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2  
3 **Abstract**

4 This research examines a widespread food norm: waiting to eat until everyone in a dining  
5 party has received their food. Six experiments (total N = 1,907) examine how individuals  
6 perceive and respond to this norm and reveal a consistent self-other difference in anticipated  
7 norm adherence. Participants reported greater expected norm adherence from themselves  
8 compared to others (Studies 1a, 2a, 3-4). This self-other difference is driven by a differential  
9 perception of the psychological costs and benefits of eating immediately versus waiting, which  
10 are more pronounced for the self than for others (Studies 2a-2b). We tested two interventions  
11 targeting this difference: taking the other person's perspective partially reduced, but did not  
12 eliminate, the self-other difference (Study 3), while explicit encouragement from a dining  
13 companion to break the norm and begin eating, intended to remove social constraints, had no  
14 significant effect on the self-other difference (Study 4). These findings extend our understanding  
15 of food norms by demonstrating that the perceived psychological utility of norm adherence  
16 varies systematically between self and others.

17  
18 **Keywords:** Food norms; Self-other difference; Food consumption; Norm utility; Norm  
19 adherence; Perspective-taking

## 1. Introduction

You have probably experienced the following situation: You were out to dinner with an acquaintance, and your food was served before theirs. Although you might have been hungry and your food was getting cold, you probably waited to eat until their food arrived as well. If you recognize yourself in this description, you are not alone. In fact, we conducted a pilot study that confirmed the prevalence of the norm of waiting to eat until others have their food, using a preregistered survey of 625 individuals from 91 different countries. Ninety-one percent of these individuals reported that in their country of origin it is expected that the person with the food delays consumption until others are served.

Interestingly, when roles are reversed, many people encourage their dining companions whose food has arrived first to begin eating immediately, rather than waiting. This desire for one's companion to violate a widely recognized norm is an intriguing anomaly. People tend to follow norms when eating in the presence of other people (Robinson et al., 2014) and adapt the quantity and the types of food consumed accordingly. Following food norms has several important functions (Higgs, 2015). For one, showing normative behavior leads to increased social cohesion. For another, normative behavior also provides information on what foods in what amounts are appropriate to eat in a given situation (Herman & Polivy, 2005; Herman et al., 2003; Robinson et al., 2014). In combination, these findings suggest that norm adherence should be expected and prescribed both for the self and for others, such that both parties would wait to eat.

In contrast, we test whether a self-other difference exists in people's attitudes towards adherence to the norm of waiting to eat. We propose that people will endorse norm adherence to greater extents for themselves compared to others. We further contend this difference is due to

46 differential access to internal psychological experiences—both the costs of violating the norm  
47 (e.g., the discomfort of feeling impolite or of being watched while eating) and the benefits of  
48 adhering to it (e.g., appearing considerate or avoiding social discomfort). Since these  
49 psychological experiences occur internally and thus are not accessible to others, people have  
50 much more insight into their own experiences, compared to others'. Consequently, they will  
51 endorse their own norm adherence based on the consideration of these internal states, but will  
52 perceive less justification to do so for others to follow the same norm. We further examine  
53 whether this difference can be reduced through two different interventions: taking the  
54 perspective of the other party to increase access to their internal states, and an explicit norm  
55 release that removes the social obligation to wait, in the form of encouragement from a dining  
56 companion to begin eating.

## 57 **2. Conceptual Framework**

58 Social norms are integral to understanding human behavior (Bicchieri, 2006). These  
59 informal rules facilitate harmonious interactions by establishing expectations and reducing  
60 uncertainties in social exchanges (Cialdini & Trost, 1998). Extensive research in the social  
61 sciences has delved into the study of social norms, showing that people internalize them and  
62 adhere to them to facilitate social order and cohesion (Gavrilets & Richerson, 2017), that  
63 normative behavior often becomes automatic and hard-wired (Eriksson et al., 2015; Morris et al.,  
64 2015; Peysakhovich & Rand, 2016), and that norm violations are typically perceived negatively  
65 and even punished (Gelfand et al., 2024). In fact, people are willing to pay with their own  
66 resources to punish norm violators, even when they themselves are not harmed by the norm  
67 violation (Fehr & Fischbacher, 2004). Consequently, people favor institutions that enforce social  
68 norms and sanction norm violation (Fehr & Schurtenberger, 2018).

69           Since eating is such an integral part of social life and much food consumption occurs in  
70 social contexts (Rozin, 1996), it is not surprising that social norms also govern much of people’s  
71 behavior around food consumption (Higgs & Ruddock, 2020). People consistently adjust their  
72 food choices and eating behavior to align with social norms (Cruwys et al., 2015; Herman et al.,  
73 2003; 2019; Robinson et al., 2014), because doing so makes them feel more socially accepted  
74 and signals they are behaving in appropriate ways (Higgs, 2015). The tendency towards  
75 conformity is particularly strong because norm violations are generally perceived negatively,  
76 particularly when norms are pervasive and there is little uncertainty around the prescribed  
77 behavior (Morgan et al., 2012), like in the case of eating.

