# The Persistence of Homophobia in Men's Friendship Norms

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## Abstract

Across five studies and one supplementary study (five pre-registered; N = 3,215 adults), we find that men, more than women, avoid shared experiences (e.g., going to the movies, sharing food) with individuals of the same gender. Furthermore, persisting societal expectations that men should be unambiguously heterosexual underlie this pattern—men feel more apprehensive about signaling same-gender romance in platonic relationships than women. In turn, romantic prototypicality drove the pattern of men (more than women) avoiding shared activities, above and beyond differences in how hedonic, enjoyable, and feminine the activities were; furthermore, findings suggest that men's reluctance to share these experiences is due to pressure to conform to societal expectations rather than solely a personal preference. This research offers insight into how, despite evolving societal attitudes, heterosexual norms can lead men to make suboptimal consumption decisions and to forgo opportunities to connect with other men, ultimately perpetuating stigma against intimacy between men.


*Keywords:* cultural standards, inequality, masculinity, friendships, shared consumption

# Research Transparency Statement

## General Disclosures

**Conflict of interest:** All authors declare no conflicts of interest. **Funding:** This research was supported by an institutional research grant, (first and second authors' institution, 2520-XERID02), and Singapore Ministry of Education (MOE) Academic Research Fund (AcRF) Tier 1 grants, 19-C207-SMU-005 and 21-LKCSB-SMU-034. **Artificial intelligence:** Artificial intelligence (ChatGPT 4.0) was utilized to enhance language, including refining grammar and structure, as well as streamlining content and improving conciseness. No other artificial intelligence assisted technologies were used in this research or the creation of this article. **Ethics:** This research received approval from a local ethics board (ID: 202135 at first and second author's institution; ID: IRB-19-073-A070-M15(323) at third author's institution). **Computational reproducibility:** The computational reproducibility of the results in the main article (but not the supplementary materials) has been independently confirmed by the journal's STAR team; **Open Science Framework (OSF):** To ensure long-term preservation, all OSF files were registered at [https://osf.io/p5982].

## Study One Disclosures

**Preregistration:** The hypotheses, methods, and analysis plan were pre-registered (https://aspredicted.org/P8X_SLT) on 2024-04-05, prior to data collection which began on 2024-04-05. There were deviations from the preregistration (for details see the Supplementary Online Materials, pp. W7-W8; Moderation (3-Way) by Initiator of Sharing without Controls; Moderation (3-Way) by Partner Gender without Controls). **Materials:** All study materials are publicly available (https://osf.io/bygnz/). **Data:** All primary data are publicly available (https://osf.io/bygnz/). **Analysis scripts:** All analysis scripts are publicly available (https://osf.io/bygnz/). **Computational reproducibility:** The computational reproducibility of the results has been independently confirmed by the journal's STAR team.

## Study Two Disclosures

**Preregistration:** No aspects of the study were pre-registered. Data collection began on 2019-09-13. **Materials:** All study materials are publicly available (https://osf.io/bygnz/). **Data:** All primary data are publicly available (https://osf.io/bygnz/). **Analysis scripts:** All analysis scripts are publicly available (https://osf.io/bygnz/). **Computational reproducibility:** The computational reproducibility of the results has been independently confirmed by the journal's STAR team.

## Study Three Disclosures

**Preregistration:** The hypotheses, methods, and analysis plan were pre-registered (https://aspredicted.org/HW1_45Q) on 2023-02-19, prior to data collection which began on 2023-02-20. There was no deviation from the preregistration. **Materials:** All study materials are publicly available (https://osf.io/bygnz/). **Data:** All primary data are publicly available

(https://osf.io/bygnz/). **Analysis scripts:** All analysis scripts are publicly available (https://osf.io/bygnz/). **Computational reproducibility:** The computational reproducibility of the results has been independently confirmed by the journal's STAR team.

**Study Four Disclosures**

**Preregistration:** The hypotheses, methods, and analysis plan were pre-registered (https://aspredicted.org/CTV_FJF) on 2024-03-20, prior to data collection which began on 2024-03-21. There was no deviation from the preregistration. **Materials:** All study materials are publicly available (https://osf.io/bygnz/). **Data:** All primary data are publicly available (https://osf.io/bygnz/). **Analysis scripts:** All analysis scripts are publicly available (https://osf.io/bygnz/). **Computational reproducibility:** The computational reproducibility of the results has been independently confirmed by the journal's STAR team.

**Study Five Disclosures**

**Preregistration:** The hypotheses, methods, and analysis plan were pre-registered (https://aspredicted.org/2zr4-7k53.pdf) on 2024-11-19, prior to data collection which began on 2024-11-20. There was no deviation from the preregistration. **Materials:** All study materials are publicly available (https://osf.io/bygnz/). **Data:** All primary data are publicly available (https://osf.io/bygnz/). **Analysis scripts:** All analysis scripts are publicly available (https://osf.io/bygnz/). **Computational reproducibility:** The computational reproducibility of the results has been independently confirmed by the journal's STAR team.

## The Persistence of Homophobia in Men's Friendship Norms

Societal attitudes towards gay individuals have rapidly evolved, reflected in the expanding legalization of gay marriage, reduction in antigay bias (Ofosu et al., 2019), and growing global support for gay rights (Adamczyk & Liao, 2019). Yet, the cultural pressure men feel to behave as unambiguously heterosexual persists. We argue that this homophobia manifests in how men choose to spend time with other men—specifically, that they avoid experiences with romantic connotations due to a fear of being perceived as gay.

Although gender is increasingly viewed as fluid (Morgenroth & Ryan, 2021), dichotomous gender assumptions still organize society (Butler, 2004; Lorber, 2018), and ultimately uphold a global hierarchy dominated by men (Cheryan & Markus, 2020; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Ridgeway, 2011). To maintain dominant status, men must show that they are "true" men by conforming to masculine stereotypes such as being stoic, strong, competitive, courageous, and aggressive (e.g., Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; DiMuccio & Knowles, 2020; Eagly & Wood, 2017; Li, 2022; Lorber, 2018; Ridgeway & Correll, 2004; Vial et al., 2022). Indeed, scholars often characterize masculinity as rigid (Bosson et al., 2005), precarious (DiMuccio & Knowles, 2020; Vandello & Bosson, 2013), and fragile (Stanaland et al., 2023)—that is, easily threatened and disconfirmed—increasing men's pressure to conform to such cultural expectations.

Heterosexuality may be one such persisting expectation (Herek, 1986; Nielsen et al., 2000). Despite declining overt homophobic attitudes (Anderson & McCormack, 2016) and growing institutional support for gay individuals (Diefendorf & Bridges, 2019; Tankard & Paluck, 2017), being a gay man is still viewed as unmasculine (Mishel et al., 2022). Men face stricter standards regarding what constitutes being heterosexual than women (Mize & Manago,

2018) and straight men tend to feel emasculated when they are perceived as gay (Munsch & Gruys, 2018; Schermerhorn & Vescio, 2022). Ultimately, the association between being gay and unmasculine manifests in subtler ways than overt expressions of homophobic attitudes (Diefendorf & Bridges, 2019, 2020).

This homophobia is posited to contribute to men's historical tendency to have less intimate and supportive friendships with men than women have with women (Bank & Hansford, 2000; Chen, 2012; Lewis, 1978). While the term "bromance" suggests a growing acceptance of intimacy between men (Robinson et al., 2018), its existence underscores the rarity of intimate heterosexual friendships between men and their need to qualify them as non-romantic (Chen, 2012). Indeed, men still commonly report lacking supportive friendships (Cox, 2021), potentially contributing to the loneliness epidemic (WHO, 2023). Consistently, men's friendships typically involve less self-disclosure than women's (Aukett et al., 1988; Gil, 2023; Migliaccio, 2009; Rudolph & Dodson, 2022), with men prioritizing shared activities over self-disclosure (Migliaccio, 2009). Despite the relative importance men place on activities over self-disclosure *within* their friendships, we suggest that they still share these activities less than women do, particularly when romance is implied, potentially due to the pressure they feel to adhere to heterosexual norms.

