.e., overestimation). In the journal article review example, underestimating the negative consequences of rejecting reviewing an article may result in a higher cost than overestimation. If a scholar predicts that an editor will consider their submissions in the future but the editor tends to reject them, the scholar may receive unexpected rejections from this journal. Conversely, if the scholar predicts that the editor will not consider their submissions yet the editor still does so, the scholar will be unnecessarily anxious. Furthermore, this pessimistic estimation is functional as it can motivate preparation for potentially negative consequences and eventually help to avoid them (Dai & Hsee, 2013; Lim, 2009; Norem & Cantor, 1986). To minimize the possibility of receiving rejections, scholars who overestimate the negative consequences of rejecting a request to review an article may avoid submitting their articles to the journal. In other words, overestimation of negative consequences eventually helps to eliminate these consequences.

Taken together, we hypothesize that rejecters will overestimate the negative consequences they will face from refusal. The mechanism of this overestimation is the rejecters' desire to avoid negative consequences. We term this mechanism "negativity avoidance."

Self-Focus as an Alternative Explanation

Theoretically, self-focus can also explain the hypothesized overestimation. The tendency to unduly focus on oneself causes an overestimation of the influence of one's behaviors (Gilovich et al., 2000; Savitsky et al., 2001). For example, Savitsky et al. (2001) showed that people's expected evaluations of their *faux pas* by observers were harsher than observers' evaluations because they overfocused on their mistakes. According to the self-focus account, as rejecters tend to concentrate more on their actions than rejectees, rejecters may overestimate the negative influence of refusal, and thus overestimate the level of unfriendly behaviors from rejectees.

According to our negativity-avoidance mechanism, as the hypothesized overestimation (at least partially) stems from the desire to avoid negative consequences, the level of overestimation should be a function of the negativity-avoidance motivation. Specifically, when rejecters believe that rejectees are less likely to retaliate or rejectees' unfriendly behaviors are less harmful and thus have a lower desire to avoid negative outcomes, their overestimation will be weaker. However, according to the self-focus explanation, the level of overestimation does not change with the desire to avoid negative outcomes, as rejecters consistently focus on their behaviors regardless of the level of desire.

Therefore, we tease apart the negativity-avoidance mechanism from the self-focus explanation by manipulating the rejecters' desire to avoid negative outcomes. We contrast situations in which people refuse a request to those in which they comply. People may have less reason to anticipate negative consequences from a requester when they comply as compared to when they reject the request. Reduced likelihood of negative consequences in the compliance situation, should, in turn, reduce the motivation to avoid negative consequences and as a result, overestimation of negative consequences. We also contrast close future connection to loose future connection between rejecters and rejectees. A rejecter tends to worry less about the negative consequences from the rejectee if they will hardly see the rejectee in the future, again because the negative consequences are less likely to occur. In addition, we contrast a powerful rejectee to a powerless rejectee. As unfriendly behaviors from a powerless rejectee will be less influential to the rejecter than those from a powerful rejectee, the rejecter will be less motivated to avoid these negative consequences. In addition, if the negativity-avoidance mechanism works, the above three manipulations will reduce the overestimation made by the rejecter. However, if the self-focus mechanism works, the level of overestimation will remain unchanged.

Study Overview

We report seven studies and four supplementary studies to test our hypotheses. Studies 1–4 showed the basic effect that rejecters overestimated the negative consequences they would face from refusal. In Study 1, the participants imagined themselves as either rejecters or rejectees. Rejecters predicted the negative consequences of refusal, whereas rejectees evaluated actual negative consequences. We found evidence for our hypothesized overestimation. In Study 2, we asked participants to recall real-life refusal and replicated the overestimation. The measurements in Studies 1 and 2 might have activated rejectees' self-presentational concerns. It was possible that rejectees might indeed want to do something

unfriendly to rejecters but be reluctant to admit it. Studies 3 and 4 showed that the overestimation persisted in cases without rejectees' self-presentational concerns.

Studies 5–7 tested the negativity-avoidance mechanism of the overestimation. In Study 5, we contrasted situations in which people refused a request to those in which they complied. In the compliance condition, the responder's desire to avoid negative consequences should be weaker because they should think that the other person is less likely to want to retaliate if they comply. We found no mispredictions for the compliance condition. In Study 6, we manipulated the rejectee's power over the rejecter. When a rejectee has lower power, their unfriendly behaviors will have less influence on the rejecter, and the rejecter will have a lower desire to avoid these negative consequences. We found an accurate prediction in the low-power condition, and an overestimation in the high-power condition. In Study 7, we manipulated the future connection between the rejectee and the rejecter. When the two parties are less likely to connect, the rejectee will have fewer opportunities to behave unfriendly, and the rejecter will have a lower desire to avoid these negative outcomes. We revealed an accurate prediction in the loose-connection condition and an overestimation in the close-connection condition. These results support the negativity-avoidance mechanism.

Across studies, the negative consequences that rejecters might face (i.e., unfriendly behaviors from rejectees) were captured by multiple dependent variables such as negative evaluations, the spread of negative information, and the unlikelihood of reciprocity (Buckley et al., 2004; Leary et al., 2006). Furthermore, as emotion is a strong trigger for behaviors (Lerner et al., 2015), rejectees' reactions may stem from their feelings (Buckley et al., 2004). To illustrate this point, a very angry rejectee is more likely to harm the rejecter than a slightly angry one. Thus, we investigated the feelings of the rejectees in some studies.