78           Taking into account the social benefits provided by norm adherence in general and norm  
79 adherence to food norms in particular, individuals might form rational expectations about others’  
80 norm adherence and think that others should follow norms to a similar extent as themselves.  
81 Since norms provide information about what is appropriate eating behavior (Higgs, 2015; Higgs  
82 & Ruddock, 2020; Herman & Polivy, 2005; McFerran et al., 2010; Roth et al., 2001), behaving  
83 normatively should provide equal utility to the self and others. If self-other differences exist in  
84 norm adherence expectations, prior research on social norms would suggest that people might  
85 expect others to follow food norms more so than they should do, as people tend to overestimate  
86 others’ endorsement of certain social norms (Miller & Prentice, 2016; Prentice & Miller, 1993).  
87 Therefore, they might believe that others attribute greater importance to food norm adherence  
88 than they themselves do, and should consequently be more likely to follow them.

89           Building on this research, this paper examines whether self-other differences exist  
90 regarding preferred adherence to a prevalent food norm. Past research has shown that food norms  
91 have a powerful influence on choices and behaviors regarding food quantity and food

92 stereotypicality (Herman & Polivy, 2005; Higgs & Ruddock, 2020; McFerran et al., 2010).  
93 However, what has been explored to much lesser extents are people's attitudes towards such  
94 norms, and whether these attitudes differ when applied to oneself versus others.

95         We consider the norm of waiting to eat until everyone at the table has received their food  
96 and propose that self-other differences in attitudes towards adherence to this norm might exist.  
97 Specifically, we propose that people consistently believe they themselves should adhere to the  
98 norm to a greater extent compared to others. We expect that this difference emerges because the  
99 benefits of norm adherence are mainly experienced internally by the person facing the decision  
100 to wait or eat. For example, they get to seem polite and mindful of the shared eating experience,  
101 and avoid the discomfort of being observed eating. However, when considering others in the  
102 same situation, people may not attribute this same rich array of emotional experiences to their  
103 dining companion, leading to different normative expectations for others compared to  
104 themselves.

105         Past research provides evidence of such differential access to mental states: people have  
106 greater access to their own thoughts and feelings than to those of others (Cooney et al., 2022;  
107 Pronin et al., 2002; Ross & Sicoly, 1979), which enables a more comprehensive assessment of  
108 the utility of norm adherence for themselves. This differential access to one's own mental states  
109 relative to others' leads people to underappreciate others' psychological experiences, for  
110 example their psychological needs (Schroeder & Epley, 2020), the frequency and intensity of  
111 their thoughts (Cooney et al., 2022), the idiosyncrasy of their preferences (Jung et al., 2020), or  
112 their intrinsic motivation (Bohns et al., 2016; Heath, 1999). Similarly, people have difficulty  
113 predicting the emotional states of others, particularly when those emotions are different from

114 their current experience (Nordgren et al., 2011; van Boven & Loewenstein, 2003; van Boven et  
115 al., 2005).

116         Consequently, when forming expectations about others' norm-adherence and the  
117 associated utility, people may rely much less on information about others' thoughts and feelings,  
118 which are largely inaccessible to them, resulting in an underestimation of both the internal costs  
119 and the benefits of adhering to (vs. violating) the norm. The limited accessibility of others'  
120 internal experiences is particularly pronounced in the context of the norm of waiting to eat,  
121 because in this case the consequences of violation are primarily psychological rather than  
122 tangible. When one's dining companion begins to eat before others have their food, there are few  
123 observable external consequences: the waiting person's food arrives at the same time regardless,  
124 and watching someone eat is not demonstrably worse than seeing an untouched plate of food on  
125 the table. Thus, without access to the internal experience of discomfort or awkwardness, people  
126 may underestimate both the psychological costs of norm violation and the benefits of adherence  
127 for others. The person whose food has arrived might be able to assess both their own internal  
128 benefits from waiting (Ruff & Fehr, 2014) and their internal costs from eating (e.g., guilt or  
129 shame, Van Kleef et al., 2015, or embarrassment, Bohns & Flynn, 2010). However, they may  
130 underestimate both the costs and benefits that others experience when adhering to this food  
131 norm, leading to a belief that others should instead violate the norm.

132         Furthermore, the norm itself provides a sufficient explanation for the observed behavior  
133 (i.e., waiting), such that observers might have no reason to consider other psychological  
134 motivations for the behavior (e.g., feeling polite, avoid being watched eating). Not only are  
135 others' internal states difficult to access, but the existence of the norm makes such access



158 Study 4, we test whether explicit encouragement to eat from the person who does not receive  
159 food reduces the self-other difference.

160 All studies used a similar hypothetical scenario where participants were asked to imagine  
161 dining with another individual at a restaurant, and one person's food was delivered prior to the  
162 others. We randomized whether participants imagined receiving their food first, or imagined  
163 their dining companion receiving their food first (exact study materials available in Appendix A).  
164 We focus on dyads of diners because for one, a party size of two is very common in restaurant  
165 settings and most tables are for two people. For another, larger parties might have different  
166 dining rules that determine when it is acceptable to start eating (e.g., Belludi, 2020). Given the  
167 hypothetical nature of our studies, to establish the realism of the scenario, we ran a pretest asking  
168 participants how realistic, plausible, and familiar the scenario felt to them on three separate 7-  
169 point scales (e.g., 1 = *Not at all realistic*, 7 = *Very realistic*). As preregistered, we averaged the  
170 three measures ( $\alpha = .68$ ) and used a one -sample t-test against the midpoint of the scale.  
171 Results revealed that the scenario was high in realism ( $M = 6.09$ ,  $SD = .87$ ;  $t(100) = 24.16$ ,  $p <$   
172  $.001$ ,  $d = 2.40$ ). This suggests that, despite the hypothetical nature of our studies, the experience  
173 we document felt realistic to participants.

