The Decision to Share: From the Joy of Self-Possession to the Joy of Shared Consumption

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Why do people share desserts, which feel good, but not vegetables, which are good? When the resource re-allocation decision is immediately followed by consumption, we find that people are more willing to share affect-rich resources than affect-poor resources with others, holding the monetary value constant.

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Come and Have Fun with Us: Social Influences and Social Perception in Leisure Activities

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Paper #2: Getting the Most from Shared Experiences: The Undervalued Impact of Clear Objectives
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SESSION OVERVIEW
Leisure is time that people spend with freedom of choice, intrinsic motivation and enjoyment (Shaw and Dawson 2001). We spend leisure time attending baseball game with friends, celebrating accomplishments with family, or volunteering in the neighborhood. As these examples suggest, many of the ways people spend leisure time involve social contexts and the presence of other people. As such, examining how the presence of others affects leisure choices and experiences is both theoretically important and substantively relevant. What activities do consumers prefer sharing with others, and when do consumers derive more utility from shared leisure experiences? How do consumers in the social contexts perceive another person’s leisure choices?

Our session sheds light on these questions. The first three papers examine how the presence of others influences the anticipated and actual leisure experiences. Yang and McGill begin by discussing how the anticipation of activity partner’s affective experience influences consumers’ choice of sharing. Consumers are more willing to share affect-rich (e.g., desserts) than affect-poor resources (e.g., vegetables), because they expect more positive affective reactions from activity partners, which will in turn increase their own enjoyment. Such tendency is further amplified if consumers have an experiential (vs. material) goal.

Moving from the anticipation of shared experiences, Wu et al. examine how clarity about a partner’s objectives influences the consumer’s actual experience. When consumers are sharing experiences with others (e.g., visiting an art gallery), they may be unclear about the degree to which her friend prioritizes absorbing the artwork or socializing with her. A lack of clarity limits the consumer’s ability to absorb consumption content and socialize, which can have downstream effects including reduced enjoyment. However, Many consumers do not spontaneously take simple steps to increase clarity.

Next, Brick et al. focus on a specific type of leisure activity—celebration, and examine the emotional and social benefits provided by celebrations. The authors find celebrations provide greater social support compared to other shared leisure activities because of the presence of more close others. Further, being the focal celebrant and/or organizing celebrations for others can further increase perceptions of social support.

Finally, Olson et al. examine how people in social contexts perceive another consumer’s ethical choices, including spending leisure time on volunteering, based on income sources (welfare recipients vs. income earners). The authors show welfare recipients (vs. income earners) are perceived less moral when they spend much time on volunteering (e.g., in a museum) or make donations of material possessions due to the stronger perception of wastefulness.

Together, this session investigates both social influences on people’s sharing choices and actual leisure experiences, as well as the effects of leisure choices on others’ impressions of them. These papers also suggest multiple ways to help consumers derive more utility from shared leisure experiences, including increasing objective clarity and the presence of close others. We expect this session to appeal to a broad audience, including researchers interested in social influence, social cognition, experiential consumption, moral judgment and consumer decision making.

The Decision to Share: From the Joy of Self-Possession to the Joy of Shared Consumption

EXTENDED ABSTRACT
Why do people share desserts, which feel good, but not vegetables, which are good? Little research has examined the decision to share in which resource re-allocation is targeted at, and immediately followed by consumption of the resources. In the present research, we investigate how people make such sharing decisions, and distinguish them from the conventionally studied giving decisions where resources are re-allocated without considering subsequent consumption outcomes (e.g., when allocating monetary tokens).