Power analysis with a medium effect size ($d = 0.50$ or $f = 0.25$) showed that 105 participants per cell ensured sufficient power (.95) for an independent sample t test, paired-sample t test, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) for three conditions, or 2×2 ANOVA. Therefore, approximately 105 participants per cell were recruited for each study. All materials are provided in Supplemental Material J and all data can be accessed at https://osf.io/psdzq/ (Lu et al., 2022). The research was approved by the ethics committee of East China Normal University.

Study 1

Study 1 tested whether rejecters' predicted negative consequences of refusal would be more severe than rejectees' actual evaluations. This study was preregistered on OSF (https://osf.io/psdzq/).

Method

Participants and Design

Two hundred ten participants recruited from Credamo, an online survey platform similar to MTurk, were randomly assigned to the rejecter or rejectee condition. Those who passed the attention check ($N = 209$; 104 men, 105 women; $M_{age} = 29.96$ years, $SD = 6.27$, range = 18–55) were included in the analyses.

Materials and Procedure

The participants read a hypothetical scenario. The rejecters imagined that their friend Zhang had asked them to help design a logo and that they had refused because they were already occupied. The rejectees imagined the scenario from the point of view of the requester. Immediately after reading the scenario, the participants completed the attention check and indicated who (themselves or their friends) rejected the request. Next, rejecters predicted the negative consequences of refusal, whereas rejectees evaluated the negative consequences. We measured five dimensions, among which four were the rejectees' behaviors or behavioral tendencies (rejectees' negative evaluations of rejecters, negative relationships between rejecters and rejectees, rejectees' unlikelihood of reciprocity, and the probability of rejectees spreading negative information about rejecters), and one was about feelings (rejectees' negative emotions). The items are listed in Table 1.[1] Finally, the participants reported their age and gender and were debriefed.

Results and Discussion

The means and standard deviations for the rejecter and rejectee conditions per item are provided in Supplemental Material C. The evaluation changes, relationship changes, and unlikelihood of reciprocity were reverse-scored. Thus, for all items, higher scores indicate more negative consequences. We further calculated a standardized z score for each item. An average of the dimensions of negative emotions, negative evaluations, and the spread of negative information was computed. Each of the dimensions of relationship changes and the unlikelihood of reciprocity had one item; however, we reported their z scores for consistency.

As presented in Table 2, independent t tests showed that the rejecter's predicted negative emotions, $t(207) = 3.90, p < .001, d = 0.54$, negative evaluations, $t(207) = 4.69, p < .001, d = 0.65$, relationship changes, $t(207) = 3.47, p = .001, d = 0.48$, unlikelihood of reciprocity, $t(207) = 2.99, p = .003, d = 0.41$, and the spread of negative information, $t(207) = 5.18, p < .001, d = 0.72$, were more negative than the rejectee's evaluations.[2]

Two additional studies were subsequently conducted (Supplemental Materials D and E). In these studies, the requester made a request for their group or a third party rather than for themselves, and the rejecter refused to offer help because of unsuitable qualifications, or the reason for refusal was not made explicit. The results of Study 1 were replicated. These three studies revealed a misprediction whereby rejecters overestimated the negative consequences of refusal.

However, rejectees in these three studies, to some extent, imagined their reactions rather than rated their reactions. In the next study, rejecters and rejectees recalled their real-life experiences and rejectees rated their true feelings.

Study 2

In this study, we used a recall paradigm and asked participants to recall an experience in which they either rejected a request or were rejected. We aimed to test whether the overestimation observed in Study 1 could be extended to real-life experiences.

Method

Participants and Design

We posted an online recruitment advertisement to students from a public university and recruited 102 participants (27 men, 75 women; $M_{age} = 22.16$ years, $SD = 2.41$, range = 18–27). They recalled and wrote down an experience in which they rejected a request from their friends or were rejected by their friends. They also provided the contact information of their friends. Of the 102 participants, seven (6.9%) refused to provide their friends' contact information, seven (6.9%) claimed that they did not have their friends' contact information, and nine (8.8%) did not describe an experience as required. Therefore, we attempted to contact 79 friends. Of the 79 friends, 17 (21.5%) did not respond, one (1.3%) refused to respond, and 61 (77.2%; 19 men, 42 women; $M_{age} = 22.64$ years, $SD = 3.33$, range = 18–40) completed our questionnaire. Thus, 61 pairs of participants were included.

Materials and Procedure

The participants were told that people sometimes asked for help but were rejected, or that people sometimes rejected requests from others. The participants were asked to describe an experience in which they had rejected a request from their friend (i.e., rejecters) or were rejected by their friend (i.e., rejectees). They also provided the contact information of their friends. We told the participants that we would contact their friends later to ask them some questions about the experience, but we would not inform their friends about their ratings regarding the experience.

Next, rejecters predicted the negative consequences of refusal, whereas rejectees evaluated these consequences. As the participants described different experiences, we used only three items (i.e., evaluation changes, relationship changes, and the unlikelihood of reciprocity) in Table 1 because these items may apply to most refusals.[3] "Zhang" was replaced by "your friend." Finally, the participants reported their age and gender and were debriefed.

Subsequently, we contacted the 79 friends and provided them with the experience described by their friends. Knowing that their ratings would not be revealed to their friends, the rejecters predicted the negative consequences of refusal, whereas the rejectees evaluated these consequences. Sixty-one participants completed these measures. Finally, the participants reported their age and gender and were debriefed.