174 All studies received approval by an institutional ethics review board before data  
175 collection commenced. All studies were conducted in English, and Studies 1a-4 recruited online  
176 participants located in the United States. Studies paid between \$0.24 and \$0.36 and took  
177 participants approximately 1-2 minutes to complete. For all studies except for Study 1a (which  
178 was part of a larger study and had a larger sample size of 150 participants per condition), we  
179 predetermined our sample size to be 100 participants per condition. We did not use a priori  
180 sample size calculations to determine this sample size but instead relied on general

181 recommendations for achieving adequate power in psychological research (e.g., Simmons et al.,  
182 2013) recommending a minimum sample size of 50 observation per condition. We at least  
183 doubled this minimum sample size in all our studies to be able to reliably detect our expected  
184 effect even in potentially noisier online studies. Recruiting at least 100 participants per condition  
185 provided 80% power to detect an effect size of  $d = 0.40$  or greater in an ANOVA with a 5%  
186 false-positive rate. We report all measures, manipulations, and data exclusions. Survey materials,  
187 preregistrations, deidentified data, and code are accessible at:

188 [https://researchbox.org/3319&PEER\\_REVIEW\\_passcode=ECBWDK](https://researchbox.org/3319&PEER_REVIEW_passcode=ECBWDK)

#### 189 **4. Studies 1a and 1b**

190 Studies 1a and 1b test whether there are systematic self-other differences in expectations  
191 about adherence to the food norm of waiting to eat. We examine attitudes about both prescriptive  
192 as well as descriptive norms because, although these norms are formed based on different  
193 processes (Lapinski & Rimal, 2005), they frequently inform each other and can exert a joint  
194 influence on people's judgments (Eriksson et al., 2015).

195 Participants read that one person received their food (i.e., either they or the other person;  
196 randomized between subjects) while the other had not yet, and indicated to what extent they or  
197 the other person should wait (prescriptive norm, Study 1a) or would wait (descriptive norm,  
198 Study 1b) until the dining companion's food has arrived versus begin eating immediately. In  
199 both studies, we predict self-other differences in people's attitudes towards norm adherence:  
200 people will believe that they both *should* and *would* follow the norm to wait to eat more so than  
201 their dining companions, because we hypothesize these self-other differences are based on  
202 differences in the perceived utility (i.e., psychological costs and benefits) of norm adherence,  
203 independent of whether the norm is prescriptive or descriptive.

204 **4.1 Method**

205 *4.1.1. Participants.* For Study 1a, we received 299 completed responses through  
206 Amazon’s Mechanical Turk (MTurk) as part of a longer study ( $M_{\text{age}} = 41.14$ ,  $SD = 12.08$ ; 41.1%  
207 female, 57.9% male, 1% other/missing). One participant accessed the study but did not complete  
208 the dependent measure. In this study, age and gender were appended using Positly, an MTurk  
209 recruitment platform. In all other studies, participants reported their age and gender at the end of  
210 the study. For Study 1b (preregistered), we received 200 completed responses through Prolific  
211 Academic ( $M_{\text{age}} = 36.98$ ,  $SD = 12.90$ ; 60.0% female, 36.5% male, 3.5% non-binary/other/prefer  
212 not to answer).

213 *4.1.2 Study 1a procedure.* Participants in Studies 1a and 1b all imagined a situation where  
214 they were dining with another person (Study 1a: friend; Study 1b: acquaintance; gender  
215 unspecified in all studies) in a 2(food receiver: self vs. other) between-subjects design. In Study  
216 1a, participants randomly assigned to the other condition imagined that the other person got their  
217 food first, and were asked: “Should they wait for you to get your food to start eating, or should  
218 they start eating immediately?” (1 = They should definitely wait for me to get my food; 7 = They  
219 should definitely begin eating immediately). Participants randomly assigned to the self condition  
220 saw an analogous situation where they received the food first, and were asked whether they  
221 should wait or eat (1 = I should definitely wait for them to get their food; 7 = I should definitely  
222 begin eating immediately). We analyzed the results using an independent samples t-test with this  
223 measure as the dependent variable and condition as the independent factor. We also tested for  
224 potential gender effects using an ANOVA, in this and all studies, though we have no specific  
225 predictions for the role of gender.

226           4.1.3 *Study 1b procedure.* In Study 1b, participants saw a very similar scenario and  
227 considered their own responses (self condition) versus that of others (other condition). Rather  
228 than being asked what they versus the other *should* do as in Study 1a, we asked what they versus  
229 the other *would* do (1 = [I/They] would definitely wait; 7 = [I/They] would definitely eat). Since  
230 this study has two between-subjects conditions and a single dependent variable, our primary  
231 analysis involved an independent samples t-test. While we had preregistered using an ANOVA  
232 for the main analysis, we opted for the t-test for parsimony, as both tests yield identical results in  
233 this specific design.