Such decisions to share arise before (or during) one’s consumption of resources and involves the transfer of resources. As such, decision-makers face the tradeoff between two goals: to maximize one’s possession, and to maximize one’s experience from consumption. What maximizes one’s possession is not necessarily the same as what maximizes one’s experience. In particular, based on a distinction made between the affective value and the monetary value as two independent sources of value (Hsee and Rottenstreich 2004), we theorize that the monetary value of resources is crucial for evaluating one’s possession, whereas the affective value of resources is more crucial for evaluating one’s consumption experience, because it is during consumption that the affective value can be realized. Moreover, the involvement of others during consumption can augment one’s own consumption experience (Boothby, Clark and Bargh 2014; Ramanathan and McGill 2007; Steinmetz, Fishbach and Zhang 2016). Thus, while people will be less willing to share resources of great monetary value, they may be more willing to share resources of great affective value, due to the spontaneous consideration of how enjoyable the consumption experience will be.

Therefore, we hypothesize that when making a sharing decision, people are more willing to share affect-rich resources with others when holding the monetary value constant. Further, although the anticipated personal enjoyment from consumption may be enhanced by either the mental simulation of others’ involvement, or the pros-
pect of actual joint consumption, we predict the prospect of actual joint consumption may further amplify one’s willingness to share affect-rich resources, because synchronized joint consumption has been shown to enhance enjoyment in multiple facets (Boothby et al. 2014; Ramanathan and McGill 2007; Steinmetz et al. 2016). We present four studies to examine the decision to share.

In study 1, we recruited 186 mturk participants ($M_{age} = 35$, 52% Male) to an allocation task between themselves and another mturker modeled after the Dictator Game. Participants were randomly assigned to two conditions that differed in the nominal resource for allocation (token vs. joke). The value of each token was equated with a joke. Participants either allocated tokens that they would use to redeem jokes, or allocated jokes directly. We found participants allocating jokes were more generous than those allocating tokens (giving 5.5 vs. 4.1 out of 11 to the other, t(184) = -3.57, p < .001). Subsequent measures suggest that participants allocating jokes considered each other’s enjoyment from consumption (i.e., of listening to the jokes) more than those allocating tokens, whereas they similarly considered each other’s satisfaction with possession (i.e., with the allocation decision). In sum, the consideration of the subsequent consumption experience may underlie the willingness to share affect-rich resources with others. A replication study with real consequences in a lab is in progress where preliminary evidence of the same pattern has been observed (N= 45 (target N=200), Median= 6.0 vs. 4.5, non-parametric t-test $p = .07$).

In study 2, we further examine how subsequent consumption affects the sharing decision. We randomly assigned online participants (N= 320, $M_{age} = 35$, 56% Male) to a 2 (resource: affect-poor vs. affect-rich) x 2 (subsequent consumption: separate vs. joint) between-subjects design. We asked participants to imagine that they had been kept hungry for a food-tasting study and were given seven mini trays of cracker chips. The experimenter ran short on chips for the next participant, so participants were asked how much they would like to share their chips, from one to six trays. The cracker chips were either described as plain or flavorful, paired with doctored images that highlighted the difference in flavors. A pretest (N=60) validated that the flavored chips were rated more likely to induce positive affective reactions than the plain cracker chips, and both were rated to have a similar market price. Further, participants either read that the other participant would retrieve the allotted cracker chips and taste them in a separate room, or that they would taste the cracker chips sitting next to each other. Overall, participants were more willing to share when the cracker chips were considered affect-rich than affect-poor (2.9 vs. 2.3, non-parametric $p = .002$). Moreover, subsequent joint consumption amplified this effect ($F(1,318)=3.3, p=.044$). Participants were more willing to share when the allocation decision was followed by joint consumption (3.2 vs. 2.2, $p<.001$).

In study 3, we examined a theoretical moderator, that people will be more willing to share if they considered experiential gain to be more crucial to their happiness, and less so if they considered material gain to be more crucial to their happiness. We recruited participants (N=194, $M_{age} = 35$, 49% Male) online and asked them either to recall three material possessions or three experiential consumption experiences that made them happy in order to prime material or experiential goals. Manipulation checks confirmed that participants considered material possession or experiential consumption to be more crucial for their happiness depending on the condition ($p<.05$). We then asked participants to imagine that they were having a good time catching up with a specified neighbor/friend, and wanted to have a drink together. The participants were asked to choose between a generic bottle vs. a premium bottle of wine. Results revealed that the experiential goal prime increased participants’ willingness to share the affect-rich premium wine (45% vs. 24%, $\chi^2= 6.4, p=.012$).

