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## **Expected and Actual Reliving of Experiences Through Different Types of Photos**

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People take photos as memory cues. Two field studies examine whether people correctly anticipate which photos allow them to best relive past experiences. We find that people mis-predict the extent to which photos of the surroundings help them relive compared to photos of the people they shared the experience with.

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# Beyond the Present Experience: Enhancing Past and Future Utility from Experiences

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## Paper #1: Consumers' Reliance on Imagination Moderates the Effect of Information on Anticipated Satisfaction

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## Paper #2: Cultivating Gratitude and Giving Through Experiential Consumption

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## Paper #3: Celebrate or Commemorate? A Material Purchase Advantage when Honoring Special Life Events

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## Paper #4: Expected and Actual Reliving of Experiences Through Different Types of Photos

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### SESSION OVERVIEW

Consumers invest both time and money in experiences, from the ordinary (e.g., watching a movie), to the special (e.g., vacations), to the extraordinary (e.g., skydiving; Bhattacharjee and Mogilner 2014; Celsi, Rose, and Leigh 1993). In fact, spending on experiences is often encouraged (e.g., Dunn and Norton 2013) as a growing body of literature has demonstrated that experiences, compared to material purchases, increase satisfaction with the purchase and overall happiness (e.g., Van Boven and Gilovich 2003).

Much of the work examining these benefits has done so by identifying different characteristics of experiences that contribute to increased happiness, such as reduced hedonic adaptation (Nicolao, Irwin, and Goodman, 2009) or fewer unpleasant social comparisons (Carter and Gilovich 2010). However, given that experiences are so important to consumers, there is much more to learn about the ways consumers interact with experiences, particularly beyond consuming those experiences in the present. *What factors are active both before and after an experience that affect how consumers anticipate and reflect on those experiences?* In this session, four papers explore these factors, revealing how enjoyment of experiences can be extended over time and into other important downstream consequences.

In the first paper, **Franssens and Botti** examine the role of receiving information prior to the experience. They show that such information may not enhance, and may even reduce, anticipated satisfaction when an individual derives a sense of control from imagining upcoming experiences. In the second paper, **Kumar, Walker, and Gilovich** demonstrate downstream consequences that emerge from the gratitude that experiences foster. They find that thinking back to experiences can trigger greater pro-social behavior towards strangers down the road.

Moreover, enjoyment from experiences can also be extended over time, as people derive utility from their memories of those experiences. In the third paper, **Goodman, Malkoc, and Stephenson** investigate how the enjoyment of special milestones (e.g., college graduation) can be amplified in the future. They find that tangible,

as opposed to experiential, purchases activate more meaning and greater enjoyment in the long run, an effect that is not anticipated by consumers. Finally, **Barasch, Diehl, Zauberan, and Zhang** examine situations where people create tangible memory cues during the experience by taking photos of their surroundings and the people they shared the experience with. They show that people mis-predict which kinds of photos allow them to best relive the experience.

As a whole this session provides novel and important insights in the area of experiences which should be of interest to a wide range of consumer researchers, from those interested in experiential consumption, to those interested in materialism and even memory processes. All projects are in advanced stages with multiple studies conducted and represent a range of methodologies from text analysis, to field studies and economic games.

## Consumers' Reliance on Imagination Moderates the Effect of Information on Anticipated Satisfaction

### EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research has shown that having information (vs. not) about upcoming experiences enhances people's expected satisfaction because it gives them a sense of personal control (Averill, 1973; Schulz, 1976) as well as accelerated physical decline--are at least in part attributable to loss of control. A field experiment in which institutionalized aged were randomly assigned to one of four conditions was carried out to assess the effects of increased control and predictability upon the physical and psychological well-being of the aged. Individuals in three of the four conditions were visited by college undergraduates under varying contingencies, while persons in the fourth condition were not visited and served as a baseline comparison group. Subjects in the control condition could determine both the frequency and duration of visits they received. A second group of subjects (predict. We predict that this positive effect of information on anticipated liking of experiences decreases, and may even reverse, for consumers in an imaginative (vs. non-imaginative) mind-set (Thompson & Hamilton, 2006). Based on research linking positive fantasies to an inflated sense of attainability (Oettingen & Mayer, 2002), we propose that the process of imagining desirable experiences enhances consumers' sense of self-determination. This heightened sense of self-determination reduces the need for information as a source of control. Consequently, providing information (vs. not) will have a smaller effect on anticipated satisfaction for consumers in an imaginative (vs. non-imaginative) mind-set. Information about future experiences may even negatively affect anticipated satisfaction when this information constrains consumers' ability to imagine and lowers their perceived self-determination. Three experiments test this hypothesis with different manipulations of imagination and information.