## 234           **4.2 Results and Discussion**

235           4.2.1 *Study 1a.* An independent-samples t-test revealed a statistically significant self-other  
236 difference such that participants believe that they should wait ( $M_{\text{self}} = 2.34$ ,  $SD = 1.67$ ) to a  
237 greater extent than others should ( $M_{\text{other}} = 4.70$ ,  $SD = 1.88$ ;  $t(296) = 11.51$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 1.34$ ).  
238 These results remain unchanged when analyzing only male and female participants (due to very  
239 small sample sizes of participants identifying their gender in other ways) and including  
240 participants' gender as a factor in a two-way ANOVA alongside food receiver condition. Results  
241 showed that gender had a significant main effect, such that women were more likely to wait (vs.  
242 eat) compared to men ( $F(1, 291) = 4.28$ ,  $p = .039$ ); however, the main effect of food receiver  
243 condition remained ( $F(1, 291) = 125.55$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and there was no interaction effect between  
244 gender and food receiver condition ( $F(1, 291) = 0.102$ ,  $p = .749$ ).

245           4.2.2. *Study 1b.* An independent-samples t-test revealed a similar result as Study 1a.  
246 When asked what they versus others would do, participants believe that they would wait ( $M_{\text{self}} =$   
247  $2.29$ ,  $SD = 1.55$ ) to a greater extent than others would ( $M_{\text{other}} = 3.61$ ,  $SD = 1.71$ ;  $t(198) = 5.72$ ,  $p$   
248  $< .001$ ,  $d = 0.81$ ). These results remain unchanged when including participants' gender (male vs.

249 female only) as a factor in a two-way ANOVA alongside food receiver condition. Gender had  
250 neither a significant main effect nor an interaction effect with the food receiver condition,  $F_s <$   
251  $.919, p_s > .339$ .

252 *4.2.3 Discussion.* The results of Studies 1a and 1b reveal a self-other difference, such that  
253 in Study 1a, people's preference for adhering to the norm of waiting to eat is stronger for the self  
254 than for others. Study 1b reveals a similar result for what people would do, thus the self-other  
255 difference exists for prescriptive as well as predicted behavior. Unlike previous research showing  
256 that people overestimate others' norm endorsement (e.g., Prentice & Miller, 1993), our results  
257 show that both desired and perceived norm adherence is lower for others than for the self.  
258 However, the results of Study 1b could reflect a tendency towards self-serving evaluations or  
259 socially desirable responding whereby people report they would be more likely to show desirable  
260 behavior than others (Alicke, 1985; Brown, 1986). Therefore, in the rest of our studies, we  
261 measure people's prescriptive beliefs about what they and others should do to capture attitudes  
262 about norm adherence that are less likely to be influenced by socially desirable responding.

## 263 **5. Studies 2a and 2b**

264 Studies 2a and 2b explore the mechanism underlying the effect. We have theorized that  
265 when a dining companion has received their food, people cannot readily assess the internal costs  
266 and benefits that arise for the other person. Thus, we predict that the self-other difference in  
267 waiting to eat occurs because people underestimate the other person's costs and benefits of  
268 waiting. In Study 2a, we directly test this mechanism through mediation analysis. Specifically,  
269 we predict that people will anticipate more positive feelings about waiting themselves than they  
270 attribute to others in the same situation. These different attributions of emotional experiences

271 (i.e., the perceived differences in how good or bad one would feel waiting versus how others  
272 would feel) should mediate the self-other difference in normative judgments about waiting.

273 In Study 2b, we sought further evidence for how the costs and benefits of waiting and  
274 eating (i.e., the benefits of norm adherence vs. the costs of norm violation) vary for the self  
275 versus others. We predict that participants will attribute different psychological experiences to  
276 themselves versus others. Specifically, in line with our proposed mechanism, we expect  
277 participants will anticipate others to experience fewer negative consequences (costs) when  
278 violating the norm by eating first, and fewer positive consequences (benefits) when adhering to  
279 the norm by choosing to wait than they themselves will.

## 280 **5.1 Method**

281 *5.1.1 Participants.* For Study 2a (preregistered), we received 201 completed responses  
282 through MTurk ( $M_{\text{age}} = 46.17$ ,  $SD = 12.66$ ; 47.3% female, 52.2% male, 0.5% prefer not to  
283 answer). For Study 2b (preregistered), we received 403 completed responses through Prolific  
284 Academic ( $M_{\text{age}} = 41.85$ ,  $SD = 12.69$ , 2 missing; 55.1% female, 42.4% male, 2.5%  
285 other/missing). Three participants did not complete the dependent measure in Study 2b.

286 *5.1.2 Study 2a procedure.* Participants followed a similar procedure to that of Study 1a  
287 and evaluated what they (self condition) versus their acquaintance (other condition, between  
288 subjects) should do when one party receives their food before the other (i.e., 1 = [I/They] should  
289 definitely wait, 7 = [I/They] should definitely eat). In addition to this main dependent variable,  
290 we also measured our proposed mediator: How good or bad would [you/they] feel if [you/they]  
291 decided to wait rather than eat immediately? (-10 = very bad; 10 = very good). We presented the  
292 two measures in random order. Note that we preregistered using an ANOVA for the main

293 analysis, however, for parsimony, we used two independent samples t-tests. As preregistered, we  
294 also performed a mediation analysis using model 4 of the Hayes process macro.