Last, we explored how affective value influences the decision to share in common food consumption scenarios (N=266). We found the willingness to share a food item with a friend was predicted by the anticipated affective experiences ($r=.44, p<.001$), but not the overall substantial benefits (e.g., nutritional or material) brought by the food item ($p>.02, p>.25$).

**Getting the Most from Shared Experiences:**

**The Undervalued Impact of Goal Clarity on Shared Consumption**

**EXTENDED ABSTRACT**

Consumers often engage in leisure activities with others, such as visiting an art gallery or attending a baseball game. When these activities support multiple objectives, such as absorbing the consumption content and socializing with the partner, it may be unclear to consumers the degree to which an activity partner wants to absorb the consumption content versus simply to enjoy the experience and socialize. The primary goal of this research is to examine how the degree of clarity about the partner’s objectives impacts a consumer’s ability to balance focusing on the consumption content and socializing with the partner during shared leisure activities.

Building on previous research on teamwork suggesting that clarity about objectives facilitates coordination and reduces concerns about the partner’s experience (e.g., Bang et al. 2010; Fitzsimons, Finkel and vanDellen 2015), we posit that lacking (vs. having) clarity about the partner’s objectives (i.e., whether the partner prioritizes absorbing the consumption content or socializing) hinders consumers’ ability to coordinate during the experience. The poorer coordination associated with low (vs. high) clarity about the partner’s objective not only undermines consumers’ ability to absorb the consumption content, but also their ability to socialize with the partner. This poorer coordination can also lead to downstream consequences such as lower enjoyment and higher regret about engaging in the experience accompanied. However, given people tend to underestimate the necessity of remedying a mildly harmful (vs. critical and intense) situation (Gilbert et al. 2004), we predict that in mundane leisure contexts consumers underestimate the importance of clarity and do not take simple steps to increase clarity. Five experiments tested these hypotheses.

In experiment 1, participants were asked to explore an art gallery in their campus student union either alone or with another person. We measured accompanied participants’ clarity about the partner’s objectives. As predicted, the higher the clarity accompanied participants had about their partner’s objectives (i.e., whether the partner prioritizes absorbing the consumption content or socializing) hindered their ability to coordinate during the experience. The poorer coordination associated with low (vs. high) clarity about the partner’s objective not only undermines consumers’ ability to absorb the consumption content, but also their ability to socialize with the partner. This poorer coordination could also lead to downstream consequences such as lower enjoyment and higher regret about engaging in the experience accompanying. However, given people tend to underestimate the necessity of remedying a mildly harmful (vs. critical and intense) situation (Gilbert et al. 2004), we predict that in mundane leisure contexts consumers underestimate the importance of clarity and do not take simple steps to increase clarity. Five experiments tested these hypotheses.

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revealed that low (vs. high) clarity led to lower enjoyment and higher regret about engaging in the activity accompanied (ps<.01).

We conducted experiment 3 in the art gallery of a hotel/conference center to further examine the effects of clarity in real consumption environments and whether consumers would take steps to increase clarity. We manipulated clarity by instructing one-third of the pairs to discuss about their objectives before entering the gallery (“high-clarity”), instructing one-third to go directly into the gallery (“low-clarity”), and allowing one-third to choose whether to discuss their objectives before entering the gallery. Additional participants were sent into the gallery solo. Consistent with results of studies 1 and 2, low-clarity participants felt less able to read brochures and absorb art, and had poorer memories of the artwork than participants in high-clarity or solo conditions (ps<.01). Low (vs. high) clarity participants were also less able to socialize with the partner (p=.019). Again, the ease of coordination mediated these effects. Despite the benefits of clarity, 24 out of 26 pairs in the choosers condition chose not to discuss about their objectives, providing evidence that consumers underestimate the benefits of having high (vs. low) clarity.