### Experiment 1

#### Procedure

601 female U.S. citizens were recruited from Mturk.com. The introduction informed participants that they would be asked a few questions about a gift voucher for a spa. We expected that participants would be more likely to rely on their imagination while evaluating the ad when their visit to the spa was hedonic ("to relax and pamper themselves") vs. utilitarian ("to get treatment for their physical ailments"), because hedonic consumption is more conducive to fantasizing than utilitarian consumption (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982).

The voucher included a picture of a massage room and stayed on the screen for thirty seconds. Participants were then asked to imagine that they would use the voucher for the “Revitalizing therapy”. Some participants were told which specific treatments would be included in the therapy whereas others were not. Participants then responded to four questions measuring how satisfied they would be with the spa (1-5 scale).

### Results

The four measures were averaged into one measure of satisfaction ( $\alpha=.92$ ). The interaction between motivation and information was significant ( $F(1,597)=7.05, p=.008$ ). In the utilitarian condition, information had a positive effect on satisfaction (4.13 vs. 4.5,  $t(308)=4.22, p<.001, d=0.48$ ), but, as expected, in the hedonic condition, information had no effect on satisfaction (4.2 vs. 4.24,  $t(289)=0.4, p=0.69, d=0.05$ ). This provides initial evidence for our hypothesis that the value of information is diminished for consumers in an imaginative mind-set.

## Experiment 2

### Procedure

142 citizens from the UK, the US, and Canada (71 men,  $M_{\text{age}}=29.6$ ) were recruited from prolificacademic.co.uk. Participants were told they would be asked a few questions about a real estate ad that would remain on their screen for 30s. All participants saw a picture of the same house. Participants were then instructed to rely on their imagination (vs. not) while evaluating the house. Participants in the *imagery* condition were asked to visualize, imagine, and dream about making the house their own, whereas participants in the *no imagery* condition were asked to “take a closer look at this place” (based on Petrova & Cialdini, 2005). The presence of information was manipulated by showing the house either furnished or unfurnished. Then, participants indicated how much they liked the house and how much they would want to live there (1-9 scale).

### Results

The two dependent variables were averaged into one composite score of satisfaction ( $r=.87$ ). One participant scored three standard deviations below the mean of her experimental group and is not included in the following analysis. The interaction between furniture and imagery was marginally significant ( $F(1,137)=3.73, p=.055$ ). Participants who were not asked to use their imagination, were more satisfied with the furnished house than with the unfurnished house (5.61 vs. 7.01,  $t(73)=3.82, p<.001, d=0.89$ ). Participants who were asked to use their imagination, however, were not significantly more satisfied with the furnished house than with the unfurnished house (6.24 vs. 6.79,  $t(65)=1.42, p=0.16, d=0.35$ ). Again, this provides evidence for our hypothesis that the positive effect of information decreases when people are in an imaginative mind-set.

## Experiment 3

### Procedure

134 English speakers from various countries (70 men;  $M_{\text{age}}=26.1$ ) were recruited from prolificacademic.co.uk. The introduction informed participants that they would be asked a few questions about a vacation ad that would remain on their screen for 30s. The ad displayed the same picture of an island for all participants. Some participants were instructed to use their imagination (vs. not) while viewing the ad. The instructions to imagine were similar to those of Experiment 2. Then, participants in the *information* condition read two sentences about the island that mentioned the view from the most visited spot on the island and which other activities

visitors could engage in during their stay. Participants in the *no information* condition did not read anything about the island. Participants indicated how much they liked the island and how much they would want to spend their vacation there (1-9 scale).