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[1] The wording was changed slightly from the materials in the preregistration for precise translation from Chinese to English. Moreover, in the preregistration, we treated "How will Zhang evaluate their relationship with you after being rejected by you, relative to before?" and "How likely is Zhang to help you if you ask them for help in the future?" as items of negative relationships. However, we later realized that they reflected different constructs. The former captures relationship changes whereas the latter captures the unlikelihood of reciprocity.

[2] We asked the rejecters to predict these negative consequences. However, would they voluntarily anticipate these consequences? The results of a survey provided a positive answer (Supplemental Material B).

[3] We did not test the spread of negative information because people can spread information about a person only when the two have friends in common. However, we did not know in advance whether the rejecters and rejectees had mutual friends.

Table 1

Items in Study 1

Dimension	Rejecter's prediction	Rejectee's evaluation	Scale
Negative emotions	How angry will Zhang be after being rejected by you?	How angry are you after being rejected by Zhang?	From 0 (*not at all*) to 10 (*very much*)
	How unhappy will Zhang be after being rejected by you?	How unhappy are you after being rejected by Zhang?	From 0 (*not at all*) to 10 (*very much*)
	How hurt will Zhang be after being rejected by you?	How hurt are you after being rejected by Zhang?	From 0 (*not at all*) to 10 (*very much*)
Negative evaluations	How disobliging will Zhang think you are after being rejected by you?	How disobliging do you think Zhang is after being rejected by them?	From 0 (*not at all*) to 10 (*very much*)
	How unfriendly will Zhang think you are after being rejected by you?	How unfriendly do you think Zhang is after being rejected by them?	From 0 (*not at all*) to 10 (*very much*)
	How will Zhang's evaluation of you change after they are rejected by you, relative to their prior evaluation?	How does your evaluation of Zhang change after you are rejected by them, relative to your prior evaluation?	From −5 (*more negative*) to 5 (*more positive*)[a]
Relationship changes	How will Zhang evaluate their relationship with you after being rejected by you, relative to before?	How do you evaluate your relationship with Zhang after being rejected by them, compared to before?	From −5 (*worse*) to 5 (*better*)[a]
Unlikelihood of reciprocity	How likely is Zhang to help you if you ask them for help in the future?	How likely are you to help Zhang if asked in the future?	From 0 (*totally unlikely*) to 10 (*very likely*)[a]
Spread of negative information	How likely is Zhang to tell others that you are a disobliging person?	How likely are you to tell others that Zhang is a disobliging person?	From 0 (*totally unlikely*) to 10 (*very likely*)
	How likely is Zhang to tell others that you are an unfriendly person?	How likely are you to tell others that Zhang is an unfriendly person?	From 0 (*totally unlikely*) to 10 (*very likely*)

[a] Reverse-scored items.

Results and Discussion

In this study, the three items were not reverse-scored so that lower scores indicate more negative consequences. As presented in Table 3, paired-sample t tests showed that the rejecter's predicted evaluation changes, $t(60) = −2.29$, $p = .026$, $d = 0.29$; relationship changes, $t(60) = −1.79$, $p = .078$, $d = 0.23$; and likelihood of reciprocity, $t(60) = −3.80$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.49$, were more negative than the rejectee's evaluations.

These results showed that the overestimation made by the rejecters can be generalized to real refusals. Nevertheless, the measurements in Studies 1 and 2 raised the question of whether the observed effect can be attributed to social desirability on the part of the rejectee. Social desirability refers to people's behavior in accordance with social norms for self-presentational concerns. As acting unfriendly to others (e.g., badmouthing the rejecters) is socially undesirable, rejecters may accurately predict rejectees' true feelings, whereas rejectees may hide their true thoughts by falsely rating the consequences of refusal more positively. Studies 3

and 4 demonstrated that our hypothesized overestimation persisted after controlling for social desirability.

Study 3

Study 3 aimed to test whether rejecters' overestimation could be completely attributed to social desirability by adding a "third-person rejectee" condition (Savitsky et al., 2001), in which the participants imagined that they were the third-person rejectee being rejected together with another rejectee. Thus, both the third-person rejectee and another rejectee experienced the same scenario. However, instead of rating their reactions after being rejected, the third-person rejectee guessed the reactions of another rejectee. Thus, the third-person rejectee did not have the self-presentational concern in rating how another rejectee would do to the rejecter. A comparison between the rejecter's predictions and the third-person rejectee's evaluations enabled us to investigate whether the mispredictions revealed in Studies 1 and 2 would persist

Table 2

Means (Standard Deviations) for Each Dimension in Study 1

Variable	Rejecter (predicted)	Rejectee (actual)
Negative emotions (averaged z score; α = .95)	0.24 (0.84)	−0.26 (1.01)
Negative evaluations (averaged z score; α = .88)	0.27 (0.84)	−0.29 (0.88)
Relationship changes (z score)	0.23 (1.07)	−0.24 (0.87)
Unlikelihood of reciprocity (z score)	0.20 (0.94)	−0.21 (1.02)
Spread of negative information (averaged z score; α = .98)	0.32 (0.95)	−0.35 (0.91)

Table 3
Means (Standard Deviations) for Each Item in Study 2

Variable	Rejecter (predicted)	Rejectee (actual)
Evaluation changes	−0.93 (1.28)	−0.49 (1.29)
Relationship changes	−0.49 (1.18)	−0.13 (1.19)
Likelihood of reciprocity	5.90 (1.90)	7.18 (2.09)

in the absence of social desirability. If the rejecter's overestimation originated solely from the rejectee's social desirability concern, no difference would emerge between the rejecter's predictions and the third-person rejectee's ratings.