Most dyads in experiments 1-3 were friends/family. Experiment 4 manipulated the relationship (friends vs. strangers) between partners in addition to clarity to test whether the positive effects of clarity can be generalized to strangers. Participants were asked to explore five movies with another person in the lab. Whereas dyads in the “strangers” condition went directly to the movies, dyads in the “friends” condition had a Relationship-Closeness-Induction-Task (Sedikides et al. 1999) first. We manipulated clarity by having pairs disclose (vs. not disclose) their objectives to each other before starting the activity. Results showed that dyads under low (vs. high) clarity learned less about the movies (p=.005), enjoyed the experience less (p=.046), and were less interested in visiting the movie festival (p=.058). In a separate study, we described the procedures of this study and asked participants to predict the effects of clarity on enjoyment and learning. Only about half of the participants correctly predicted the positive effects of clarity, suggesting that people tend to underestimate the benefits of clarity.

To provide further support for the proposed mechanism of coordination, experiment 5 manipulated the level of coordination required during an activity. Clarity about the partner’s objective was measured. Specifically, participants were asked to explore photos from National-Geographic Instagram with another participant in the lab, and they were either shown the photos and the blurbs automatically (“low-need-for-coordination” condition) or they needed to navigate through the activity together (“high-need-for-coordination” condition). Results showed significant interaction effects of clarity and need-for-coordination on the ability to focus on the consumption content and enjoyment (ps<.04): when the activity required high coordination to navigate through, lower clarity about the partner’s objective decreased consumers’ ability to focus on the consumption content and enjoyment; however, when the activity required minimal coordination, clarity did not impact consumers’ ability to focus on the consumption content or enjoyment.

Together, our results show that clarity about the partner’s objective plays an important role in shared consumption. However, consumers don’t predict the strong effects of clarity nor do they take simple steps to increase clarity.

Celebrations and Social Support

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Extensive research has focused on social support during times of adversity (e.g., Bolger, Zuckerman, and Kessler 2000; Cohen 1988; Kasser and Sheldon 2000; Lakey and Cohen 2008); yet, almost no empirical work has examined social support during positive life events (see Gable et al. 2004; Reis et al. 2010 for exceptions). Recently, Feeney and Collins (2014) called attention to the lack of research on social support during times of non-adversity and emphasized the importance of this type of supportive function in helping people thrive. In particular, they note that “very little theoretical or empirical work has focused on the factors that promote or hinder effective social support processes in close relationships” (Feeney and Collins, p. 18). The current research examines this understudied area and investigates how celebrations can be a relevant context for understanding the process by which individuals garner social support during positive life events.

In our first study, we explored individuals’ innate definitions of celebrations and the benefits they receive from celebrations. 204 participants from Amazon’s Mechanical Turk completed the study in exchange for financial compensation. Participants answered a series of open-ended questions and prompts designed to explore celebrations and social support (e.g., “What does a ‘celebration’ mean to you?” “Please recall and describe a recent celebration you had or participated in that was not related to a holiday” “What did you get out of the celebration?”) We then had two undergraduate RAs code the responses. Coders were highly reliable and any disagreements were resolved by a third coder. Supporting our own conceptualization, participants viewed celebrations as joint consumption highlighting at least one member’s separate, positive event. Celebrations were also viewed as largely providing social and emotional benefits. Furthermore, we found that individuals who are the focal celebrant and have a celebration organized for them report greater support than do individuals who have to organize their own celebration.