Past research suggests that men often avoid engaging in certain activities due to a fear of appearing gay through stereotypically feminine behaviors (e.g., Bosson et al., 2006; Prewitt-Freilino & Bosson, 2008). In contrast, we propose that men specifically avoid sharing experiences with same-gender partners because of romantic apprehension (i.e., unease at the prospect of romantic inferences in a relationship). Our work therefore highlights a relational dimension of heterosexual norm violation, focusing on concerns about romantic undertones in

relationships among men, independent from avoidance of femininity.

## The Present Research

Five studies demonstrate how the cultural expectation of heterosexuality manifests in dyadic relationships among men (vs. women). We demonstrate that: men share experiences with same-gender peers less than women (Studies 1-5); this occurs for real-time (Study 2) and ostensibly consequential choice (Study 3); is particularly prominent for activities with romantic connotations (e.g., sharing food) (Studies 1, 3, and 4); and stems from romantic apprehension (Studies 3-4). Importantly, men even make suboptimal decisions (i.e., forgoing cash reward and preferred options) to avoid sharing romantic experiences. These patterns were observed in the U.S., the U.K., and Singapore (which has strong heterosexual and masculine norms; Lowe, 2019; Tang & Quah, 2018; Wong et al., 2016), underscoring their cross-cultural relevance. Additionally, men avoided sharing even though they wished they *could*, indicating that their behavior is influenced by gendered expectations rather than inherent preference (Study 5). Overall, these studies examine how these expectations shape men's navigation of shared experiences, offering experimental evidence on the relational dimensions of homophobia and their impact on men's decision-making and interpersonal bonds.

## Methodological Transparency

To facilitate replication, we report all manipulations and measures with greater detail in the Supplementary Online Materials [SOM] and provide materials, data, and analysis scripts here: https://osf.io/bygnz/. In all studies, we aimed to collect at least 50 participants per comparison group (Simmons et al., 2013), and when possible, aimed for at least 100 participants per comparison group, assuring 80% power to detect medium-sized effects at a 5% error probability (Brysbaert, 2019). Exact stopping rules are indicated in each study's methods section.

This research received approval from a local ethics board (ID: 202135 at first and second author's institution; ID: IRB-19-073-A070-M15(323) at third author's institution).

Empirically, we compare same-gender experience sharing between individuals identifying as men and women in all studies (except for Study 2 in which gender was inferred by the experimenter based on gendered appearance norms). Our main text includes results from participants of all sexual orientations without exclusions. However, to address the possibility that individuals with less pressure to adhere to heterosexual standards, such as gay and bisexual men, may exhibit different behavior patterns, we also examine data comprising only heterosexual participants (except for Study 2 in which sexual orientation was not collected and thus exclusion was not possible). The findings consistently align with those reported in the main text (see SOM). In all main studies, insufficient power prevented us from testing interactions between sexual orientation and our independent variables (i.e., LGBTQIA+ groups were under 30 participants per gender group). We therefore include a Supplementary Study to test effects across gay and bisexual men and women in the SOM, with findings discussed in the General Discussion.

## Study 1: Men Avoid Romantic Experiences with Other Men

Study 1 tested whether men are less likely than women to share experiences with same-gender others, particularly in romantic contexts. Participants evaluated ten activities, indicating their likelihood of engaging in each with a same-gender friend, and rating how romantic each activity was. We anticipated that men would be less likely than women to invite or accept invitations from same-gender friends, especially for highly romantic experiences.

### Method

#### *Participants and Design*

This study was pre-registered (https://aspredicted.org/P8X_SLT). We aimed to recruit 100 men and 100 women from Prolific. We opened the study to 200 Prolific members based in the United States using Prolific's gender-balanced sample option and ceased data collection when the request was fulfilled by the platform, resulting in 200 Prolific members based in the United States ($M_{age}$ = 39.7; 99 men [83 heterosexual, 96 cisgender], 100 women [82 heterosexual, 95 cisgender], 1 non-binary; detailed analyses by gender identity and sexual orientation and by transgender identity and sex assigned at birth in the SOM). This study employed a 2 (participant gender: men vs. women; between-subjects) × 10 (activity: go to the movies, share a dish and a drink at dinner, go to an expensive restaurant, go to the beach, go to a concert, visit a museum, go hiking, go ziplining, go to a fast-food restaurant, go kayaking; within-subjects) mixed design. We used the continuous measure of perceived activity romanticness as the repeated independent variable.

***Procedure***

**Demographics.** Participants first reported their demographics, including age, sex assigned at birth, transgender identity, gender identity, and sexual orientation (see SOM for measure details). We measured participant gender using a two-stage approach (Fraser, 2018). Participants first answered an open-ended question about their gender and then self-categorized their response into one of four categories (1 = *male*, 2 = *female*, 3 = *non-binary*, 4 = *prefer not say*). Using sex assigned at birth along with transgender identity to infer gender identity shows consistent results for all analyses.

**Activity romanticness (independent measure).** Besides participant gender, activity romanticness served as another main independent measure in this study. Participants viewed the ten activities listed above in random order and responded to the following item: "To what extent

is each of the below experiences a prototypical (i.e., quintessential or classic) example of an activity you would do on a date with a romantic partner?" (1 = *not at all*, 5 = *extremely*). We propose that a fear of appearing to be in a romantic relationship with one's activity partner drives activity avoidance, above and beyond aspects of the activities that may foster romantic bonding (e.g., opportunity for intimate discussions); thus, we operationalized activity romanticness as the prototypicality of a romantic date, which captures the cultural connotations of the activity that suggest a romantic relationship.

**Control variables.** Participants rated the activities on several additional dimensions, which were randomized with the independent measure and included as pre-registered control variables. Specifically, they responded to the following items on 5-point scales (1 = *not at all*, 5 = *extremely*): "How indulgent is each of the below experiences?"; "How feminine is each of the below experiences?"; "How much would you enjoy doing each of these activities?"; and "How much do you think a typical platonic male/female [same-gender as participants] friend of yours would enjoy doing each of these activities?" Participants also responded to an item assessing how hedonic the experience was (1 = *completely utilitarian*, 5 = *completely hedonic*; Ratner & Hamilton, 2015): "To what extent is each of the below experiences engaged in to accomplish something (utilitarian) or engaged in to experience pleasure or other emotions (hedonic)?" We fully randomized the control items along with the activity romanticness predictor, and participants consistently completed these items before the dependent measures. This approach ensured that romanticness was not more salient than alternative accounts, reducing participants' potential bias toward any specific measure while alleviating the concern that the romanticness predictor may prime participants with the notion of romance. Notably, prior research has underscored men's desire to avoid feminine behavior, suggesting that the femininity measure

could prime men to avoid suggesting activities perceived as feminine. This effect, however, is distinct from our theorized explanation, which focuses on men avoiding romantic behaviors due to fears of appearing gay. By equally priming femininity and romanticness, and statistically analyzing the independent roles of femininity and romanticness in the same model, this design serves as a conservative test of our theory.

**Dependent measures.** For the first dependent measure, participants indicated how likely they were to suggest each activity to a platonic same-gender friend. For the second dependent measure, participants indicated how likely they would be to accept an invitation from a same-gender friend to engage in each activity together. This measure implies that the friend is interested in sharing the activity, enabling us to test whether men would still avoid sharing romantic activities with same-gender friends when potential judgment or anticipated discomfort from the friend is minimized. These two items were counterbalanced and presented on 5-point scales (1 = *not likely at all*, 5 = *extremely likely*).

After answering the two dependent measures, participants rated, on a single-item scale, how likely they were to suggest each activity to a platonic opposite-gender friend (1 = *not likely at all*, 5 = *extremely likely*). This rating served as a pre-registered control variable, as well as an additional dependent measure, which enabled us to test partner gender (same vs. opposite) as a moderator.

## Results

### *Main Findings*

To test whether men avoid sharing experiences more than women, and whether romantic prototypicality underlies this effect, we ran a mixed-effects model (using lmerTest in R statistical software, Kuznetsova et al., 2017), including by-participant intercepts to control individual

variation for all mixed-effects models. We regressed the likelihood of suggesting an activity to a same-gender friend on participant gender (men vs. women), activity romanticness, and their two-way interaction. As pre-registered, we also included the other activity-level characteristics (indulgence, femininity, enjoyability for oneself, assumed enjoyability for a same-gender friend, and hedonicness) and their interaction with gender as predictors in the model. This allowed us to test if romanticness is associated with sharing avoidance in men (and not women) above and beyond alternative explanations, such as men avoiding sharing feminine activities with same-gender others. We also included the likelihood of sharing with an opposite-gender friend as a control variable without its interaction with gender. This helps rule out the alternate process that men are less willing to share romantic experiences with anyone, regardless of their gender, and that this broad reluctance leads to the interaction in the same-gender context. If this were the case, we would expect a similar gender × romanticness interaction on sharing in same- and opposite-gender friend contexts (formal moderation by partner gender tests are also reported below), and controlling for opposite-gender sharing would substantially reduce or eliminate the gender × romanticness interaction on same-gender sharing.