### Results

Two participants scored three standard deviations below the mean of their experimental group on the satisfaction measure (average of two dependent variables,  $r=.80$ ) and are not included in the following analysis. The interaction between imagery and information was significant ( $F(1,128)=6.58, p=.01$ ). In the no-imagery condition, results are directionally consistent with the first two studies in that satisfaction was greater when information was present than when it was absent (6.09 vs. 6.63,  $t(65)=1.47, p=0.14, d=0.36$ ). In the imagery condition, however, information had a negative effect when participants imagined their stay on the island (7.17 vs. 6.38,  $t(63)=2.15, p=0.033, d=0.54$ ).

Three experiments show that having more information does not always have a positive effect on consumers’ anticipated satisfaction, and may even have a negative effect, when consumers are in an imaginative mind-set. Further research will focus on demonstrating the proposed process that imagination heightens people’s sense of self-determination and therefore fulfils a need for control. Further research will also investigate why, in the imagination conditions, information had no effect in Experiments 1 & 2 and a negative effect in Experiment 3. We speculate that the information in Experiment 3 was too constraining such that participants’ sense of self-determination was undermined.

## Cultivating Gratitude and Giving Through Experiential Consumption

### EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research on material consumption—buying for the sake of *having*—and experiential consumption—buying for the sake of *doing*—has predominantly focused on differences in the satisfaction consumers derive from each. A growing body of evidence argues that consumers tend to get more satisfaction, and more enduring satisfaction, from the money they spend on experiences than the money they spend on material possessions (for a review, see Gilovich and Kumar, 2015). Here, we focus on another downstream consequence of buying experiences, in addition to the more enduring satisfaction that results from doing so: facilitating a grateful emotional state. Gratitude promotes well-being and prompts pro-social behavior (Bartlett and DeSteno, 2006; Emmons and McCullough, 2003). In the present research, we examine a novel way to cultivate this beneficial emotion. We demonstrate that these two different types of consumption differentially foster gratitude and giving. In six studies we show that reflecting on experiential purchases (travel, meals out, tickets to events) inspires more gratitude than reflecting on material purchases (clothing, jewelry, furniture), and that thinking about experiences leads to more subsequent altruistic behavior than thinking about possessions.

In Studies 1-2b, we empirically test our main hypothesis: that people are more grateful for what they’ve done than what they have. In Study 1, we employed a counterbalanced within-subjects forced-choice paradigm to examine whether participants reported that their recent experiential purchases prompted greater feelings of gratitude than their recent material purchases. Indeed they did,  $X^2(1, N = 95) = 6.06, p = 0.01$ . To rule out demand effects, we replicated this finding using more conservative between-subjects experiments (Studies 2a-2b;  $N$ ’s = 75 and 100). In these studies, participants rated their experiential purchases as having fostered more gratitude than their

material purchases when responding on continuous scales,  $t$ 's  $> 2.8$ ,  $p$ 's  $< 0.01$ . These studies address the possibility that participants in Study 1 felt they were *supposed* to say that their experiences prompt more gratitude than their material goods, or that saying so might cast them in a more favorable light. The between-subjects design used prevents direct comparisons between experiential and material consumption in the minds of participants. The methods used in Studies 1-2b also allowed us to rule out other artifactual concerns about the differences we found; our results could not be explained by factors like the price of the purchases in question or the amount of time that had passed since the purchase had been made.

Study 3 finds evidence for this effect in a real world-setting: online customer reviews ( $N = 1,200$ ). Consumers are more likely to spontaneously mention feeling grateful for experiences they have bought than for material goods they have bought,  $F(1,1192) = 52.17$ ,  $p < 0.0001$ . We investigated this by utilizing a large data set of reviews posted on materially-oriented websites (i.e., *CNet*, *Amazon*) and on experientially-oriented websites (i.e., *TripAdvisor*, *Yelp*). After randomly sampling 1,200 distinct comments from these sites, reviews were then coded for expressions of gratitude by two independent raters who were blind to our hypothesis. Far removed from the laboratory, and even in the context of consumer reviews where mentions of grateful feelings are uncommon, people tend to be more inspired to comment on their feelings of gratitude when they reflect on the trips they took, the venues they visited, or the meals they ate than when they reflect on the gadgets, furniture, or clothes they bought.