Method

Participants and Design

We recruited 323 participants (125 men and 198 women; M_{age} = 30.29 years, SD = 7.72, range = 18–64) via wjx.cn, an online survey platform similar to MTurk. The participants were randomly assigned to one of three conditions: rejecter, rejectee, or third-person rejectee. All the participants passed the attention check.

Materials and Procedure

The participants read a scenario similar to that used in Supplemental Study B. The rejecters imagined being asked by two friends, Zhang and A, to donate to a children's charity. However, they refused to participate. Those in the rejectee and third-person rejectee conditions imagined themselves along with friend A, asking Zhang to donate to the same charity. However, Zhang refused to do so.

Subsequently, the participants completed the attention check and indicated who (themselves or their friends) rejected the request. The rejecters then predicted the consequences of refusal on items similar to those in Study 1 (e.g., "How angry will Zhang be after being rejected by you?"). The rejectees evaluated the consequences (e.g., "How angry are you after being rejected by Zhang?"). The participants in the third-person rejectee condition evaluated the reactions of another rejectee (e.g., "How angry will A be after being rejected by Zhang?"). Finally, the participants reported their age and gender and were debriefed.

Results and Discussion

The means and standard deviations per item are provided in Supplemental Material F. The data were computed as in Study 1.

Higher scores indicate more negative consequences. One-way ANOVA revealed differences among the three conditions (Table 4) for negative emotions, $F(1, 320) = 21.95$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .12$; negative evaluations, $F(1, 320) = 16.52$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .09$; relationship changes, $F(1, 320) = 7.95$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .05$; unlikelihood of reciprocity, $F(1, 320) = 6.94$, $p = .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$; and the spread of negative information, $F(1, 320) = 20.88$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .12$.

Fisher's least significant difference (LSD) post hoc tests showed that the rejecter exaggerated the rejectee's negative emotions ($MD = 0.68, p < .001, d = 0.80$), negative evaluations ($MD = 0.59, p < .001, d = 0.74$), relationship changes ($MD = 0.53, p < .001, d = 0.52$), the unlikelihood of reciprocity ($MD = 0.50, p < .001, d = 0.50$), and the spread of negative information ($MD = 0.81, p < .001, d = 0.85$).

We compared the third-person rejectee's and rejectee's evaluations to identify the impact of social desirability. The third-person rejectee's evaluations were more severe than the rejectee's on the unlikelihood of reciprocity ($MD = 0.28, p = .039, d = 0.30$) and the spread of negative information ($MD = 0.43, p = .001, d = 0.59$). These results indicated that the rejectee might hide their true thoughts. However, the two roles' evaluations did not differ for negative emotions ($MD = 0.03, p = .771$), negative evaluations ($MD = 0.17, p = .110$), and relationship changes ($MD = 0.20, p = .140$).

Crucially, the rejecter's predicted consequences were more severe than those of the third-person rejectee (negative emotions: $MD = 0.65, p < .001, d = 0.81$; negative evaluations: $MD = 0.42, p < .001, d = 0.57$; relationship changes: $MD = 0.33, p = .013, d = 0.75$; unlikelihood of reciprocity: $MD = 0.22, p = .095, d = 0.23$; and the spread of negative information, $MD = 0.38, p = .002, d = 0.43$). These results indicated that mispredictions persisted in cases without rejectee's self-presentational concerns.

Notably, in Studies 1–3, the number of potential helpers was left open. Responders (rejecters) may have considered themselves the only ones able to do the favor (unique ability) or the only ones being asked for help (unique status). Therefore, responders (or rejecters) viewed rejection as a severe outcome. However, multiple others may have had the ability to provide help, and requesters (rejectees) may have solicited all potential helpers. Thus, rejection from a certain responder would not be consequential for the requesters (rejectees). These uniqueness-of-self beliefs may result in the rejecters' overestimation of negative consequences. In the next study, we precluded this explanation by creating a setting in which the rejecter was the only person who could offer assistance. Furthermore, we conducted Supplemental Study C (Supplemental Material G) to further eliminate this possibility.

Table 4
Means (Standard Deviations) for Each Dimension in Study 3

Variable	Rejecter (predicted)	Rejectee (actual)	The third-person rejectee
Negative emotions (averaged z score; α = .89)	0.44 (0.74)	−0.24 (0.94)	−0.21 (0.86)
Negative evaluations (averaged z score; α = .75)	0.34 (0.76)	−0.25 (0.84)	−0.09 (0.72)
Relationship changes (z score)	0.28 (1.07)	−0.24 (0.95)	−0.05 (0.91)
Unlikelihood of reciprocity (z score)	0.24 (1.00)	−0.26 (1.01)	0.02 (0.94)
Spread of negative information (averaged z score; α = .94)	0.39 (0.93)	−0.42 (0.97)	0.01 (0.84)

Study 4

In Study 4, we used a two-round token-distribution task to test our proposed mispredictions. In the first round, Participant A decided how to distribute 10 tokens, and Participant B's request for some was refused. In the second round, Participant B decided how to distribute 10 tokens, and Participant A asked for some tokens. Therefore, Participant B had the opportunity to "gain revenge." We tested whether Participant A (the rejecter from the first round) would underestimate the number of tokens that Participant B (the rejectee from the first round) would give to them. The tokens were converted into study payment.