295 *5.1.3 Study 2b procedure.* This study employed a 2(food receiver: self vs. other) x  
296 2(decision: wait vs. eat) between-subjects design. Participants evaluated how they versus  
297 someone else would feel if they decided to either eat or wait. Specifically, we presented all  
298 participants the scenario from Study 2a. We asked participants in the wait condition the feelings  
299 question from Study 2a. We asked participants in the eat condition: How good or bad would  
300 [you/they] feel if [you/they] decided to eat immediately rather than wait? (-10 = very bad; 10  
301 very good). As preregistered, we used an ANOVA to investigate the effect of our two factors on  
302 the dependent measure. Further, we were interested in the simple effects of food receiver within  
303 the decision to eat versus wait.

## 304 **5.2 Results and Discussion**

305 *5.2.1 Study 2a.* An independent samples t-test supported our predictions, showing that  
306 participants believed that they should wait ( $M_{\text{self}} = 1.98$ ,  $SD = 1.33$ ) to a greater extent than  
307 others should ( $M_{\text{other}} = 4.31$ ,  $SD = 2.03$ ;  $t(199) = 9.59$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 1.35$ ). An independent  
308 samples t-test on the feelings question revealed that people expected to feel better upon waiting  
309 ( $M_{\text{self}} = 4.81$ ,  $SD = 4.25$ ) than they predicted others would ( $M_{\text{other}} = 1.50$ ,  $SD = 4.64$ ;  $t(199) = -$   
310  $5.27$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 0.74$ ). These results remain unchanged when including participants' gender  
311 (male vs. female only) as an additional factor in an ANOVA, as participant gender showed  
312 neither a significant main effect nor an interaction effect with the food receiver condition,  $F_s <$   
313  $0.430$ ,  $ps > .513$ .

314 The predicted feelings and attitude measures were correlated ( $r(201) = -.415$ ,  $p < .001$ ).  
315 Model 4 of the PROCESS Macro with 5000 bootstrapped samples revealed a significant indirect

316 effect ( $b = -.1810$ ,  $SE = .0594$ , 95% CI: LL =  $-.3068$ , UL:  $-.0724$ ; Hayes, 2017). Thus, the  
317 predicted feelings from waiting are a mechanism underlying the attitude that people themselves  
318 should wait more so than others. There is one alternative specification possible for this mediation  
319 which would involve switching the causal order such that the decision to eat versus wait (i.e., the  
320 dependent measure in our analysis above) would cause the feelings associated with the decision  
321 (i.e., the mediator in our analysis above). This model is unlikely to reflect the current context,  
322 where it is more likely that how someone feels about eating versus waiting drives their decision  
323 to eat versus wait.

324         5.2.2. *Study 2b*. An ANOVA with the food receiver condition (self vs. other) and the  
325 decision condition (wait vs. eat) as independent factors and the feelings measure as the  
326 dependent variable revealed a significant main effect of decision ( $F(1, 396) = 217.41$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  
327  $\eta_p^2 = 0.35$ ) and a non-significant main effect of food receiver ( $F(1, 396) = .24$ ,  $p = .622$ ,  $\eta_p^2 <$   
328  $0.01$ ). Results revealed a significant interaction ( $F(1, 396) = 135.53$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = 0.26$ ), such  
329 that participants saw greater costs of eating for themselves than for others ( $M_{\text{self}} = -5.57$ ,  $SD =$   
330  $3.91$ ,  $M_{\text{other}} = -0.29$ ,  $SD = 4.58$ ;  $F_{\text{simple effect}}(1, 396) = 72.91$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = 0.16$ ) and greater  
331 benefits of waiting for themselves than for others ( $M_{\text{self}} = 5.91$ ,  $SD = 4.33$ ,  $M_{\text{other}} = 1.06$ ,  $SD =$   
332  $4.54$ ;  $F_{\text{simple effect}}(1, 396) = 62.76$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = 0.14$ ). These results remain unchanged when  
333 including participants' gender (male vs. female only) in an additional factor in an ANOVA, as  
334 gender had no significant main effect, no significant two-way interaction between gender and  
335 food receiver, and no significant three-way interaction effect with the food receiver condition  
336 and the cost-benefit measure,  $F_s < 2.47$ ,  $p_s > .117$ . There was a significant interaction between  
337 gender and decision condition ( $F(1, 382) = 5.32$ ,  $p = .022$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .014$ ).



360 **6.1 Method**

361 *6.1.1 Participants and procedure.* Study 3 (preregistered) received 404 responses through  
362 MTurk ( $M_{\text{age}} = 42.30$ ,  $SD = 12.70$ ; 42.6% female, 55.9% male, 1.5% other/prefer not to answer).  
363 All participants were exposed to our basic scenario in a 2(food receiver: self vs. other) x  
364 2(perspective taking: control vs. perspective taking) between-subjects design. Participants  
365 assigned to the perspective taking condition saw the following additional instructions: “Please  
366 briefly note down three things your acquaintance might be thinking or feeling in this situation,  
367 including what they think each of you should do.” Then, all participants answered the primary  
368 dependent measure from prior studies, indicating their beliefs about whether they versus the  
369 other person should wait or begin eating immediately. As preregistered, we analyzed both the  
370 effect of the two factors (self vs. acquaintance; control vs. perspective taking) on the decision to  
371 wait vs. eat using a two-way ANOVA, as well as the simple effects to examine whether the  
372 effect of who gets their food first changes in the perspective taking condition.