Might the gratitude elicited by experiential purchases extend their benefits outward to other people as well? In our final two studies, we explore a significant behavioral consequence that stems from the greater gratitude people tend to feel as a result of their experiential purchases by showing that experiential consumption also makes consumers more likely to be generous to others. In these experiments ( $N$ 's = 48 and 60), participants who contemplated a significant experiential purchase behaved more generously toward anonymous others in an economic game (when assigned the role of allocator in the standard "dictator game;" see Camerer, 2003) than those who contemplated a significant material purchase,  $p$ 's  $< 0.05$ . These results indicate the benefits of experiential consumption extend beyond the purchase itself and even beyond the experiencer: they flow outward to others as well. It is particularly noteworthy that participants who were prompted to think about an experience they had bought were more generous to anonymous strangers, recipients they knew they would never meet or interact with, and who would never know they had acted generously. Buying experiences instead of "things" not only cultivates gratitude, it also facilitates one of gratitude's most beneficial effects: pro-social behavior. It thus appears that shifting spending towards experiential consumption can improve people's everyday lives as well as the lives of those around them.

Gratitude may not be the first thing that comes to mind when thinking of "consumerism." But what we have shown here is that a certain type of consumption—experiential consumption—is more likely to foster feelings of gratitude than the consumption of material items. And by prompting feelings of gratitude, it also leads to more pro-social behavior. It is especially notable that these results were obtained using a variety of different types of studies, thereby providing convergent evidence for our central claim. Together, this research demonstrates that shifting some personal consumption toward "doing" rather than "having" may increase feelings of gratitude and, in so doing, leads people to act more virtuously by being more generous to others.

## Celebrate or Commemorate? A Material Purchase Advantage when Honoring Special Life Events

### EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Moments that mark a special life events are rich in meaning and often inspire people to spend money to signify their importance. In doing so, consumers can either *celebrate*—making a purchase with the primary intention of creating an experience (such as a wedding reception, graduation party, or a trip to Europe)—or they can *commemorate*—making a purchase with the primary intention of acquiring a material object (such as a wedding or class ring, watch, or framed picture). Though little is known about how these two purchase types might better achieve this goal of honoring a special life event, consumers seem to favor celebrations over commemorations. For instance, the average amount spent on graduation celebrations in 2015 was \$985 ([www.graduationparty.com](http://www.graduationparty.com)) compared to \$230 on class rings (<http://staugustine.com>). Weddings are the same: wedding receptions cost \$15,000 on average and engagement rings \$6,000. Further, in terms of maximizing happiness, research supporting an *experiential advantage* agrees: Celebrate because experiences lead to more happiness than comparable material goods (e.g., Nicolao et al. 2009; Pham 2015; Van Boven and Gilovich 2003).

Yet, honoring a special life event is often not about maximizing happiness with a purchase; instead, it increases meaning in life by connecting an important event in the past with the future. Whereas happiness is a present-oriented feeling signaling satisfaction with one's current needs and goals, meaningfulness comes from feeling connected with one's past accomplishments and significant moments, like weddings, graduations, births, or promotions (Baumeister et al. 2013; Belk 1988; Deci and Ryan 2008; MacKenzie and Baumeister 2014; Wildschut et al. 2006). As such, an important role of purchases that mark special life events is to facilitate the connection between the past special event and one's future self.

We propose that when consumers are marking special life events, material purchases reveal an advantage over experiential purchases as time passes. Further, we propose that consumers do not predict this material advantage because they fail to appropriately consider the permanent nature of material goods. Across seven studies we (1) provide evidence for a material (i.e., commemorative) advantage over experiences (i.e., celebrations) when marking a special life event, (2) demonstrate that consumers do not accurately forecast such an advantage (and thus choose experiences), and (3) provide an explanation for this misprediction by demonstrating a way to mitigate the preference for experiential purchase (i.e., when permanence is salient).

In study 1 we asked married participants to describe either their wedding reception (celebratory experience) or their wedding ring (commemorative material good). They rated their connections between the purchase and this special occasion and how long they had been married. We found a significant purchase type by time since marriage (logged) interaction on connection to the special event ( $b=.25$ ,  $t(127)=2.88$ ,  $p<.01$ ). Participants who focused on their reception reported a declining connection to the past event ( $b=-.41$ ,  $t(127)=-3.03$ ,  $p<.01$ ); however, those who focused on their ring had a non-significant positive slope ( $b=.1$ ,  $t(128)<1$ ).