By adopting the token-distribution task, we had three aims. First, we tested whether the findings in Studies 1–3 could be extended to the cases where the reaction of the rejectee was actual. In the previous studies, since reluctance to admit the desire to retaliate had few costs for rejectees, rejectees were likely to hide their true thoughts for self-presentational reasons. In Study 4, given that rejectees' reactions toward rejecters determined how many tokens both rejecters and rejectees would get, hiding the intention to retaliate was costly for rejectees (because rejectees would give away more tokens and keep fewer by doing so). Hence, we were more likely to detect the true reaction of rejectees and further eliminated the social desirability explanation.

Second, we aimed to rule out the possibility that the rejecters in Studies 1–3 made mispredictions merely because they did not have the motivation to predict accurately. To incentivize rejecters to make accurate predictions, rejecters would gain additional tokens if their predictions were accurate.

Third, we aimed to rule out the two explanations of uniqueness-of-self beliefs mentioned in the discussion of Study 3. Specifically, rejecters consider themselves the only ones able to do the favor or the only ones being asked for help, whereas multiple others are able to provide help and rejectees solicit all potential helpers. As the task in Study 4 involved only two roles (the requester and the rejecter), both the rejecter and rejectee knew that the rejecter was the only source of help. Therefore, if the two uniqueness-of-self beliefs are the explanations for overestimation on the part of rejecters, the overestimation should disappear. If the overestimation held in Study 4, the result ruled out the explanations of uniqueness-of-self beliefs.

Method

Participants and Design

We posted an online recruitment advertisement to students from a public university and recruited 210 participants. The participants were randomly paired. Each pair includes one rejectee and one rejecter. Two rejecters failed the attention check and we excluded data from their paired rejectees. Therefore, the final data set comprised 206 participants (79 men, 127 women; $M_{age} = 21.21$ years, $SD = 2.54$, range = 17–31).

Materials and Procedure

The participants were informed that the study involved a two-round token-distribution task and that their payoffs would be determined by the number of tokens they owned. The rejecters and rejectees entered two separate rooms and completed the tasks on a computer. In the first round, one participant (rejecter) distributed 10 tokens. Another participant (rejectee) sent the message "please give me some tokens" to the distributor. The distributor entered the number of tokens that they wanted to offer the requester on the computer. Regardless of the distributor's decision, both the distributor (rejecter) and requester (rejectee) were shown a statement on the computer stating that the distributor refused to give any tokens to the requester (rejectee). The experimenter then told the distributor (rejecter) that the statement appeared due to a programming error and that the requester (rejectee) had seen the refusal message and would not know the distribution to be a programming error before they completed all the tasks. Next, the distributor (rejecter) completed the attention check and indicated the message (refusal or compliance) received by the requester. The requester indicated the distributor's response (refusal or compliance). The rejecter then predicted negative emotions and evaluations, and the rejectee rated the negative emotions and evaluations, as in Study 1.

In the second round, the roles were reversed. The rejectee entered the number of tokens they would like to offer to the rejecter, whereas the rejecter predicted the number of tokens that the rejectee would give to them. To encourage accurate predictions, the rejecter gained two additional tokens if they made an accurate prediction. The participants then reported their age and gender.

Next, the experimenter told the participants that, owing to a programming error, they would receive five tokens in the first round. Their payoffs in the second round depended on the token distribution of the rejectees. Additionally, 23 rejecters who made accurate predictions received two additional tokens. The tokens were then converted into money. Finally, the participants were debriefed. No participants doubted the "programming error."

Results and Discussion

The means and standard deviations per item are provided in Supplemental Material H. The data were computed as in Study 1. As shown in Table 5, paired-sample t tests revealed that the rejecter overestimated the rejectee's negative emotions, $t(102) = 4.07$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.40$, and negative evaluations, $t(102) = 2.83$, $p = .006$, $d = 0.28$. Crucially, the rejectee gave more tokens to the rejecter than the rejecter predicted, $t(102) = -3.10$, $p = .002$, $d = -0.31$. This indicated that overestimation of the negative consequences of refusal persisted in an incentivized setting.

Study 5

In this study, we tested the negativity-avoidance mechanism by adding the compliance condition in which responders complied with the request. For responders, rejection is accompanied by possible negative consequences (i.e., unfriendly behaviors) from requesters. When responders accept a request, in most cases, they may encounter no negative consequences from requesters. However, in Study 5, we used a scenario in which the only potential consequences of either compliance or rejection were negative and controlled by the rejectee. This allowed us to test whether the overestimation of negative consequences would be reduced with compliance as compared to rejection. In the compliance condition, the responders' desire to avoid negative consequences should be weaker because they should think that the other person is less likely to want to retaliate if they comply. Therefore, we

hypothesized a reduced overestimation in the compliance condition compared to the refusal condition. Unlike the negativity-avoidance mechanism, the self-focus account predicts that overestimation should hold across the compliance and refusal conditions because responders consistently focus on themselves more than do requesters. We adopted an electric shock scenario in which the negative consequence was captured by the level of the electric shock that the requesters delivered to the responders. This study was preregistered on OSF (https://osf.io/psdzq/).

Method

Participants and Design

A total of 432 participants (153 men, 279 women; $M_{age} = 30.37$ years, $SD = 9.74$, range = 16–100) recruited via wjx.cn were randomly assigned to a condition in a 2 (role: requester or responder) × 2 (response: refusal or compliance) between-subjects design. All the participants passed the attention check.