We found a two-way interaction between gender and romanticness on same-gender friend sharing ($t(1958) = -4.79$, $p < .001$, see Figure 1a and SOM for full regression table). Spotlight analysis showed that men were less likely than women to share an activity that was highly romantic (one standard deviation above the mean) ($t(349) = -5.43$, $p < .001$) and of average (mean) romanticness ($t(197) = -3.40$, $p < .001$) with a same-gender friend. This effect was nonsignificant for less romantic activities (one standard deviation below the mean) ($t(354) = -.38$, $p = .706$). Decomposed differently, although romanticness was negatively correlated with men's willingness to share the activity with a same-gender friend ($t(1968) = -3.15$, $p = .002$),

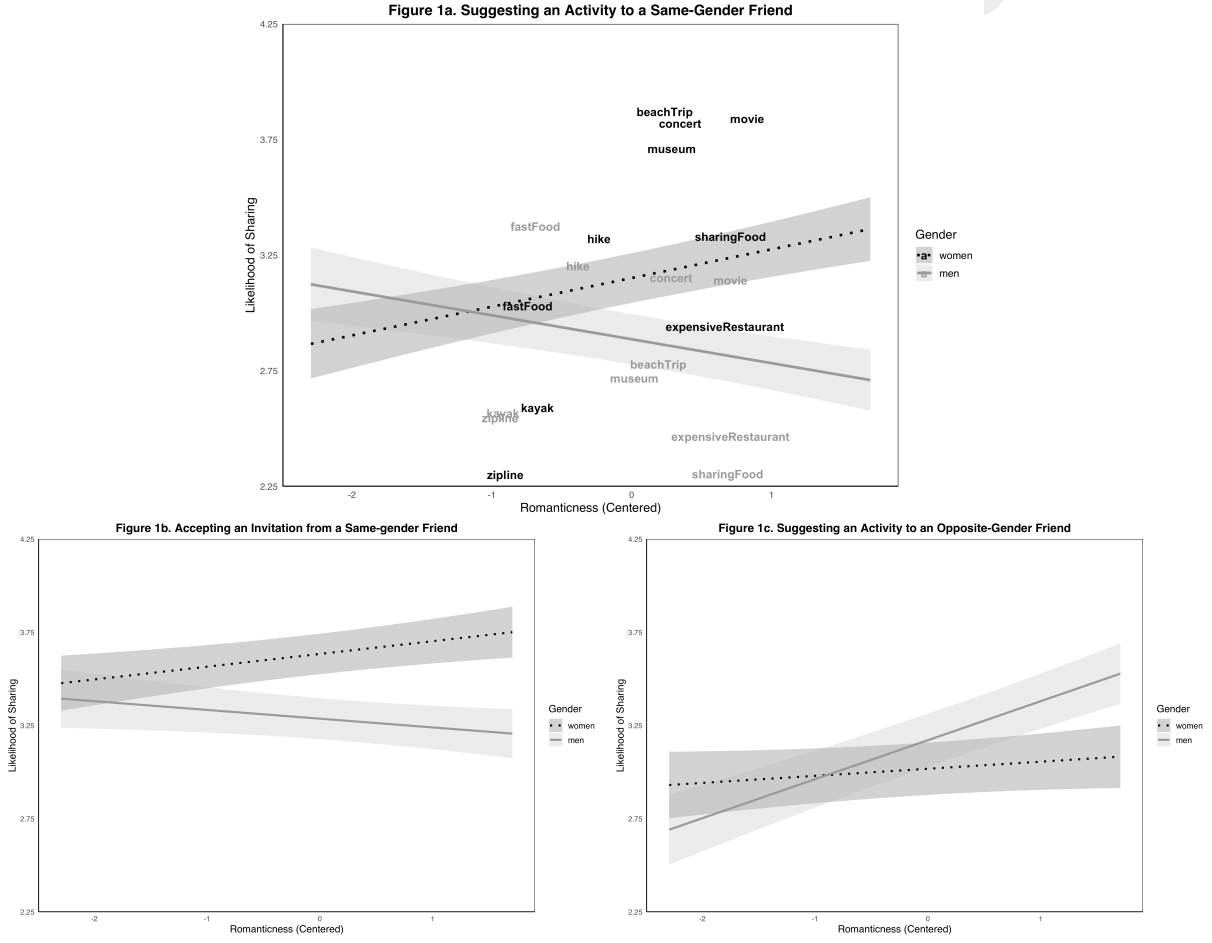
this effect was not found, and was even reversed, for women ($t(1943) = 3.59$, $p < .001$; see SOM for descriptives for each activity by gender). This reversal in women is not consistently observed across studies, and does not account for the negative effect of romanticness on men's experience sharing.

Thus, men were less likely than women to share experiences with a same-gender friend. The moderation by activity romanticness suggests that men do not merely prefer to engage in activities alone; rather, they seek to avoid *romantic connotations* in their platonic friendships with other men. Notably, as pre-registered, the results reported control for how hedonic, indulgent, feminine, and enjoyable participants perceived each activity to be, how enjoyable they believed the activity would be for a same-gender friend, and the interactions of these variables with gender. Of note, although the gender × femininity interaction was significant ($b = –.12$, $t(1243) = –2.83$, $p = .005$), the gender × romanticness interaction remained an independent, strong predictor in the model ($b = –.17$, $t(1958) = –4.79$, $p < .001$) (see SOM for further exploratory analyses regarding femininity).

Results also remained when controlling for their likelihood of suggesting the activity to an opposite-gender friend. We therefore do not believe these effects are driven solely by men's perception that women would prefer the romantic activities (e.g., because they are more feminine), nor by the belief that men would enjoy romantic activities less, or by men's tendency to avoid sharing romantic (vs. unromantic) activities with anyone. Additionally, non-preregistered robustness checks showed that the moderation results remained significant without the control variables and when progressively including the control variables and their interactions with gender, and their interactions with activity romanticness across ten regression models (see Table A4 in the SOM).

**Fig. 1.**

Study 1—Likelihood of Sharing Based on Gender and Activity Romanticness, When the Same-gender Sharing is Initiated (a) by the Self or (b) by the Friend, or (c) When Sharing with an Opposite-gender Friend. In Figure 1a, means for each activity's romanticness and the likelihood of suggesting sharing are indicated by each activity's name, with separate values provided for men and women. Figures 1a-1c show regression lines with pre-registered controls. The y-axes do not represent the full scale.




***Moderation by Initiator of Sharing***

To test whether this pattern remained even when the friend clearly preferred to engage in and share the activity (i.e., when the friend initiated the experience sharing), we created a long-

form dataset, in which the likelihood of sharing—whether initiated by the participant or the friend—served as the dependent measure, while the initiator of sharing (self vs. friend) was an independent variable. We ran a mixed-effects model regressing the likelihood of sharing with a same-gender friend on participant gender (men vs. women), activity romanticness, sharing initiator (self vs. friend), and their three-way interaction, along with all two-way interactions, without a priori predictions. Although we pre-registered these analyses without control variables, we report the results here with control variables for consistency with the main analyses and to facilitate visual comparison between Figures 1a and 1b. Specifically, we controlled for likelihood of sharing with an opposite-gender friend (without its interaction with the independent variables), as well as how indulgent, hedonic, feminine, enjoyable for oneself, and enjoyable for a same-gender friend the activities were (with their interactions with participant gender and sharing initiator). The SOM presents the pre-registered analyses without control variables, which yield highly consistent results. The three-way interaction was significant ($t(3744) = 2.37$, $p = .018$). Romanticness moderated the gender effect on same-gender sharing more strongly when the initiator was the self ($t(3915) = –5.14$, $p < .001$). Importantly, the effect remained when the initiator was the friend ($t(3915) = –2.03$, $p = .043$). When the initiator was a friend, men were less likely to share highly romantic activities (+1 *SD*) ($t(4921) = –5.27$, $p < .001$) and activities of average (mean) romanticness ($t(2597) = –4.94$, $p < .001$) than women (consistent with results when the initiator was the self). This gender difference was also present, albeit weaker, for less romantic activities (–1 *SD*) when the initiator was the friend ($t(5010) = –3.05$, $p = .002$). These results suggest that men's experience sharing avoidance is not solely due to concerns about their partner's judgment or preferences, as men were still more likely than women to decline invitations from same-gender friends for average and above-average romanticness activities.