In our next set of studies, we expand upon our initial findings using experimental designs to better understand how celebrations may contribute to perceptions of social support. In Study 2, we examined whether individuals report greater perceptions of social support after recalling a celebration, experience (i.e., positive consumption) than a coping experience (i.e., negative consumption) as previous research has largely focused on social support in response to negative life events. In addition, Study 2 examines the process through which celebrations may increase perceptions of social support, namely by increasing the number of close others in one’s social network. 241 participants from Amazon’s Mturk successfully completed this study. Participants received financial compensation in exchange for participation. Participants were randomized to recall a time when something positive [negative] happened and they celebrated [coped with] this positive [negative] event by engaging in a consumption activity with others. Participants then indicated, “about how many close friends and close relatives do you have (people you feel at ease with and can talk to about what is on your mind)”? Finally, they completed the measure of perceived social support (MDSPPSS, Zimet et al. 1988). An ANOVA revealed a significant difference between the conditions in terms of perceived social support (p < .05) with individuals in the celebration condition reporting greater social support (M = 5.7) than the coping condition (M = 5.4). Moderated mediation analyses revealed that the number of close others mediated the link between consumption experience and perceived social support.

Study 3 used a 3-cell design (celebration vs. coping vs. positive control) to further explore celebrations and social support. After indicating consent, participants were randomized to recall one of the following: a time when something positive happened and they engaged in a consumption activity with others (celebration), a time when something negative happened and they engaged in a consumption activity with others (coping), or a time when something positive
happened (positive control). Participants then completed the same measure of number of close others as in the previous study and the MDSPPS (Zimet et al. 1988). An ANOVA revealed a significant difference between the groups in terms of number of close others (p < .05) and planned comparisons indicated that individuals in the celebration condition reported significantly more close others than did those in the coping (p < .02) or the control (p < .05) conditions. Number of close others significantly predicted perceived social support, and moderated mediation analyses revealed that the number of close others mediated the link between consumption experience and perceived social support.

Finally, Study 4 experimentally manipulated the focal celebrant and the organizer to replicate the findings from Study 1 and to explore whether the role of the individual at a celebration may differentially contribute to perceptions of social support. Study 4 used a 2 (focal celebrant: self vs. other) × 2 (organizer: self vs. other) design. 406 participants from Mturk completed the study in exchange for financial compensation. After consenting, participants were randomized to recall and describe a recent celebration that was for them [not for them] and that they helped [did not help] organize. They then completed a series of measures, including the measure of perceived social support (MDSPPS, Zimet et al. 1988). In line with the findings from the previous study, an ANOVA with focal celebrant condition, organizer condition, and their interaction as predictor variables revealed a significant interaction on perceived social support (p < .02). Planned comparisons indicated that individuals who organized a celebration for someone else reported greater perceptions of social support than did individuals who organized a celebration for themselves (p < .05). Conversely, individuals who did not organize a celebration reported greater perceived social support when the event was for them than when it was for someone else (p < .05).

Across four studies, we find evidence that celebrations as joint consumption increase perceptions of social support. Furthermore, we suggest some of the ways in which this process occurs, e.g., increasing the number of close others, and how different roles, e.g., whether one is the focal celebrant and/or organizer, in celebrations can influence perceptions of social support. The theoretical and practical implications are discussed.

Wasting Time and Money? How Consumers Evaluate Others’ Resource (Mis)Management

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Recent research demonstrates that low-income consumers receiving government assistance are seen as undeserving of ethical consumption choices (Olson et al. 2016). This group, relative to those who earn modest to high incomes, are perceived as less moral when buying organic food, renting a Prius, or making monetary donations, presumably because such options cost additional money. We build upon this research by examining decisions beyond financial expenditures. Specifically, we propose that divergence in moral attributions extends to decisions about all resources, including time and material goods.