373 **6.2 Results and Discussion**

374 *6.2.1 Results.* An ANOVA using the food receiver condition (self vs. other) and the  
375 perspective taking condition (control vs. perspective taking) as independent factors revealed a  
376 main effect of the food receiver condition ( $F_{\text{receiver}}(1, 400) = 183.77$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = 0.32$ ), no  
377 main effect of perspective taking ( $F_{\text{perspective}}(1, 400) < .01$ ,  $p = .966$ ,  $\eta_p^2 < 0.01$ ), and a significant  
378 interaction ( $F_{\text{interaction}}(1, 400) = 5.39$ ,  $p = .021$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .01$ ). An examination of the simple effects  
379 revealed that, despite a significant interaction, the self-other difference is robust in both the  
380 control condition ( $M_{\text{self}} = 2.24$ ,  $SD = 1.44$ ,  $M_{\text{other}} = 5.15$ ,  $SD = 1.95$ ;  $F_{\text{simple effect}}(1, 400) = 132.44$ ,  
381  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .25$ ) and the perspective taking condition ( $M_{\text{self}} = 2.66$ ,  $SD = 1.90$ ,  $M_{\text{other}} = 4.72$ ,  
382  $SD = 1.99$ ;  $F_{\text{simple effect}}(1, 400) = 60.20$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .13$ ). These results remain unchanged when

383 selecting only male and female participants and including gender as an additional factor in the  
384 ANOVA. Specifically, gender had neither a significant main effect, nor a two-way interaction  
385 between gender and perspective taking condition, nor a three-way interaction effect with the food  
386 receiver and perspective taking conditions,  $F_s < 2.11$ ,  $p_s > .147$ . There was a significant  
387 interaction between gender and food receiver condition ( $F(1, 390) = 5.94$ ,  $p = .015$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .015$ ).

388 *6.2.2 Discussion.* The results of Study 3 revealed a statistically significant but  
389 surprisingly limited impact of perspective-taking on the self-other difference in attitudes towards  
390 the norm of waiting to eat. Despite being explicitly instructed to consider the thoughts and  
391 feelings of their dining companion, participants continued to exhibit a stronger preference for  
392 norm adherence for themselves compared to others. The persistence of this self-other difference  
393 aligns with previous research demonstrating the challenges of accurate perspective-taking, even  
394 when individuals are specifically directed to do so (Eyal et al., 2018).

395 One might have expected our perspective-taking manipulation to have a larger impact,  
396 given that presumably all participants have experienced each of both roles (i.e., the person with  
397 or without food) at some point in their lives. The limited effectiveness of the intervention may  
398 reflect the inherent difficulty of accessing and accurately interpreting others' internal  
399 experiences. These results suggest that the norm of waiting to eat may have been internalized to  
400 such a degree that even when circumstances surrounding the norm change (i.e., being asked to  
401 consider the other's perspective), individuals still maintain a differential attitude towards norm  
402 adherence for the self versus others.

## 403 **7. Study 4**

404 While Study 3 demonstrated the persistence of the self-other difference even in the face  
405 of perspective-taking, it left open the question of whether this difference might be reduced by

406 directly addressing the perceived costs of norm violation. In Study 4 we sought to investigate  
407 whether explicitly removing the social constraint of the norm might be effective in reducing the  
408 difference. Specifically, we informed participants that the person whose food arrived first has  
409 explicitly instructed the person with the food to eat. This face valid intervention may encourage  
410 people to revise their cost-benefit assessments and potentially align their attitudes with their  
411 dining companion's preferences. However, we expect that the self-other difference emerges due  
412 to the counterpart's internal costs and benefits not being accessible. If so, then the release from  
413 the norm might not affect people's internal utility for following the norm (e.g., not wanting to be  
414 observed, feeling awkward). If these inaccessible internal costs and benefits drive the self-other  
415 difference in attitudes, these self-other differences should prevail even when people are released  
416 from the norm.

## 417 **7.1 Method**

418 *7.1.1 Participants and procedure.* Study 4 received 400 responses using Prolific  
419 Academic ( $M_{\text{age}} = 42.06$ ,  $SD = 13.05$ , 1 missing; 43% female, 56% male, 1% other/prefer not to  
420 answer). All participants were exposed to the scenario from Study 2a in a 2(food receiver: self  
421 vs. other) x 2(release from the norm: control vs. release from the norm) between-subjects design.  
422 In the condition where participants were explicitly released from the norm, they additionally read  
423 that the food receiver told their dining companion to go ahead and eat. Specifically, in the self-  
424 release condition, participants read: "You tell your acquaintance to go ahead and eat." In the  
425 other-release condition, participants read: "Your acquaintance tells you to go ahead and eat."  
426 Then, all participants answered the primary dependent measure from prior studies.