***Moderation by Partner Gender***

To further show that men do not merely avoid engaging in romantic activities with anyone, we created a long-form dataset in which the likelihood of sharing activities—regardless of whether the partner was same-gender or opposite-gender—served as the dependent measure and partner gender (same-gender vs. opposite-gender) was an independent measure. We ran a mixed effects model, regressing the likelihood of suggesting an activity on participant gender (men vs. women), activity romanticness, partner gender (same-gender vs. opposite-gender), their three-way interaction, and all resulting two-way interactions. Again, for consistency with the main findings, we report analyses controlling for how indulgent, hedonic, feminine, enjoyable for oneself, and enjoyable for a same-gender friend the activities were and their interactions with participant gender and partner gender. The SOM presents highly consistent results for the pre-registered analyses without controls.

We found the expected three-way interaction between participant gender, romanticness, and partner gender ($t(3750) = -4.47$, $p < .001$). The interaction between romanticness and gender was significant when suggesting sharing to a same-gender friend ($t(3901) = -2.60$, $p = .009$), and in the opposite direction for an opposite-gender friend ($t(3901) = 3.28$, $p = .001$). Relevantly, men were more likely to share highly romantic activities (+1 *SD*) with opposite- than same-gender friends ($t(3750) = -6.61$, $p < .001$). The reverse was true for less romantic activities (–1 *SD*) among men ($t(3750) = 2.09$, $p = .036$). Although this tendency may partly reflect men's perception that romantic activities would be preferred by women partners, the fact that this pattern remained when controlling for femininity of the activity suggests that romantic apprehension contributes above and beyond this account. As sharing a romantic experience with an opposite-gender friend does not signal being gay, this finding supports our theory that a key

reason men avoid romantic experiences with other men is the fear of appearing gay, rather than because men are less likely to share romantic experiences in general.

On the other hand, the effect was reversed for women who were more likely to share highly romantic activities ($t(3750) = 2.38$, $p = .018$) with same- than opposite-gender friends. Notably, this effect was not observed for less romantic activities among women ($t(3750) = 1.18$, $p = .238$). Future research is needed to further investigate the mechanisms leading women to prefer romantic sharing with women over sharing with men, as it is outside of the scope of the current investigation. However, we can speculate on the various factors that may contribute to this effect. For instance, whereas men have more intimate opposite-gender than same-gender friendships, women have historically had more intimate same-gender than opposite-gender friendships (Sapadin, 1988), suggesting that women may prefer to engage in intimate activities with women than with men. Furthermore, it has been found that straight men tend to overestimate straight women's sexual interest in them, which can lead straight women to be more reserved around them (Russell et al., 2018). Thus, it is also possible that women may avoid engaging in romantic activities with their straight male friends to prevent misinterpretation of romantic interest.

**Discussion**

Men reported a tendency to avoid both initiating and accepting invitations to share experiences with same-gender friends compared to women, which was associated with romantic prototypicality of activities. This was not the case for opposite-gender friends, and held while accounting for femininity of the activity and partner's preference, among other alternatives (see SOM). We acknowledge that these activities varied in factors like time commitment and conversational expectations, which we controlled for in subsequent studies.

## Study 2: Men Eschew Their Preferred Option When They Have to Share It

Study 2 tested whether men share a romantic experience less than women (drink sharing, identified as romantic in Study 1). Dyads of two men or two women chose between mineral water (two small bottles), and green tea, which was manipulated to come in either one large bottle to share or two small bottles. We predicted that men would avoid shared green tea more than individually consumed tea; we did not expect this for women.

### Method

#### *Participants and Design*

This study was not pre-registered. We stopped collecting data after we obtained the intended sample size of 200 dyads (100 dyads of men, 100 dyads of women). Participants were people walking, sitting, or dining in same-gender dyads in public areas in two- to three-hour blocks between 10 AM and 4 PM on six separate days near an undergraduate campus in Singapore. Same-gender dyads were approached at equal rates (i.e., approximately half of the dyads recruited on each day were men and half were women). This study was a 2 (dyad gender: men vs. women) × 2 (tea sharing option: shared bottle vs. separate bottles) design, with the dyad as the unit of analysis.

#### *Procedure*

**Experimental setup.** Two experimenters (both women) identified dyads consisting of two men or two women, inferring gender based on gendered appearance norms. Participants were invited to participate in a campaign called "Beat the Hot Day with a Friend" (Singapore's climate is always hot), offering participants a free drink. If the pair agreed to participate, one of the experimenters surreptitiously indicated the inferred gender of the dyad in a Qualtrics survey on a tablet and then passed the tablet to the dyad without seeing the subsequent page (to remain

blind to the condition).

**Tea sharing manipulation.** The survey displayed a drink choice set under the title "Beat the Hot Day with a [Bro]/[Gal]" (depending on the dyad's inferred gender). The drink choice set included two 250 ml bottles of mineral water in both conditions; the other option was either two 250 ml bottles of green tea (separate-bottles condition) or one 500 ml bottle of green tea labeled "1 Bottle of 500ml Ayataka TO SHARE" (shared-bottle condition). To control for the expected consumption amount and package design, we used the same image of the green tea in both conditions, adjusting the bottle size to match the size of the water bottles (separate-bottles condition) or to be twice the size of one water bottle (shared-bottle condition).

**Choice of green tea (dependent measure).** Each dyad selected either green tea or water from the condition-specific choice sets specified in the tea sharing manipulation section.

**Control variable.** Before receiving their chosen drink(s), participants reported how long they planned to hang out that day after completing the survey (7-point scale: 0 = *0 minute*, 1 = *10 minutes*, 2 = *20 minutes*, 3 = *30 minutes*, 40 = *40 minutes,* 50 = *50 minutes*, 6 = *more than an hour*). We added this measure to test a potential confound: if men were hanging out for less time than women, then the men would have less time to consume a drink together. We started collecting this measure after running the first 20 dyads, at which point we realized the possibility that the hangout duration might confound the estimated effect. Note that three dyads did not respond to the question, so we collected responses from 177 dyads.

**Debrief.** Finally, participants received the selected drink(s), and were debriefed. As green tea and water do not come in 250 ml bottles, dyads that chose individual bottles ultimately received either two 300 ml bottles of green tea or two 330 ml bottles of mineral water as an approximation of their choice. Importantly, they believed they were choosing between equal

volumes of 250 ml when making their choice.

**Results**

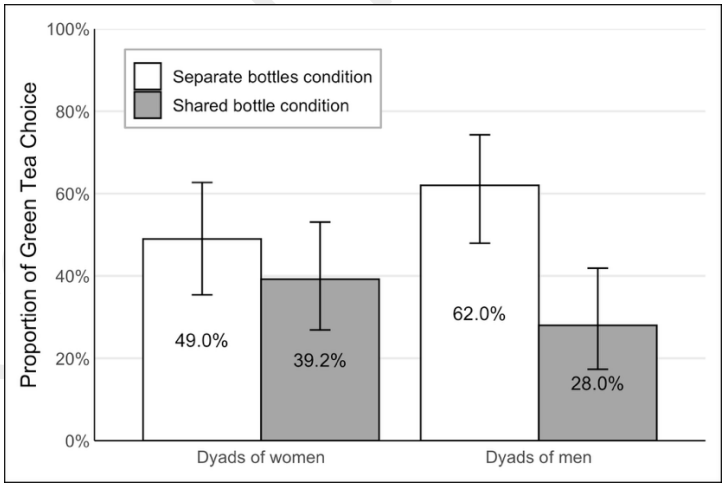
To test whether men would avoid choosing green tea when it had to be shared, we ran a binomial logistic regression of the drink choice (green tea vs. water) on the dyad gender (men vs. women), tea sharing condition (shared bottle vs. separate bottles), and their interaction. We found a main effect of tea sharing condition such that more dyads chose green tea when the green tea option came in two individual bottles compared to when it had to been shared ($b$ = –.46, $SE$ = .15, $p$ = .002, odd's ratio ($OR$) = .63). We did not find a main gender effect ($b$ = .01, $SE$ = .15, $p$ = .967, $OR$ = 1.01).

