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Received: 24 September 2020 | Revised: 21 October 2020 | Accepted: 22 October 2020

DOI: 10.1002/arcp.1062

REVIEW

CONSUMER PSYCHOLOGY REVIEW WILEY

A mind stretched: The psychology of repeat consumption

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Abstract

Repeat consumption refers to re-experiencing an enjoyable stimulus in order to enjoy it again. We rewatch the same shows, reread the same stories, and revisit the same cities; we play our favorite songs on loop and stick to our secret spots in town. When and why do people engage in repeat consumption, and what actually happens in our psychological experience (e.g., attention, enjoyment) upon doing so? This article reviews burgeoning research shedding light on these questions. First, I establish repeat consumption as a distinct construct. Second, I highlight an emerging perspective: Repeat consumption is not so repetitive after all. Not only does repetition reveal new things within the stimulus—dubbed *stimulus-level novelty* (e.g., upon rewatching a movie, we notice missed details and new connections)—but we also learn new things about ourselves in the process—dubbed *self-level novelty* (e.g., "I must really be committed!"). This model qualifies traditionally grim understandings of hedonic adaptation and exposure effects; people derive greater utility from the old and familiar than assumed. Third, I highlight future research directions, including the need for a clearer taxonomy of repeat value and implications for maximizing utility. Exciting discoveries lie ahead if we return to where we have already been.

KEYWORDS

hedonic and experiential consumption, preference and choice, variety seeking

1 | INTRODUCTION

> A mind that is stretched by new experience can never go back to its old dimensions.
>
> (Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr.)

The highest grossing movie to date, *Avengers: Endgame*, yielded $2.8 billion in ticket sales during its theatrical run from April to July 2019. It turns out, a surprising number of those tickets were purchased by one person: superfan Augustin Alanis. Alanis, age 30 of Riverview, Florida, saw the movie in theaters a record-setting 202 times. "I started going every day, posting my rounds because I really love the film," Alanis told a *CNN* reporter. "I go twice on weekdays; Saturday and Sunday, four to five times—which is the most I can because of the movie being 3 hr and 2 min long" (Jackson, 2019).

Alanis's enthusiasm strikes us as bizarre not just because of the extremity of his behavior, but because his behavior seems to violate the long-standing psychological principle of hedonic adaptation. Hedonic adaptation is the tendency for pleasurable stimuli (like an enjoyable movie) to elicit less intense pleasure the more we experience them, and it pervades nearly everything we consume (Campbell et al., 2014; Frederick & Loewenstein, 1999; Galak & Redden, 2018; Lyubomirsky, 2010). As Myers (1992) decidedly put: "This point cannot be overstated: *Every* desirable experience is transitory" (p. 53). If our goal is to maximize happiness and hedonic outcomes, the prevailing recommendation is to pursue novelty rather than to repeatedly consume the same old things ("variety is the spice of life": Lyubomirsky et al., 2005; Sheldon et al., 2012). What is Augustin Alanis doing?

The current article reviews an emerging line of research on the psychology of *repeat consumption*. Though few us of would head

to the theater hundreds of times in a row, all of us engage in some form of repeat consumption throughout daily life. We rewatch the same shows, reread the same stories, and revisit the same cities; we play our favorite songs on loop and stick to our secret spots in town. The key insight advanced by this research, which will be reviewed in detail in what follows in this article, is that repeat consumption *may not be so repetitive after all*: Not only do repeat exposures often help us learn something new within the stimulus itself (e.g., missed or forgotten details from the first time around; new connections and interpretations), but we also learn something new about ourselves in the process (e.g., "I must *really* be a superfan!"). Thus, variety is indeed the spice of life—but one of its sources may also come from the familiar.

This article is structured in three parts. First, I operationalize the construct of repeat consumption and compare and contrast it with related consumer phenomena (e.g., mere-exposure effects). Second, I review the psychological process of repeat consumption and propose two central reasons for why people engage in it: Repeat consumption reveals *stimulus-level novelty* as well as *self-level novelty*. Third, I discuss the theoretical implications of these ideas and how they advance a new perspective on hedonic adaptation and novelty preferences, suggesting that people derive more utility from repeat consumption than traditionally depicted. Repetition too may add its own spice to life. I end by discussing pressing questions and next steps for research.

2 | WHAT IS REPEAT CONSUMPTION?