Materials and Procedure

The responders imagined themselves going to a university to participate in a psychology experiment. At the university gate, a passerby asked them if they could use their cell phones to make a phone call. The requesters imagined themselves in a similar situation, only as the person who asked a passerby if they could use their cell phones. The participants in the refusal condition were told that the responders refused, whereas those in the compliance condition were told that the responders agreed.

All participants were told when they arrived at the psychology lab, they found that they would participate in an experiment involving pain with another participant. The responders were told that their paired participant would give them an electric shock ranging from 0.1 to 200 volts. During the experiment, responders found that their paired participants made a request at the university gate. The requesters were informed that they would administer an electric shock to their paired participants. They found that paired participants responded to their requests at the university gate.

After reading the scenario, the responders indicated who would give them an electric shock (the one they rejected or helped), whereas the requesters indicated who they would give an electric shock to (the one who rejected or helped them). Next, the responders predicted the voltage of the electric shock that their paired participants would administer to them. The requesters evaluated the voltage of the electric shock they would administer to their paired participants. Finally, the participants reported their age and gender and were debriefed.

Results and Discussion

A 2 × 2 ANOVA yielded a main effect of role ($M_{requester} = 39.98$, $SD = 57.75$; $M_{responder} = 62.25$, $SD = 63.80$), $F(1, 428) = 17.51$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$; and a main effect of response ($M_{refusal} = 71.32$, $SD = 67.51$; $M_{compliance} = 28.92$, $SD = 45.76$), $F(1, 428) = 63.07$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .13$. Moreover, we found an interaction between role and response, $F(1, 428) = 6.15$, $p = .014$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$. In the refusal condition, the voltage predicted by the responder ($M = 90.37$, $SD = 66.94$) was higher than that evaluated by the requester ($M = 54.06$, $SD = 63.51$), $F(1, 428) = 22.92$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .05$. However, in the compliance condition, the responder's predictions ($M = 33.59$, $SD = 45.26$) did not differ from the requester's evaluations ($M = 24.30$, $SD = 46.00$), $F(1, 428) = 1.41$, $p = .236$, $\eta_p^2 < .01$.

These results revealed that the responder's mispredictions were specific to refusal, thus supporting our negativity-avoidance mechanism. In this study, the responder was faced with negative consequences regardless of their response. However, in some cases, the potential consequences are negative for rejecters but positive for people who accept the request. Therefore, we compared overestimations of negative consequences to overestimations of positive consequences in Supplemental Study D (Supplemental Material I). The results showed that the overestimations were specific to refusal.

Study 6

In Study 6, we manipulated the rejectee's power over the rejecter. By "power," we mean the influence a person can exert on another. As unfriendly behaviors from a powerless (vs. powerful) rejectee have less influence on the rejecter, the rejecter will have a weaker desire to avoid these unfriendly behaviors. Hence, according to the negativity-avoidance mechanism, the rejecter's overestimation will be reduced when the rejectee is powerless (vs. powerful). However, since the self-focus account is not related to rejecters' desire to avoid negative consequences, this account predicts no moderating effect of the rejectee's power.

Method

Participants and Design

We recruited 420 participants (225 men and 195 women; $M_{age} = 27.52$ years, $SD = 5.41$, range = 16–54) via Credamo. Participants were randomly assigned to one condition in a 2 (role: rejecter or rejectee) × 2 (rejectee's power: high or low) between-subjects design. All the participants passed the attention check.

Table 5
Means (Standard Deviations) for Each Dimension in Study 4

Variable	Rejecter (predicted)	Rejectee (actual)
Negative emotions (averaged z score; α = .90)	0.25 (0.77)	−0.25 (0.98)
Negative evaluations (averaged z score; α = .91)	0.20 (0.79)	−0.20 (1.07)
Number of tokens rejectee gave to rejecter	1.83 (1.85)	2.62 (1.96)

Note. Rejecter and rejectee indicate participants' roles in the first round.

Materials and Procedure

The participants imagined that they were employees of a company. The annual assessment of their company, which would determine their bonuses, included in-role performance and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). OCB refers to behavior that is not essential to the job but beneficial to colleagues and the company, such as altruistic behavior. Each employee's OCB was rated by one leader and one colleague. The colleague's rating accounted for 80% in the high-power condition but 5% in the low-power condition.

Next, the rejecters were informed that their colleague, Wang, would rate their OCB. Recently, however, Wang invited them to dance on behalf of their department at the annual company party, but the rejecters refused. By contrast, the rejectees were informed that they would rate Wang's OCB. Recently, they asked Wang to perform a dance, but Wang refused.

Subsequently, the participants indicated who (themselves or their colleagues) rejected the request. Next, the rejecters rated the influence of colleague Wang on their bonus (0 = *negligible*, 10 = *enormous*) and predicted the extent to which their rating by Wang would decrease because of their refusal (0 = *little*, 10 = *very much*). The rejectees rated their influence on Wang's bonus and evaluated the extent to which their rating of Wang would decrease because of refusal. Finally, the participants reported their age and gender and were debriefed.

Results and Discussion

As shown in Table 6, a 2 (role) × 2 (power) ANOVA on perceived influence showed a main effect of power, $F(1, 416) = 225.16$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .35$. Perceived influence was higher in the high-power condition ($M = 7.60$, $SD = 2.33$) than in the low-power condition ($M = 3.71$, $SD = 2.98$), indicating the successful manipulation of power. Neither the main effect of role nor the interaction between role and power was significant, $F(1, 416) = 2.05$, $p = .153$, $\eta_p^2 < .01$, and $F(1, 416) = 3.83$, $p = .051$, $\eta_p^2 < .01$, respectively.