Centrally, the interaction was marginally significant ($b$ = –1.04, $SE$ = .59, $p$ = .079, $OR$ = .35). To decompose this interaction, we focus on comparisons within rather than between the dyad gender. This is because men and women may have different baseline preferences for green tea versus water (i.e., more men than women may prefer green tea over water, or vice versa). Indeed, 62.0% of dyads of men versus 49.0% of dyads of women chose green tea in the individual bottle condition, suggesting that comparing choices between men and women in the shared condition could be confounded by their baseline green tea preference. The key planned contrast was therefore whether dyads of men would choose the green tea less when it had to be shared. This was the case. Fewer dyads of men chose green tea in the shared-bottle condition (28.0%) than in the separate-bottles condition (62.0%) ($b$ = –1.43, $SE$ = .43, $p$ < .001, $OR$ = .24). This result suggests that the prospect of having to share green tea led 34% of men to switch from their preferred drink, green tea, to choosing individual bottles of water. In contrast, the number of dyads of women who chose green tea did not differ significantly between the shared-bottle condition (39.2%) and the separate-bottles condition (49.0%) ($b$ = –.40, $SE$ = .40, $p$ = .326, $OR$

= .67, see Figure 2). Thus, men's preference for an individual over shared experience was greater than women's. Although not central to our hypothesis, we did not find a gender difference in green tea choice in the shared bottle ($b$ = .53, $SE$ = .41, $p$ = .194, $OR$ = 1.70) or separate bottles ($b$ = –.51, $SE$ = .43, $p$ = .235, $OR$ = .60) conditions. A t-test found no difference in the hangout duration between dyads of men ($M$ = 4.35, $SD$ = 2.13) and dyads of women ($M$ = 4.76, $SD$ = 2.06) ($t$(175) = 1.31, $p$ = .191), and the results were also consistent when controlling for dyad hangout duration (see details in SOM). This suggests that the observed effects are unlikely to be driven by men anticipating hanging out for a shorter time than women, which would have limited their time to share.

**Fig. 2.**

Study 2—Proportions of Dyads of Men and Women Choosing Green Tea When It Came in a Shared versus Separate Bottle(s). Error bars are 95% confidence intervals.




**Discussion**

This field study demonstrates, in real-time choice for immediate consumption, that men are less likely to choose a product when it requires sharing. Although many men preferred green tea over water, they did not want to share it. However, this study was not pre-registered.

Additionally, the key interaction was marginal, and without measuring sexual orientation, we could not verify robustness specifically for heterosexual participants. Subsequent higher powered pre-registered studies aim to theoretically replicate this finding by treating shared (vs. individual) choice as the dependent measure rather than manipulating it, while providing evidence for process.

## Study 3: Monetary Incentives Fail to Overcome Romantic Apprehension in Men

In Study 3, Singaporean lab participants chose between watching film clips with a same-gender partner for $20 or alone for $10, believing their choice was consequential. We manipulated the film clip's perceived romance and expected men to forgo $10 to watch the romantic film clip alone more than women, but that this effect would be attenuated for an unromantic clip. Finally, we expected romantic apprehension to mediate this pattern.

### Method

#### *Participants and Design*

This study was pre-registered (https://aspredicted.org/HW1_45Q). Behavioral lab participants at a Singaporean university took part in this study for class credit. We aimed to recruit at least 100 men and 100 women, but the final sample size was determined by the number of students who signed up for this series of studies in the laboratory. In total, 315 participants took part in our study ($M_{age}$ = 22.2, 124 men [119 heterosexual, 122 cisgender], 188 women [167 heterosexual, 186 cisgender], 1 non-binary, 2 prefer not to say; detailed analyses by gender identity and sexual orientation, and by gender identity and transgender identity in the SOM). This study employed a 2 (participant gender: men vs. women, between-subjects) × 2 (experience romanticness: romantic vs. unromantic, within-subjects) mixed design.

#### *Procedure*

**Experimental setup.** After completing a series of unrelated online surveys in the behavioral lab, participants were asked to indicate their preferences for future lab studies. They read:

> These will be experience studies. For efficiency, we are offering the opportunity for you to complete the study in pairs, with same-gender partners (for $20 per participant in the pair) or to complete the study individually, on your own (for $10). Thus, you will get paid more if you complete the study with a partner.
>
> You will be invited to the relevant studies according to your preference. So please answer carefully and answer according to your true preference, as they will affect the actual study you will be offered later.

**Romance manipulation (within-subject independent measure).** Participants then viewed two lab experiences—one romantic, and one unromantic—presented in random order. The romantic experience was a movie clip from *The Notebook*, described as "a portrait of a powerful love that lasted the test of time" which is "one of the most romantic films of all time." The unromantic clip was a clip from the 2022 World Cup, described as containing "some of the most unforgettable moments from the World Cup in 2022." By holding the activity (watching a clip in the lab) constant and only changing the content (i.e., romantic vs. unromantic), we control for various differences between unromantic and romantic activities (e.g., anticipated amount of interaction).

**Sharing choice (dependent measure).** For both clips, participants indicated whether they would prefer to view the clip with a same-gender partner, or alone (1 = *Paired study with $20 reward (watch video clip with a same-gender participant),* 0 = *Individual study with $10 reward (watch video clip individually)*). Because participants believed they would complete this study with someone who chose the shared experience, the perceived preferences of the partner should not have influenced the participants' choices.

**Mediator measure.** To measure the romantic apprehension mediator, participants indicated their agreement with four statements about watching each movie clip (i.e., from *The Notebook* and the World Cup, counterbalanced) with a same-gender participant in a lab room: "It would be too intimate," "It would be too romantic," "It is something I would only do with a romantic partner," "It would be too much like a date" ($\alpha$ = .89). Agreement with each item was measured on a 7-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*).

**Manipulation check.** Participants indicated how romantic each experience was on a 5-point scale (1 = *not at all*, 5 = *extremely*): "To what extent is below experience romantic (i.e., prototypical of an activity you would do on a romantic date)?" ($M_{\text{romantic}}$ = 3.31, $SD$ = 1.12; $M_{\text{unromantic}}$ = 1.45, $SD$ = .87; $t(625) = -23.28$, $p < .001$, $d$ = 1.86).

**Demographics.** Finally, participants reported their demographics (i.e., age, gender identity, transgender identity, and sexual orientation; see SOM for measure details). For the independent variable of gender, participants responded to an open-ended question about their gender which we then coded into one of four categories (1 = *male*, 2 = *female*, 3 = *non-binary*, 4 = *prefer not say*) as pre-registered.

**Debrief.** Last, participants were debriefed that, although they were told their answers might lead to invitations for future studies, this was part of a hypothetical scenario to stimulate real decisions, and no such invitations would actually occur.