I operationalize repeat consumption as the act of consuming an enjoyable stimulus that one has already consumed in full in the past. Prototypical examples of repeat consumption, to which I will typically refer, often involve a person's free choice to engage in it (e.g., choosing to rewatch an old favorite movie with the explicit goal to enjoy one's period of consumption in the present). However, much of the psychology beyond the phase of choice presumably should still apply regardless of whether people opt into repeat consumption by choice or by chance (e.g., happening to stumble upon an old favorite movie while flipping around or having a friend or family member show it to us). Research on repeat consumption encompasses both people's initial decisions to engage in repetition and their psychological experience of repetition (e.g., changes in attention and learning during one's *n*th consumption episode as compared to one's initial consumption episode). Together, by addressing all phases—from initial engagement, to real-time experience, to more lasting psychological effects—research on repeat consumption seeks to elucidate a better understanding of when repeat consumption does (and does not) make a worthwhile goal.

To be sure, this operationalization can quickly become confusing. When a hungry diner goes out to eat three nights in a row, but they eat at a different restaurant at each night, are they engaging in repeat consumption? What if they order the same meal at each different restaurant? What if they order a different meal each night, but they do so at the same restaurant? And so on. Likewise, one might wonder how the interval of time in between consumption episodes (e.g., listening to the same song once a day over the next 5 days, as opposed to listening to the same song right now five times in a row) relates to repeat consumption as it is presently operationalized.

In some sense, the specific content of a repeat consumption episode (or one's cycle or schedule of repetitions) does not matter per se so long as the consumer subjectively encodes the experience as a repeat. A widely held perspective across social and cognitive psychology is that an individual's subjective construal of a construct is what centrally affects thoughts, feelings, and behaviors as compared to the objective features of that construct (for a review, see Ross, 1977). In the context of repetition, for example, Redden (2008) found that the way in which people categorized a stimulus affected their repeat reactions to it, such that merely framing a stimulus as unique at each exposure ("You're now eating an *orange* jelly bean; You're now eating a *cherry* jelly bean") slowed their self-reported satiation as compared to merely framing the stimulus in more generic categorical terms ("You're now eating a *jelly bean*; You're now eating another *jelly bean*"). Similarly, merely framing the intervals of time in between consumption episodes as being narrow or vast can influence self-reported satiation in ways that correspond to objectively narrow or vast windows (Redden & Galak, 2013). Such kinds of framing effects have been observed across many repeat consumption contexts (for a review, see Galak & Redden, 2018).

For simplicity, I operationalize repeat consumption as a stimulus-centric construct as opposed to a category-centric or context-centric construct. Stimulus can be defined as a match between what the consumer experiences and the target that the consumer explicitly evaluates. In the story of Augustin Alanis, for example, the stimulus is clearly the movie *Avengers: Endgame*; Alanis is not commenting on the fact that the popcorn flavor differed from viewing to viewing, or that the crowd composition differed from viewing to viewing—both of which surely varied—but is commenting on the film itself. This operationalization of repeat consumption allows for a more precise understanding of its underlying psychology, inviting additional theorizing beyond what is already known about genuine stimulus novelty (e.g., a consumer rating a return visit to the same restaurant as highly enjoyable simply because they ordered an entirely different dish).

People commonly engage in this operationalization of repeat consumption in daily life. The television show *The Office*, a show that debuted in 2005, was the most watched entity on Netflix in 2019 and accounted for nearly 10% of all viewing hours in the United States—with much of that traffic reportedly reflecting repeat viewers (Mutz, 2019). The *Rewatchables* podcast focuses entirely on the repeat value of popular movies, boasting millions of listens and ranking among the most downloaded entertainment podcasts (Apple Podcasts, 2020). The publishing industry has experienced a surge in sales of "tried and true" books—classic titles that customers have already read yet want to read again—during the current COVID-19 pandemic (Alter, 2020).

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Given this stimulus-centric operationalization of repeat consumption, it may be useful to further specify how repeat consumption compares and contrasts to related constructs. Research on repeat consumption holds much in common with existing constructs, yet also examines novel features that may help advance shared lines of research on longer-term consumption dynamics.