This prediction is not obvious based on past research. Previous work on consumer altruism suggests that resources are not perfectly fungible. The act of giving time versus money (holding dollar value constant) is seen as more caring, moral, and heartfelt (Reed, Aquino, and Levy 2007). While favorable perceptions of altruism exist for the act itself, they may not extend to the people doing the act, especially when those people are at the lower end of the socioeconomic (SES) ladder. We propose that identical resource expenditures by low-income consumers receiving government assistance are subject to greater scrutiny due to opportunity costs (i.e., “considering alternative uses for one’s resources when deciding whether to spend resources on a focal option”; Spiller 2011, 595). Simply put, low-income consumers receiving government assistance “should” be devoting resources toward gaining economic independence (Henry, Reyna, and Weiner 2004). From this perspective, volunteering without pay is a wasteful use of one’s time. Similarly, donating material possessions is perceived as wasteful because it implies that the giver has so many possessions that s/he can afford to give away, making him/her appear less needy and therefore more wasteful of government assistance. Consumers have a strong aversion to waste, especially when waste is tangible (Bolton and Alba 2012). Accepting government assistance without contributing back to the economic system through hard work may be a “tangible” reminder of “their” (participants’) taxpayer dollars being misallocated. We examine these predictions in a series of experiments.

Experiment 1 examined moral judgments toward three types of equivalent resource expenditures. Participants read about a target described as either receiving $12,000 a year in welfare benefits or earning $12,000 a year. Participants also learned that the person had donated $250 to a local charity, donated $250 worth of material possessions, or volunteered for 35 hours at a local charity. These amounts were calibrated based upon the federal minimum wage of $7.25 per hour (U.S. Department of Labor 2016), which would be a probable wage for someone earning $12,000 a year. Thus, working 35 hours for minimum wage would be valued at approximately $250. The key dependent variable was a morality index (used in all experiments), which was created by averaging responses from four items: unethical/ethical, cruel/kindhearted, immoral/moral, and uncaring/caring. The results revealed that across all three resource expenditures, the welfare recipient was perceived as less virtuous than the low-income earner.

Experiment 2 was designed such that the ethical choice directly benefited the target (vs. donations to others in experiment 1). Specifically, participants read about a target who has a dessert craving and decides to either buy or make an organic apple pie. The experiment followed a 3 (Income: $12,000 in welfare benefits vs. $12,000 earned vs. $85,000 earned) × 2 (Resource: Money vs. Time) between-subjects design. The results revealed that $12,000 welfare recipients were perceived as more moral when they made an organic apple pie at home versus buying the same pie at the store. Targets earning $12,000 or $85,000 a year were evaluated similarly whether they chose to spend time or money.

Although welfare recipients received a boost for spending a small amount of time versus money in experiment 2, they did not receive moral credit on par with earners. Given the importance of opportunity costs (Spiller 2011), time spent baking is time not spent seeking paid employment. Thus, spending time that comes at the cost of gaining employment may be seen as wasteful and ultimately immoral. We tested this prediction in experiment 3 using a 3 (Income: $12,000 in welfare benefits vs. $12,000 earned vs. $85,000 earned) × 2 (Employment: Yes vs. No) between-subjects design. Participants read a scenario about an individual who was volunteering each week at a museum without pay; the position was described as either being likely or unlikely to lead to future employment. Mediation results revealed that volunteering at a position that is unlikely (vs. likely) to lead to employment is deemed wasteful for low-income consumers receiving government assistance, and being wasteful is seen as immoral. This judgment sequence did not extend to low- or higher-income earners.

Our next three experiments focused on moderators of these moral attributions. We find that spending money to purchase organic
food for children (experiment 4A) or spending time to help a child with her volunteer efforts (experiment 4B) are considered moral endeavors for everyone, regardless of income. We also find that low-income consumers receiving government assistance are judged less harshly than wealthier consumers when lying about the price of an organic purchase to save money (experiment 5).

Our final experiment demonstrates that these divergent moral reactions also have behavioral implications. Specifically, we manipulated the income of a volunteer ($12,000 in welfare benefits vs. $85,000 earned) seeking monetary donations for his organization. The results revealed that low-income consumers receiving government assistance were perceived as more wasteful of their time than relatively wealthier volunteers (i.e., “he should be working, not volunteering”), which resulted in lower donor support from participants. Donating money to his cause, however commendable it may be, may be perceived as facilitating waste and condoning his reliance on taxpayer dollars.

In conclusion, results from seven experiments demonstrate that moral attributions extend to non-financial expenditures, showing that those lowest in SES are under the greatest moral scrutiny.

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