A 2 (role) × 2 (power) ANOVA on rating reduction showed a main effect of role, $F(1, 416) = 6.93$, $p = .009$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$. The rejecter's predicted rating reduction ($M = 6.87$, $SD = 2.46$) was stronger than the actual rating reduction ($M = 6.28$, $SD = 2.24$). The main effect of power was also significant, $F(1, 416) = 18.32$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$. The rating reduction was stronger in the high-power condition ($M = 7.05$, $SD = 2.31$) than in the low-power condition ($M = 6.10$, $SD = 2.33$).

Crucially, we found an interaction between role and power, $F(1, 416) = 4.12$, $p = .043$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$. The rejecter ($M = 7.58$, $SD = 2.25$) overestimated the rejectee's rating reduction ($M = 6.53$, $SD = 2.25$) in the high-power condition, $F(1, 416) = 10.92$, $p = .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$. However, in the low-power condition, the rejecter ($M = 6.16$,

$SD = 2.47$) accurately predicted the rejectee's rating reduction ($M = 6.03$, $SD = 2.20$), $F(1, 416) = 0.18$, $p = .671$, $\eta_p^2 < .01$.

These results indicated that overestimation of the negative consequences of refusal occurred when the rejectees had high power over the rejecters but not when the rejectees had low power, supporting our negativity-avoidance mechanism and ruling out the self-focus account. Although, unlike other studies, the refused request (which could be regarded as a part of OCB) was the thing being rated by rejectees in this study, the dependent variable (i.e., rating reduction) reflected unfriendly behaviors from rejectees, as theorized.

Study 7

In Study 7, we changed the future connection between the rejecter and the rejectee. Because a rejectee who has a loose (vs. close) connection with the rejecter has fewer opportunities to do something harmful to the rejecter, the rejecter should have a lower desire to avoid the negative consequences of refusal. Therefore, we hypothesized a smaller overestimation in the loose-connection condition than that in the close-connection condition. However, if the self-focus account works, the future connection will not moderate the rejecter's overestimation because the rejecter focuses on themselves more than the rejectee in both loose- and close-connection conditions.

Method

Participants and Design

A total of 420 participants (203 men, 217 women; $M_{age} = 30.62$ years, $SD = 8.57$, range = 18–83) recruited via wjx.cn were randomly assigned to a condition in a 2 (role: rejecter or rejectee) × 2 (future connection: close or loose) between-subjects design. All the participants passed the attention check.

Materials and Procedure

The participants read a scenario in which they imagined themselves as employees. In the morning, they, wearing their badge, commuted to their company by metro train. In the rejecter condition, a stranger on the metro train asked the rejecter if they could use the rejecter's cell phone to make a phone call, but the rejecter refused. In the rejectee condition, the rejectee asked a stranger on the metro train if they could use the stranger's cell phone to make a phone call, but the stranger refused. Then, the rejecter (or rejectee) noticed the badge that the counterpart wore. In the close-connection condition, the participants found that they would work closely with their counterpart from that afternoon. In the loose-connection condition, the participants found their

Table 6
Means (Standard Deviations) in Study 6

Variable	High power		Low power	
	Rejecter (predicted)	Rejectee (actual)	Rejecter (predicted)	Rejectee (actual)
Perceived influence	8.05 (2.40)	7.17 (2.19)	3.64 (3.11)	3.78 (2.86)
Rating reduction	7.58 (2.25)	6.53 (2.25)	6.16 (2.47)	6.03 (2.20)

counterpart to be an employee of another company and that they would have few interactions with their counterpart in the future.

The participants then indicated who had made the request (an employee with whom they would work closely or have few interactions). Next, the rejecters predicted the number of people the rejectees would tell them that they were unfriendly. The rejectees evaluated the number of people they would tell that the rejecters were unfriendly. Finally, the participants reported their age and gender and were debriefed.

Results and Discussion

A 2×2 ANOVA yielded a main effect of role ($M_{rejecter} = 3.31$, $SD = 2.94$; $M_{rejectee} = 2.06$, $SD = 2.38$), $F(1, 416) = 22.37$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .05$, and a main effect of future connection ($M_{close} = 3.05$, $SD = 2.92$; $M_{loose} = 2.31$, $SD = 2.50$), $F(1, 416) = 7.11$, $p = .008$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$. Moreover, we found an interaction between role and future connection, $F(1, 416) = 4.57$, $p = .033$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$. In the close-connection condition, the number of people predicted by the rejecter ($M = 3.90$, $SD = 3.19$) was larger than that evaluated by the rejectee ($M = 2.13$, $SD = 2.27$), $F(1, 416) = 23.91$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .05$. However, in the loose-connection condition, the rejecters' predictions ($M = 2.66$, $SD = 2.48$) did not differ from the rejectees' evaluations ($M = 1.99$, $SD = 2.49$), $F(1, 416) = 3.31$, $p = .069$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$.

These results indicated that the overestimation of the negative consequences of refusal occurred when rejecters and rejectees had close future connections, supporting our negativity-avoidance mechanism.