## Results

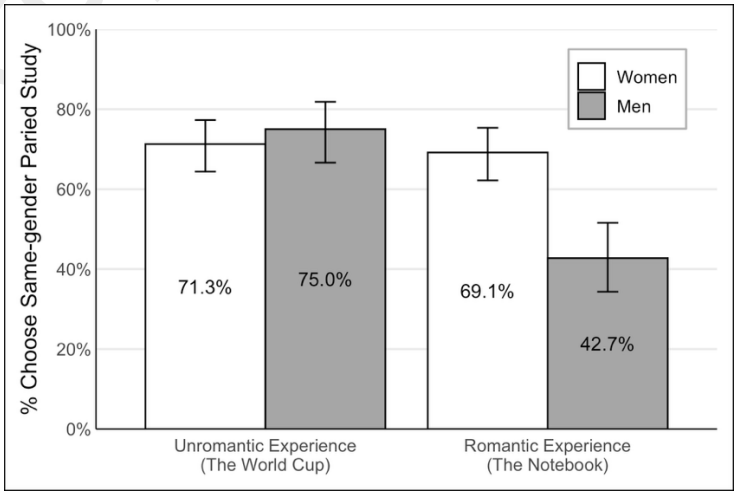
### *Main Findings*

To test whether men would avoid sharing romantic (but less so unromantic) activities more than women, we ran a mixed-effects model, regressing sharing on participant gender (men vs. women), experience (romantic vs. unromantic), and their interaction, controlling for

participant random effects. We found the predicted interaction ($b$ = –2.37, $SE$ = .54, $p$ < .001, $OR$ = .28, see Figure 3): For the romantic experience (watching *The Notebook*), men chose the (same-gender) partner option less often (42.7%) than women (69.1%; $b$ = –2.11, $SE$ = .50, $p$ < .001, $OR$ = .33). For the unromantic experience (watching the World Cup) men (75.0%) and women (71.3%) chose the partner option at about an equal rate ($b$ = .26, $SE$ = .45, $p$ = .569, $OR$ = 1.21). Decomposed differently, fewer men chose the partner study when it involved watching a romantic clip than an unromantic clip ($b$ = –2.55, $SE$ = .46, $p$ < .001, $OR$ = .25), but women chose the partner study involving a romantic and unromantic experience at about an equal rate ($b$ = –.18, $SE$ = .30, $p$ = .551, $OR$ = .90). This latter finding suggests that our effect was driven by romantic avoidance in men rather than a desire to share a romantic experience among women. Thus, Study 3 shows that more men than women gave up $10 to avoid watching scenes from *The Notebook* with a partner of the same gender, but this was not the case for watching scenes from the World Cup.

**Fig. 3.**

Study 3—Interaction Effect of Experience Romanticness and Participant Gender on Choice of the Same-gender Paired Study. Error bars are 95% confidence intervals.

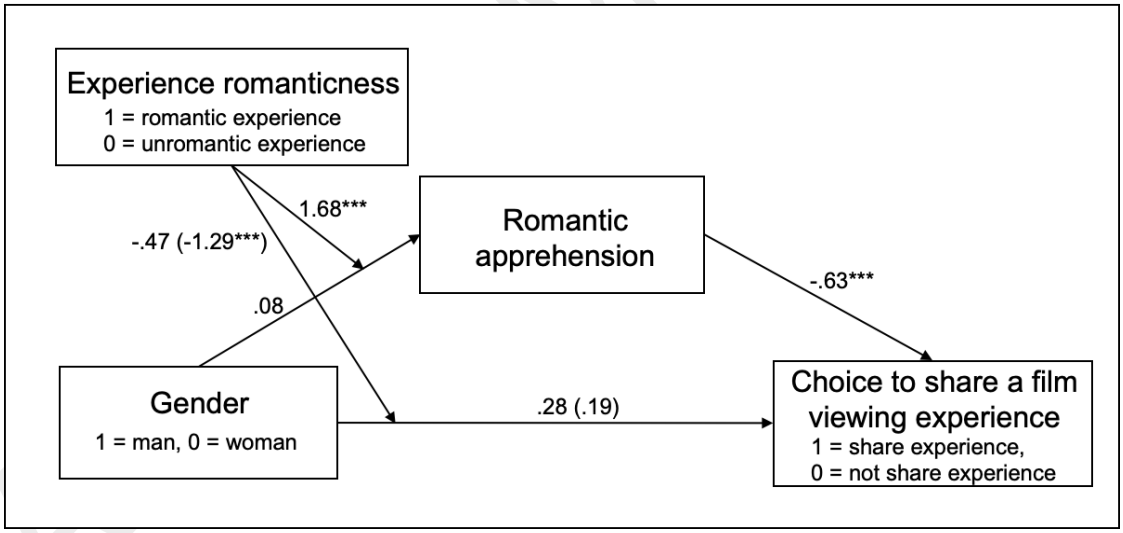


***Moderated Mediation***

We found a moderated mediation (Hayes, 2017, PROCESS Model 8, 5,000 sims; 95% CI [–1.50, –.70], see Figure 4). When the lab study involved watching a romantic movie clip (from *The Notebook*), men had higher romantic apprehension than women, which was associated with a lower likelihood of men choosing the same-gender paired study (95% CI [–1.53, –.77]); this indirect effect was not observed for the unromantic experience (watching a sports video clip; 95% CI [–.21, .10]). These results held true when including age as a covariate, as pre-registered (see SOM for detailed results).

**Fig. 4.**

Study 3—Moderated Mediation Model. Coefficients are standardized linear regression coefficients. Asterisks denote p-values as follows: *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$.




**Discussion**

Men, more than women, forwent $10 to avoid watching the romantic film, *The Notebook*, with a same-gender partner, potentially due to greater romantic apprehension. This was not the case for the unromantic World Cup footage. This design controls for differences between

unromantic and romantic activities (e.g., time, conversation), and partner preference, as participants expected to pair with someone who chose the shared experience.

Whereas Studies 2 and 3 took place in Singapore, subsequent studies were conducted in the U.S. and the U.K. to provide evidence for generalizability.

## Study 4: Men Prefer Sharing Feminine Over Romantic Experiences with Other Men

Study 4 tested whether men avoid sharing romantic experiences more than non-romantic experiences, even when the non-romantic experience is more feminine and sharing it should thus threaten masculinity. Participants indicated whether they would watch a romantic (*The Notebook*) or unromantic but more feminine (*Barbie*) movie at the cinema with a same-gender friend or independently.

### Method

#### *Participants and Design*

This study was pre-registered (https://aspredicted.org/CTV_FJF). We increased the sample size for this study to 250 per cell, as tests for interactions that involve reductions of a simple effect require at least double the sample size per cell compared to tests for a simple effect alone to achieve the same level of power (Simonsohn, 2015). We opened our study to 1,000 participants on Prolific using Prolific's gender-balanced sample option and ceased data collection when the request was fulfilled by the platform, resulting in 999 Prolific members based in the United States ($M_{age}$ = 41.2, 495 men [432 heterosexual, 482 cisgender], 474 women [397 heterosexual, 490 cisgender], 4 non-binary, 6 prefer not to say; detailed analyses by gender identity and sexual orientation and by transgender identity and sex assigned at birth in the SOM). This study employed a 2 (participant gender: men vs. women) × 2 (movie experience: more romantic-less feminine vs. less romantic-more feminine) between-subjects design.

### *Procedure*

**Demographics.** Participants first reported their gender identity, sexual orientation, age, transgender identity, and sex assigned at birth using the same measures as Study 1.

**Experimental set-up.** Participants imagined that they and a platonic same-gender friend (i.e., a male or female friend, or a platonic friend for participants not identifying as a woman or man) were taking a communication skills course together and were required to watch a movie as an assignment. They also read that each course participant had received a ticket for a movie showing at a cinema. Thus, assumed preference of the friend should not play a role, as both the participant and their imagined friend were required to watch the film, regardless of whether they would do so together or separate.

**Romance manipulation.** We manipulated what movie participants would have to watch. As confirmed by manipulation checks (see below), the movie was either more romantic but less feminine (*The Notebook*, which was described as "a contemporary love story set in the pre- and post- World War II era" known as "one of the most romantic films of all time") or less romantic but more feminine (*Barbie* described as "a delightful pink-themed film hailed for its strong message of female empowerment, without any romantic themes"; see SOM). Participants then watched a 30-second scene from their assigned movie.

**Likelihood of sharing (dependent measure).** Next, participants indicated how likely they would be to coordinate seeing the movie with their same-gender friend or go to the movie alone on a 5-point scale (1 = *definitely would coordinate to watch together*, 5 = *definitely would watch by myself instead*). We reverse-coded these responses to indicate participants' tendency to share.

**Mediator measure.** We used the same 4-item scale as in Study 3 to measure romantic

apprehension ($\alpha$ = .96).

**Manipulation checks and control variables.** Participants first indicated how romantic the movie they were assigned was ("How romantic is the movie '[Barbie/The Notebook]'?") and how feminine the movie was ("How feminine is the movie '[Barbie/The Notebook]'?"), both on 5-point scales (1 = *not at all*, 5 = *extremely*). As intended, *The Notebook* was viewed as more romantic ($M$ = 4.27, $SD$ = .73) and less feminine ($M$ = 3.59, $SD$ = .94) than *Barbie* ($M_{romantic}$ = 1.68, $SD$ = .89; $M_{feminine}$ = 4.06, $SD$ = .85; $t_{romantic}(997) = -50.15$, $p < .001$, $d = 3.18$; $t_{feminine}(997) = 8.32$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.53$). Finally, participants rated the extent to which the movie appealed to women versus men (1 = *appeals much more strongly to men*, 5 = *appeals much more strongly to women*), which was a pre-registered control variable along with femininity.