427 As preregistered, we analyzed both the effect of the two factors (food receiver: self vs.  
428 other; release from the norm: control vs. release from the norm) on the decision to wait vs. eat

429 using a two-way ANOVA, as well as the simple effects to examine the effect of who gets their  
430 food first in both the control and the release conditions.

## 431 **7.2 Results and Discussion**

432 *7.2.1 Results.* An ANOVA using the food receiver condition (self vs. other) and the  
433 release condition (control vs. release) as independent factors revealed two main effects  
434 ( $F_{receiver}(1, 396) = 274.40, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .41$ ;  $F_{release}(1, 396) = 16.99, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .04$ ) and no  
435 interaction ( $F_{interaction}(1, 396) = .54, p = .465, \eta_p^2 < 0.01$ ). In the control condition, participants  
436 believed that they should wait to eat ( $M = 2.05, SD = 1.54$ ) to a greater extent than others ( $M =$   
437  $5.17, SD = 2.06$ ;  $F_{simple\ effect}(1, 396) = 149.58, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .27$ ). The release manipulation  
438 boosted the tendency to eat; however, it did so similarly in both the self ( $M = 2.92, SD = 1.97$ )  
439 and other ( $M = 5.79, SD = 1.66$ ) conditions ( $F_{simple\ effect}(1, 396) = 125.35, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .24$ ).  
440 These results remain unchanged when including participants' gender (male vs. female only) as  
441 an additional factor in the ANOVA, as gender had neither a significant main effect, nor a two-  
442 way interaction between gender and release condition, nor a three-way interaction effect with the  
443 food receiver and release conditions,  $F_s < 0.202, p_s > .653$ . There was a marginally significant  
444 interaction between gender and food receiver condition ( $F(1, 388) = 3.71, p = .055, \eta_p^2 = .009$ ).

445 *7.2.2 Discussion.* The results of Study 4 provide further insight into the nature of the self-  
446 other difference in attitudes towards the food norm of waiting to eat. Despite explicitly releasing  
447 participants from the norm, the self-other difference persisted. This study demonstrates that our  
448 results cannot be explained by participants merely waiting for the other party's permission to eat  
449 or by a general discomfort around imposing norms on others or asking others to follow norms on  
450 one's behalf. The release manipulation, while effective in increasing the overall tendency to eat,  
451 likely through decreasing the costs of eating, did so similarly in both the self and other

452 conditions. This suggests that explicit permission can modify behavior to some extent but cannot  
453 eliminate the underlying difference in attitudes, perhaps because it did not systematically address  
454 the difference in accessibility of internal costs and benefits between self and other. This self-  
455 other difference persists even when the individual's costs of norm violation are explicitly  
456 reduced.

## 457 **8. General Discussion**

458 In six experiments, we document a novel self-other difference in attitudes towards the  
459 prevalent food norm of waiting to eat: people believe that they should wait when they receive  
460 their food first, but they are less likely to expect the same behavior from others. While prior  
461 research has documented various benefits of adhering to food norms (e.g., being accepted or  
462 learning about which foods are appropriate to eat; Higgs, 2015), we find that people perceive  
463 these benefits as less pronounced for others than for themselves. Specifically, people recognize  
464 that following the norm of waiting to eat generates psychological utility for themselves but  
465 believe this is less true for others. This asymmetry appears to be driven by differential access to  
466 the psychological benefits and costs of norm adherence versus violation, which are more  
467 accessible for the self than for others. Thus, while people believe that following the norm would  
468 be a positive experience for themselves and norm violation would be negative, they predict more  
469 muted emotional responses for others. In addition to documenting a novel self-other difference,  
470 we demonstrate that it is robust to theoretically and practically relevant interventions.  
471 Specifically, neither encouraging norm violation by considering the perspective of the other  
472 party (Study 3) or being explicitly encouraged to eat (Study 4) meaningfully reduces this  
473 asymmetry in norm adherence expectations.

474 Our findings build on past research demonstrating the challenges of perspective taking,  
475 particularly people’s tendency to underappreciate others’ psychological experiences (e.g.,  
476 Schroeder & Epley, 2020; van Boven & Loewenstein, 2005) by examining this miscalibration in  
477 the context of typical food consumption situations. The limited effectiveness of perspective-  
478 taking may be due to fact that the norm itself could paradoxically inhibit deeper perspective-  
479 taking. When observing someone waiting for others’ food to arrive, the existence of the social  
480 norm provides a seemingly sufficient explanation for the behavior (i.e., they are waiting because  
481 that is what people are supposed to do). This explanation may preempt seeking access to others’  
482 psychological motivations, making people less likely to consider the internal experiences that  
483 drive norm adherence even when explicitly prompted to perspective-take.

484 We recognize the real-world decisions about waiting versus eating may involve multiple  
485 contextual factors and encourage future research to explore potential moderators of the self-other  
486 difference that we have documented. We predict that strong situational factors may override the  
487 difference. For example, time pressure might lead people to believe both they and others should  
488 eat immediately, regardless of norm expectations. Similarly, if one person receives food that  
489 rapidly declines in utility (e.g., hot brownie with ice-cream), both parties might endorse norm  
490 violation. Further, a myriad of real-world factors is likely to moderate our results. For example,  
491 the formality of the dining occasion and the relationship to the dining companion may influence  
492 the strength of our effect. While the current work focuses on documenting and understanding a  
493 robust phenomenon affecting daily interpersonal interactions, we encourage future research to  
494 deepen our collective understanding of the norm of waiting to eat.