Study 2 extended our findings to positive affect and graduations. We asked participants to think back to their most important graduation, and then asked them to either recall how they commemorated or celebrated. They then responded to seven positive affect measures, indicated the connective value of the purchase, amount spent, and years since graduation. We found the same significant purchase type by time interaction on connective value ( $b=.33$ ,  $t(144)=2.31$ ,  $p<.05$ ).

A test of mediation showed a significant indirect effect of connection to the event on positive affect (95% CI=.0083,.1300), suggesting that over time material purchases provided stronger connections to past special events, which enhanced the feelings experienced when consumers thought back to their event.

Studies 3A-3C, 4, and 5 explored whether and why consumers (mis)predict advantages for material goods. Study 3a asked participants to imagine they received a \$1000 gift card to either a jewelry store or a vacation website (between subjects) as a way to honor graduation. We then asked how well they expected to feel seven positive emotions in 1 or 20 years. Participants believed that their emotions would fade over time, ( $p$ 's<.05); however, they did not expect the advantage to commemorating over celebrating ( $F$ <1) that we found in previous studies. We found the same effects for expected memory (study 3b) and in a choice task participants chose more experiences than material goods (study 3c).

Studies 4 and 5 tested our proposed mechanism: Whether these mispredictions are due to consumers failing to consider the permanence of material purchases. In a 2(Purchase Type: Experiential vs. Material) x 2(Permanence: More vs. Less) between subjects design, study 4 asked participants to write about a purchase that would either last in their possession for a long (more permanence) or short (less permanence) time. They then were asked to imagine spending a \$1000 gift card to either a jewelry store or a vacation website to honor a graduation and to rate their happiness. Participants expected to be happier with an experience ( $M=5.98$ ) compared to a material item ( $M=4.33$ ,  $F(1,197)=84.50$ ,  $p<.001$ ), and it was moderated by permanence ( $F(1,197)=6.85$ ,  $p=.01$ ): The difference in predicted happiness was smaller in more ( $M=1.18$ ) than less ( $M=2.13$ ) permanence. Study 5 was a similar design but used an open-ended dependent measure and a subtler permanence manipulation: Participants viewed advertisements that either highlighted a permanent or a non-permanent aspect of the advertised product (e.g., "a diamond is forever" vs. "a diamond is sincere"). The permanence condition chose gifts that were rated as a more material than experiential ( $M=3.53$ ) compared to control ( $M=4.09$ ,  $F(1,141)=3.98$ ,  $p<.05$ ). In sum, when permanence was salient, consumers better appreciated the long-term advantages of material items, diminishing their mispredictions.

The results suggest a potential exception to the widely accepted experiential advantage, while providing important implications for how purchases contribute to meaningfulness in life. Though consumers tend not to appreciate the long-term advantages of material items when choosing to celebrate or commemorate, the results suggest that people can increase their long-term happiness by giving themselves permanent reminders of special life events—which are often the very experiences that have been shown to increase happiness.

### Expected and Actual Reliving of Experiences Through Different Types of Photos

#### EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Recalling memories of one's experiences increases positive affect and meaning in one's life (e.g. Wildschut et al. 2006; Holbrook 1993). While memories can be a source of enjoyment, people are aware that memory fades and that they may forget aspects of an experience (Flavell and Wellman 1975). Consequently, people try to counteract memory loss either by recording significant parts of the experience (e.g., filming videos, writing diaries) or by investing in specific memory cues that they believe will allow them to relive the experience later (e.g., souvenirs, Zauberman, Ratner, and Kim 2009).

Because experiences are fleeting, one must decide *which* memory cues to invest in for the future. Yet, even though these decisions

are made strategically, they may not maximize enjoyment as intended. People are poor predictors of what will optimize their future feelings (Gilbert et al. 2002) and mispredict which experiences they will enjoy revisiting (Zhang et al. 2014). People also sometimes choose memory cues that in the long term create regret, rather than enjoyment (Abendroth and Diehl 2006).

While prior literature has examined the efficacy of different *externally provided* memory cues for *accurate recall* (e.g., Herz 1998), the literature has mostly neglected how the *choice or creation* of such cues affects the *ability to relive* the experience. We assess people's *expectations* about which memory cues will be useful for reliving and hence which cues they invest in at the time of the experience. Then, we examine which cues *actually* help people to best relive an experience.