## Results

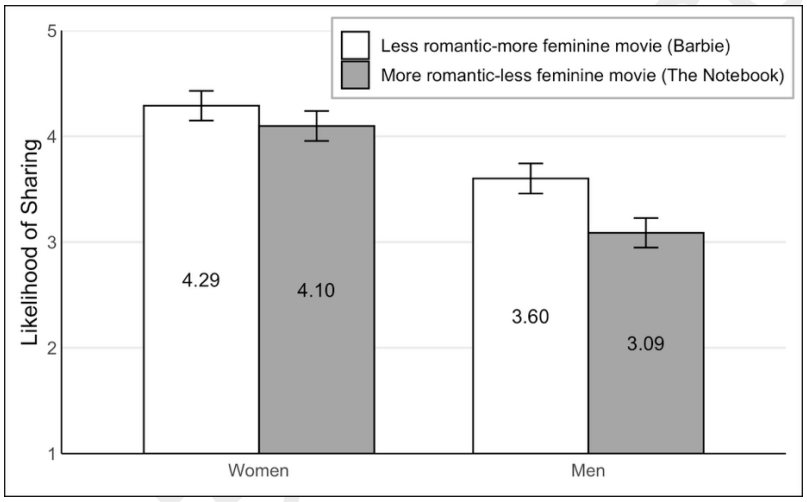
### *Main Findings*

To test whether men would avoid sharing a romantic movie more than women, and whether this pattern would be attenuated for an unromantic but feminine movie, we regressed sharing on participant gender (men vs. women), movie experience (romantic-unfeminine vs. unromantic-feminine), and their interaction. The interaction was significant ($t(985) = -2.25$, $p = .025$, see Figure 5). For *The Notebook* (the more romantic but less feminine movie), men were less likely to coordinate seeing the movie with a same-gender friend ($M$ = 3.09, $SD$ = 1.38) compared to women ($M$ = 4.10, $SD$ = 1.06, $t(985) = -9.98$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.82$). This gender difference was attenuated for *Barbie* (the unromantic but more feminine movie) ($M_{men}$ = 3.60, $SD$ = 1.12; $M_{women}$ = 4.29, $SD$ = .89, $t(985) = -6.76$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.68$). Decomposed differently, men were less likely to coordinate seeing the movie with a same-gender friend when watching *The Notebook* (more romantic but less feminine) than when watching *Barbie* (less romantic but

more feminine) ($t(985) = –5.06$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.41$). This effect was weaker among women ($t(985) = –1.88$, $p = .060$, $d = 0.20$). The fact that the effect was marginal among women suggests that the observed pattern is driven by men's avoidance of romance rather than women's attraction to romantic activities.

**Fig. 5.**

Study 4—Interaction Effect of Movie Experience and Participant Gender on Same-gender Experience Sharing. Error bars are 95% confidence intervals.




As pre-registered, we repeated the main analysis while controlling for how feminine the movie was, how much the movie appealed to women, and their interactions with participant gender. We found a significant (and stronger) interaction between participant gender and movie experience ($t(981) = –2.76$, $p = .006$): As before, for *The Notebook* (the more romantic but less feminine movie), men were less likely to coordinate seeing the movie with a same-gender friend than women ($t(981) = –10.23$, $p < .001$). This gender difference was attenuated for *Barbie* (the unromantic but more feminine movie) ($t(981) = –6.21$, $p < .001$). Decomposed differently, men were less likely to coordinate seeing the movie with a same-gender friend when watching *The Notebook* (a more romantic but less feminine movie) than when watching *Barbie* (a less romantic

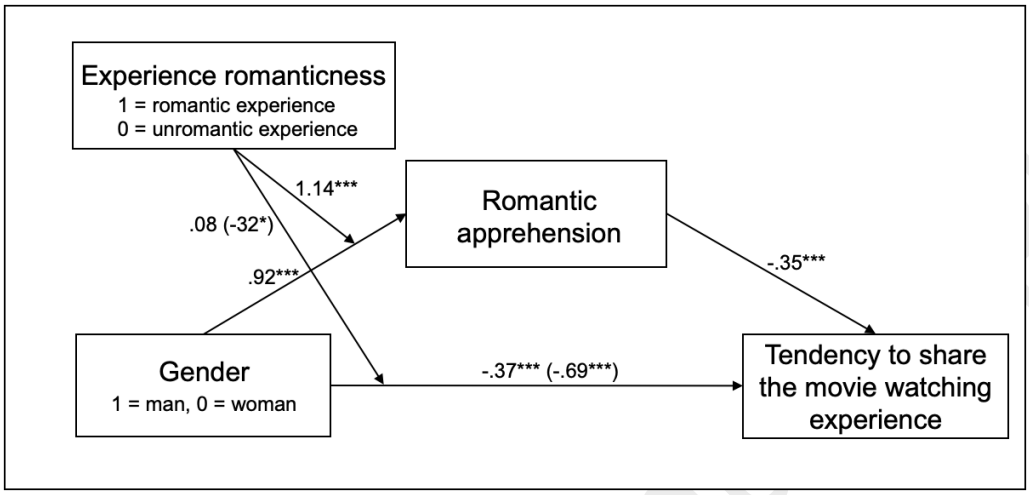
but more feminine movie); $t(981) = -5.54$, $p < .001$). This effect was not found among women ($t(981) = -1.63$, $p = .104$). This finding speaks to men's aversion of being in romantic situations with other men that is independent and, in this context, stronger than the aversion to appearing feminine or engaging in feminine activities with other men.

***Moderated Mediation***

We replicated the moderated mediation found in Study 3 (Hayes, 2017, PROCESS Model 8, 5,000 sims; 95% CI [–.54, –.26], see Figure 6). For *The Notebook* (more romantic and less feminine), men reported higher romantic apprehension than women, which was associated with greater reluctance to watch the movie with a same-gender friend (95% CI [–.87, –.59]). This indirect effect was attenuated for *Barbie* (less romantic but more feminine) (95% CI [–.42, –.23]). The persistence of the effect for *Barbie* makes sense, as going to the movies, even an unromantic one, is thought to be a date-like activity, leading men to avoid it with other men. A romantic movie, being more overtly date-like, leads to greater avoidance. We replicated these findings while controlling for how feminine the movie was, and how much the movie appealed to women as covariates (Hayes, 2017, PROCESS Model 8, 5,000 sims; 95% CI [–.54, –.26]); indirect effect for *The Notebook*: 95% CI [–.87, –.59]; indirect effect for *Barbie*: 95% CI [–.43, –.23]) and when including them as mediators in parallel (Hayes, 2017, PROCESS Model 8, 5,000 sims; 95% CI [–.55, –.26]; indirect effect for *The Notebook*: 95% CI [–.87, –.59]; indirect effect for *Barbie*: 95% CI [–.42, –.23]). We did not find a moderated mediation via how feminine the movie was (95% CI [–.02, .01]) nor how much the movie appealed to women (95% CI [–.01, .02]), suggesting that in this context, femininity does not contribute to the interactive effect of romanticness and gender on likelihood of sharing.

**Fig. 6.**

Study 4—Moderated Mediation Model. Coefficients are standardized linear regression coefficients. Asterisks denote p-values as follows: *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$.




**Discussion**

Study 4 suggests that men (vs. women) eschew sharing romantic (vs. unromantic) experiences even when the unromantic experience is more feminine. Mediation highlights the potential role of romantic apprehension, above and beyond concerns about the femininity of the activity.

## Study 5: Social Constraints on Men's Willingness to Share Experiences

Study 5 directly measured how much men (vs. women) feel constrained by the perceived social acceptability in a food sharing setting. We predicted that men's reluctance to share arises from the pressure to conform to socially constructed gender norms, rather than merely from a personal aversion to sharing.