## 495 **8.1 Limitations**

496           One limitation of our work is that our studies are based on hypothetical scenarios,  
497 employing single-item measures of the focal dependent variable. While single-item measures  
498 have been criticized for potential measurement error and validity concerns, they can be  
499 appropriate when measuring concrete, unambiguous constructs (Bergkvist & Rossiter, 2007), as  
500 is the case with our specific behavior of waiting to eat. Additionally, if single-item measures  
501 involve higher measurement error, this would likely make our tests more conservative rather than  
502 less reliable, as such error would make it more difficult to detect true effects (Fuchs &  
503 Diamantopoulos, 2009).

504           All studies in the current work are based on a scenario. To ensure our scenario was  
505 ecologically valid, we ran a pretest that confirmed that participants found the situation described  
506 highly realistic despite its hypothetical nature. We use hypothetical scenarios because our focal  
507 measure pertains to attitudes about norm adherence and beliefs about its utility, constructs that  
508 are difficult to observe directly in behavioral studies. However, we acknowledge the limitations  
509 inherent to hypothetical studies and encourage future research to examine actual behavior.

510           Although all our studies were conducted online, several measures were implemented to  
511 ensure data quality (Jaeger & Cardello, 2022). A key strength of our experimental paradigm is its  
512 efficiency, as it combines brief, straightforward scenarios with minimal questions, reducing the  
513 cognitive burden on participants and the likelihood of satisficing response behaviors. Short  
514 surveys with straightforward tasks have been shown to yield higher quality data compared to  
515 longer questionnaires (Galesic & Bosnjak, 2009). While online survey environments cannot be  
516 fully controlled for distractions or multitasking, the concise nature of our study design was  
517 intended to minimize the impact of these potential limitations compared to more complex study  
518 designs. Participants were recruited through Prolific and Positly, an MTurk recruitment platform.

519 Both platforms employ extensive quality control measures. Prolific maintains strict policies  
520 regarding participant verification and data quality (Albert & Smilek, 2023; Palan & Schitter,  
521 2018). Similarly, Positly provides multiple tiers of quality control  
522 (<https://www.positly.com/quality-control/>). Nevertheless, it is uncertain whether bots generated  
523 by large-language-model were detected.

524 Another potential limitation pertains to the fact that all of our studies were conducted  
525 with US-based participants. Social norms research has shown that cultures differ in the strength  
526 of influence that norms hold over people (Gelfand, 2012). Although our pilot study showed that  
527 the norm to wait to eat is pervasive across cultures, it could nevertheless be less influential in  
528 some cultures compared to others. Yet, we would expect the self-other difference in perceived  
529 utility of norm adherence to replicate across cultures, because the lack of access to others'  
530 internal experiences should persist also in different cultural contexts. In cultures where norms are  
531 "tighter" (Gelfand, 2012), such self-other differences might even be more pronounced because  
532 normative behavior is expected to such large extents that this explains people's overt norm  
533 adherence without any need to speculate about internal costs and benefits as additional reasons.

## 534 **8.2 Implications**

535 Regarding theoretical implications, our findings extend beyond the specific norm of  
536 waiting to eat, contributing to a broader understanding of food norm adherence. While adhering  
537 to food norms generally provides psychological benefits, such as being accepted by others and  
538 being "correct" in one's behavior, our research demonstrates that these benefits (or utility) may  
539 be differently perceived for the self versus others. Thus, future research should explore not only  
540 the influence that norms exert over people's eating behavior, but also people's attitudes about

541 such norms and whether these have downstream consequences for people's enjoyment of social  
542 eating situations.

543         The self-other difference in attitudes towards norm adherence might emerge for other  
544 food norms as well where norm adherence provides mostly benefits that are inaccessible to  
545 others. For example, violating the norm to order gender-stereotypical food (Vartanien et al.,  
546 2015) might be experienced as more costly for the self compared to for others. Such differences  
547 could have consequences in dining situations where people choose food for others (e.g., hosting  
548 a meal or ordering catering) where people might more readily violate food stereotypicality norms  
549 because they lack access to the psychological costs that others might experience. We encourage  
550 future research to explore the importance of perceived utility in norm adherence versus violation  
551 and whether it applies to social judgments around food norms more generally.

552         Regarding practical implications, our research suggests that restaurants as well as people  
553 hosting at home should avoid situations where some people are served their food before others.  
554 We show that people may experience discomfort in such situations, which could ultimately  
555 influence their satisfaction with the dining experience. However, restaurants and hosts might be  
556 unaware of the extent of people's discomfort, as this is largely experienced internally. Thus, this  
557 discomfort might be underestimated and not taken into account when making decisions about the  
558 sequence of food preparation. Although the social norm to wait to eat exists to govern behavior  
559 in these situations, our research shows that this norm is experienced in more complex ways than  
560 previously thought.

561 **Statements and declarations:** The Pilot Study, Pretest, and Studies 1b, 2a, 2b, 3 and 4 were  
562 preregistered. Survey materials, preregistrations, deidentified data, and code are accessible at:  
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