We explore this question in the context of photos as memory cues, in particular we examine whether people capture photos of people or scenery. We propose that at the time of the experience people will capture more photos of the surroundings, since those are the aspects of the experience that seem distinct and unique in the moment. However, at the time of revisiting, people will enjoy photos that include people in them more than scenery photos. This is consistent with work showing that people are drawn to and pay particular attention to social content in photos (Birmingham, Bischof, and Kingstone 2008) and that they are better at correctly recognizing photos of people as opposed to objects (Isola et al. 2011).

In two studies, we examine people's photo-taking behavior and expectations about these photos shortly after an experience and their actual reliving enjoyment when looking at these photos after one or four months.

**Study 1** examines the types of photos people take on a field trip to an arboretum, and which photos they actually enjoyed looking back at either one or four months later. Visitors ( $N = 94$ ) took more photos that include scenery (61% of all photos;  $M = 12.82$ ,  $SD = 17.81$ ), than photos of people (39% of all photos;  $M = 34.17$ ,  $SD = 54.09$ ),  $F(1, 93) = 13.37$ ,  $p < .001$ .

After the trip, participants uploaded four photos of each scenery and people. One month and four months later, participants ( $N = 38$ ) saw one randomly selected photo from each category (scenery and people) in random order. A repeated-measures ANOVA with enjoyment of the photo as the dependent measure and photo contents (scenery vs. people) and time (1-month vs. 4-months) as within-subject factors revealed a main effect of photo contents. Individuals enjoyed viewing photos of people more ( $M = 75.71$ ) than photos of scenery ( $M = 69.29$ ),  $F(1,37) = 6.53$ ,  $p = .02$ . The same analysis with the extent to which the photo helped participants relive the moment as the dependent measure, also revealed a main effect of photo contents, such that photos with people helped individuals relive the experience better ( $M = 74.78$ ) than photos of scenery ( $M = 67.37$ ),  $F(1,37) = 6.86$ ,  $p = .01$ .

Interestingly, in the moment, visitors took many more photos of the surroundings than of people, however, those photos were not the ones that best allowed them to relive the experience. One may argue that in an arboretum the surroundings are particularly focal and salient which could have contributed to these findings. Hence in Study 2 we examine the creation of memory cues in a different, less nature-focused context: during Christmas celebration.

In **Study 2**, participants ( $N = 172$ ) uploaded one photo of just scenery and one photo that included people (as well as other "distractor" photos) that they had taken during Christmas. They also reported how much they expected to enjoy looking at each photo in the future. Four months later, participants were shown the two focal

photos and rated how much they enjoyed looking at each photo and how much it allowed them to relive the experience.

A repeated-measures ANOVA with enjoyment of the photo as the dependent measure and photo content (scenery vs. people) and timing (predicted vs. actual) as within-subject factors revealed a main effect of photo content ( $M_{\text{Scenery}} = 76.60$ ,  $M_{\text{People}} = 80.66$ ),  $F(1,171) = 12.36$ ,  $p = .001$ , and a main effect of time ( $M_{\text{Predicted}} = 82.94$ ,  $M_{\text{Actual}} = 74.32$ ),  $F(1,171) = 40.72$ ,  $p < .001$ . More importantly, however, we find a significant interaction,  $F(1,171) = 11.08$ ,  $p = .001$ . Participants expected to enjoy scenery and people photos similarly when they took the pictures,  $F(1,171) = .13$ ,  $p = .72$ . However, four months later they enjoyed looking at the people photo more ( $M_{\text{Scenery}} = 70.48$ ,  $M_{\text{People}} = 78.17$ ),  $F(1,171) = 16.68$ ,  $p < .001$ .

Since we did not want to reveal the purpose of the study to participants, we directly measured reliving only at Time 2. Paralleling the findings for photo enjoyment, people felt that the people photo they had taken ( $M = 76.70$ ) allowed them to relive the experience to a greater extent than the scenery photo ( $M = 66.78$ ),  $F(1, 171) = 37.16$ ,  $p < .001$ .

In sum, although individuals expect to like scenery and people photos equally well in the future, and oftentimes take more photos of scenery, photos with people are enjoyed more and allow the photographer to better relive the experience.

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