### Method

#### *Participants and Design*

This study was pre-registered (https://aspredicted.org/2zr4-7k53.pdf). Because the magnitudes of the independent indirect effects were unclear, we targeted a relatively large

sample size of 400 in an effort to achieve sufficient statistical power for the mediation analysis. We opened our study to 200 men and 200 women in separate surveys on Prolific and ceased data collection when the request was fulfilled by the platform, resulting in 401 members of Prolific Academic based in the United Kingdom participated ($M_{age}$ = 43.3, 201 men [190 heterosexual, 195 cisgender], 200 women [184 heterosexual, 200 cisgender]; detailed analyses by gender identity and sexual orientation and by transgender identity and sex assigned at birth in the SOM). This study employed a two-group (participant gender: men vs. women) between-subjects design.

***Procedure***

We used a gender identity pre-screener on Prolific Academic to recruit men and women for two separate surveys. This approach mitigates the potential influence of gender identity salience, which may arise when participants answer a gender identification question at the beginning of the survey. Participants imagined being at a restaurant with a same-gender friend as indicated by the use of pronouns. In this scenario, they imagined being interested in a chicken dish and a fish dish but unable to decide. They then imagined that their friend was also debating between the same two options.

**Likelihood of sharing (dependent measure).** Participants indicated their agreement with the statement, "I would share with [him/her]" (with the pronoun matching the participant's gender), on a 7-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*).

**Mediator and alternative mechanism measures.** Participants then indicated their agreement with our two-item measure of felt social constraint against sharing: "I wouldn't share but I wish I felt comfortable doing so," "I wouldn't share but I wish it were more socially acceptable to share," ($r$ = .61). To test the alternate account that men may prefer not to share even if it were socially acceptable, participants also rated their personal aversion to sharing by

indicating their agreement with the statement "I wouldn't share because I don't want to." Note that even this statement is likely influenced by social norms (e.g., deep-seated internalized reluctance to seem gay), therefore this design serves as a conservative test of our theory. All three mechanism statements are randomly ordered and presented on the same page as the dependent measure, using a 7-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*).

**Demographics.** Lastly, participants reported their sexual orientation, age, transgender identity, and sex assigned at birth using the same measures as in Studies 1 and 4.

**Results**

**Effect of gender on sharing.** Regressing sharing onto gender (men vs. women), we found that men were less likely to share two dishes with a same-gender friend ($M = 4.60$, $SD = 2.08$) than women ($M = 5.28$, $SD = 1.91$), $t(399) = -3.40$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.34$.

**Mediation.** We then regressed our measure of social constraint on participant gender (men vs. women) and found that men reported feeling more constrained by social pressure regarding sharing ($M = 2.94$, $SD = 1.46$) than women ($M = 2.58$, $SD = 1.36$), $t(399) = 2.56$, $p = .011$, $d = 0.26$.

We conducted a mediation analysis (Hayes, 2017, PROCESS Model 4, 5,000 sims) testing the indirect effects of gender on sharing through social constraints. The results indicated that men's heightened concerns about social constraints around sharing were linked to their lower willingness to share the two dishes with a friend, 95% CI [–.37, –.05]). This effect remained when controlling for personal aversion to sharing as a parallel mediator, 95% CI [–.12, –.01]. Personal aversion to sharing also mediated the gender effect in this model, 95% CI [–.69, –.05].

Personal aversion to sharing can include various factors, such as internalized social

standards and personal enjoyment of sharing, making it unclear which specific aspect is driving the observed finding. One possibility is that men feel constrained by social pressures to share, leading them to internalize such social standards into their personal attitudes about sharing, ultimately resulting in their avoidance of sharing. This is consistent with the internalized social standards account, part of our suggested mechanism (i.e., fear of seeming gay).

To test this possibility, we conducted a pre-registered exploratory serial mediation model (Hayes, 2017, PROCESS Model 6, 5,000 sims) with sharing tendency as the dependent variable, participants gender as the independent variable, and perceived social constraints and personal aversion to sharing as serial mediators. Our results revealed a significant serial mediation effect (95% CI [–.26, –.03]) in addition to a significant mediation of perceived social constraints (95% CI [–.12, –.01]). Notably, personal aversion to sharing did not mediate independently (95% CI [–.52, .08]).

**Discussion**

Study 5 again finds that men are less likely to share experiences than women, this time at a cost of variety. Importantly, men indicated that social constraints, rather than their personal preferences, were the primary driver. Although personal aversion to sharing played a role, serial mediation suggests that societal standards may influence this aversion, ultimately contributing to men's sharing avoidance.

## General Discussion

We examine how the cultural expectation that men should be unambiguously heterosexual shapes men's decisions in relationships with other men. Across five studies, men avoided shared activities with same-gender others more than women, particularly for romantic activities (Studies 1, 3, and 4). Men made suboptimal choices—forgoing cash payment, preferred

options, and variety—in real decision contexts to avoid romantic activities with same-gender others. This was linked to men's discomfort with implied romance (Studies 3–4) rather than fears of appearing feminine, assumptions about their friend's preferences, or differences between romantic and unromantic activities. Despite men wishing they could share, they felt constrained by socially constructed expectations (Study 5).

Our work contributes to research examining fear of identity misclassification, which has primarily focused on avoidance of feminine behavior (Bosson et al., 2006; Prewitt-Freilino & Bosson, 2008), and the resulting discomfort (Bosson et al., 2006; Schermerhorn & Vescio, 2022), and anti-gay attitudes and behaviors (Schermerhorn & Vescio, 2022) among men. We demonstrate how implicit homophobia shapes men's relationships through the avoidance of shared experiences. This avoidance not only leads to suboptimal decisions, but may reduce intimacy (Bank & Hansford, 2000; Chen, 2012; Lewis, 1978) and support (Cox, 2021; Gil, 2023) in men's relationships, potentially contributing to their loneliness (WHO, 2023). Beyond leading to suboptimal decision making, this behavior may also reinforce heterosexual norms in men (e.g., Herek, 1986; Mishel et al., 2022; Munsch & Gruys, 2018; Nielsen et al., 2000), perpetuating a gender hierarchy dominated by stereotypically masculine men and potentially marginalizing other genders, gender non-conforming men, and the LGBTQIA+ community.

**Limitations and Future Directions**

Men in our studies may avoid sharing experiences with other men due to intrinsic and extrinsic pressure (Stanaland & Gaither, 2021; Stanaland et al., 2023). In an exploratory survey (scenario similar to Study 4, see SOM), 55 of 201 men chose to watch *The Notebook* alone, and attributed their discomfort primarily to themselves (44.6%), followed by their friend (21.3%), others (18.0%), or none of the above (16.1%). This suggests internalized homophobia may play

an important role in men's sharing avoidance, with extrinsic pressures being secondary. Future research should further disentangle these mechanisms.

In the Supplementary Study (see SOM), gay and bisexual men and women, like straight men, showed romantic apprehension about sharing romantic experiences with platonic same-gender others, likely due to concerns about misinterpreted romantic intent (e.g., attempt to start romantic relationships) which could be examined in future research. For straight men, the discomfort appeared to stem from the mere act of engaging in a pseudo-romantic dynamic.

Our analyses relied on dichotomous gender assumptions, limiting nuance in individuals' experiences. Future research could explore experiences of transgender men, who may avoid romantic activities with men less due to reduced concerns about heterosexual self-presentation (Anzani et al., 2023), and friendships of non-binary individuals.

Singaporean, American, and British men avoided sharing experiences with other men in our studies. While these findings were robust across samples, their generalizability maybe limited (e.g., Prolific workers, college students). Future research could examine cultural influences on same-gender friendship norms. For instance, non-romantic physical intimacy (e.g., hand-holding) among men occurs commonly in some cultures (e.g., Fattah, 2005; Watson, 1968), perhaps because non-heterosexuality is less recognized, reducing concern that their behavior would be interpreted as romantic. Future work may also examine how male friendship norms evolve when institutional support for LGBTQIA+ individuals regresses, as in the recent US context (Osborn, 2025).

**Concluding Remarks**

We reveal how the pressure to behave in an unambiguously heterosexual manner shapes men's behavior in their friendships, constraining their decision making while potentially

perpetuating a hierarchy that privileges stereotypically masculine men. By raising awareness of this stigma in men's relationships, we hope to encourage a shift in societal standards and ultimately improve individual and societal well-being.

*Author Contributions*

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