General Discussion

This study reveals a misprediction whereby rejecters overestimate the negative consequences they will face from refusal. The effect holds for requests between friends, colleagues, and strangers; and requests intended to benefit oneself, the group of which one is part, and third parties. This overestimation operates by a negativity-avoidance mechanism. Given that people desire to avoid negative consequences for themselves and that the cost may be lower for overestimation than for underestimation, rejecters overestimate the severity of what rejectees will do to rejecters, perhaps to minimize the influence of these expected negative consequences. When the desire to avoid negative consequences weakens because they are less likely or less harmful, rejecters overestimate less or even make accurate predictions. We also rule out the theoretically plausible explanation of self-focus which would predict equal overestimation regardless of likelihood and harmfulness.

Overestimation About Negative Outcomes Could Be Functional

This study contributes to the literature on mispredictions. Many studies have found that people fail to accurately predict others' feelings, thoughts, and preferences (Bruk et al., 2018; Epley et al., 2004; Gilovich et al., 2000; Levine & Cohen, 2018; Li et al., 2022; Savitsky et al., 2001; Yang et al., 2021). Traditionally, these mispredictions, regardless of overestimations or underestimations, have been identified as errors, and efforts have been made to identify the human limitations that create such errors. A classic view is that

people are egocentric and find it difficult to empathize with others' experiences. Thus, making predictions about others from one's own perspective ultimately leads to errors (Epley et al., 2004; Gilovich et al., 2000). Another view is that incomplete information, caused by limited access to others' internal states, results in mispredictions (Boothby et al., 2017).

Beyond these human limitations, our findings imply that "not all mispredictions are created equally." Although both underestimation and overestimation are mistakes, underestimation of negative consequences, in some cases, may be costlier than overestimation (Dai & Hsee, 2013). For example, if a person in a dangerous environment overestimates the danger, they may be highly anxious. If they underestimate the danger, they may even lose their lives. Similarly, if a rejecter predicts considerable harm from the rejectee but the rejectee does nothing, the rejecter may be unnecessarily anxious. Conversely, if a rejecter predicts no harm from the rejectee but the rejectee does something very harmful to the rejecter, the rejecter may incur serious losses.

The perspective of functional overestimation may help interpret findings regarding asymmetric mispredictions between positivity and negativity. Kermer et al. (2006) found that the differences between predicted and actual feelings were greater for losses than for gains. Wilson et al. (2003) revealed that mispredictions about feelings were more significant for negative events than for positive ones. Our research (Study 5) demonstrated that responders mispredicted requesters more when they refused (vs. accepted) a request. All of these asymmetries may carry functional benefits because they motivate preparation for serious consequences caused by negative events by anticipating the worst outcomes. Of note, we did not test the functional benefits of overestimation. It is an interesting topic for future research.

In addition, although overestimations in refusal carry more benefits than underestimations do in some situations, we cannot ignore the costs of overestimations. For example, overestimating the negative consequences sometimes leads to excessive request compliance. Responders thus have to take on more work. In this sense, accurate predictions are better than overestimations. Therefore, future research should investigate how to promote accurate predictions of refusal.

Practical Implications

Although helpful behavior is beneficial for the society in many cases, it can also be a hindrance, especially when helpers are not qualified or have limited time and effort, since inappropriate assistance can even harm the relationships between requesters and responders. However, people often find it difficult to say "no" and may push themselves to spend time on what others want rather than what they want to do (TEDx Talks, 2017). Consequently, they experience psychological discomfort. Many companies are facing this dilemma. When facing additional requests from Party A after signing a contract, Party B may become concerned about the partnership between the two companies and avoid saying "no." Nevertheless, accepting such additional requests increases workloads, which may compromise Party B's priorities and reduce its work efficacy.

Our findings suggest one reason for the tendency to avoid refusing requests is that rejecters overestimate the negative consequences they will face from refusal. Understanding this

misprediction will encourage people to refuse the requesters they cannot accommodate and reduce the detrimental influences of avoiding saying "no."

Limitations and Future Directions

Admittedly, most requests in our study were small. However, even with these small rejections, which may cause less severe outcomes in rejectees, we found evidence for our hypothesized overestimation. It would be interesting to test whether this overestimation persists for significant rejections. According to our negativity-avoidance mechanism, as rejecters desire to avoid negative consequences in small and large rejections, we would expect overestimation to hold in both situations.

Moreover, our study focused on the short-term consequences of refusal. As "revenge is a dish best served cold," long-term consequences are interesting to consider. Will rejecters overestimate the long-term consequences of their refusal? Do rejecters focus on short-term consequences, whereas rejectees plan to do something harmful to them in the long run? Further investigation is necessary.

Another limitation is that our experimental situations are different from real-world situations in two ways. First, in most of our studies (except for the survey in Supplemental Material A), we assigned responders to the role of rejecter instead of allowing them to voluntarily consider both the costs of compliance and rejection before responding. Second, the fact that the negative consequences of compliance in our scenarios were possibly less salient than those in the real world may amplify the overestimation of the negative consequences regarding rejection. Hence, future research may test whether responders will overestimate the negative consequences of rejection more than those of compliance before they respond.

Our research implies that the overestimation of the negative outcomes caused by rejectees is a possible reason for the tendency to avoid saying "no." Other reasons are also likely. For example, research shows that the expected discomfort of saying "no" also drives people to comply (Flynn & Lake, 2008). Future research may compare these factors in driving people's agreement to requests.

Conclusions

Rejecters overestimate the negative consequences they will face from saying "no" due to a desire to avoid harm from rejectees. When the desire becomes weaker, the overestimation will be reduced.

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