2.1 | Repeat consumption versus mere exposure

A long history in social and cognitive psychology has examined how people's attitudes toward a stimulus develop as they are repeatedly exposed to it in the absence of any objective change in that stimulus—dubbed *mere-exposure effects*. Zajonc was among the first researchers to examine mere-exposure effects under controlled laboratory conditions, finding that people's liking of a stimulus increases across repetition (e.g., Zajonc, 1968). Bornstein's later meta-analytic techniques advanced Zajonc's findings by suggesting that such boosts grow stronger as repeated stimuli are less consciously perceived (e.g., via shorter exposures: Bornstein, 1989).

Together, the psychological process underlying mere-exposure effects has typically been interpreted through an evolutionary lens, such that our sense of familiarity with a stimulus must mean the stimulus has not yet harmed us (or else, we would not be around to recognize it), thus activating a broader approach-motivation toward it (see Zajonc, 2001, for a review). Mere-exposure effects have been documented in both human and non-human animals (Hill, 1978). Such an explanation, however, need not preclude more cognitive components as well. For example, to the extent that a stimulus feels familiar, people may also feel more confident in its truth value—and this explicit feeling of confidence may drive more favorable evaluations to a greater degree than some subtle sense of familiarity per se (Tormala et al., 2002).

In any case, the construct of repeat consumption and research on mere-exposure effects share the critical feature of adopting a stimulus-centric approach. Both convey a more positive interpretation of repetition as compared to what the hedonic adaptation literature traditionally suggests (e.g., boredom and desensitization). However, they differ in three important ways.

First, few (if any) studies in the mere-exposure literature examine people's free choices to repeatedly experience the stimulus in question, whereas research on repeat consumption includes assessments of a consumer's free choice to seek out a previously experienced stimulus.

Second, studies in the mere-exposure literature typically examine the effects of repeated exposure to very simple and hedonically neutral stimuli. For example, Zajonc commonly used foreign alphabetic characters as his stimuli (e.g., Zajonc, 1968). In contrast, research on repeat consumption seeks to explore how people interact with richer real-world activities that likely start out as relatively more complex and hedonically positive. There is little room for an alphabetic character to reveal new layers of enjoyable information at each new exposure, while this kind of revelation-based psychology is of core interest in research on repeat consumption.

Third, many mere-exposure effects may well reflect desensitizing effects akin to hedonic adaptation. Many of the dependent measures assessing mere-exposure capture *lesser disliking* or *declining uncertainty* as opposed to actively increasing enjoyment (e.g., Zajonc, 1968). Repeat consumption is focused on the active gains people can tap by returning to the same old stimulus.

2.2 | Repeat consumption versus processing fluency

Processing fluency describes an experiential phenomenon such that stimuli tend to feel easier to encode and interact with the more we encounter them (Alter & Oppenheimer, 2009). Most relevant to repeat consumption, research on processing fluency finds that people tend to interpret these feelings of ease as a cue about the stimulus itself, often manifesting in the form of more positive evaluations (e.g., O'Brien, 2013; Reber et al., 2004). In one study, participants were more likely to conclude that a recipe was easy to prepare if the cooking instructions happened to be written in an easy-to-read font (thereby promoting high fluency) as opposed written in a hard-to-read font (thereby promoting low fluency: Song & Schwarz, 2008).

Repeat consumption and processing fluency share a number of features. Again, both constructs take a stimulus-centric approach and generally highlight the positive benefits (versus the dulling effects) of repetition. Processing fluency may play a role in the pleasures of repeat consumption. For example, one reason why revisiting a museum may be enjoyable is because one's second time around is more fluently processed than one's original visit; rather than aimlessly wandering overwhelming hallways as a first timer, a return visitor can confidently maneuver through the experience—and this fluent maneuvering may provide its own boosts.

One critical distinction, however, is that it is unclear whether people are aware of fluency effects. Snell et al. (1995) might come closest to testing this idea, suggesting that people are at best moderately aware of such dynamics—and so it is unclear how fluency affects people's free choices to repeat a stimulus as well as other features of repeat consumption (again, however, note that fluency effects can provide boosts via explicit thought processes: Tormala et al., 2002). Another distinction is that boosts from fluency are typically operationalized as a product of (mis) attribution as opposed to reflecting something endogenous in the stimulus itself (e.g., Reber et al., 2004); people *mistake* their positive feelings of fluency as a cue for viewing the stimulus more positively. Again, a key feature of research on repeat consumption involves assessing the extent to which repetition knowingly unveils novel features within the stimulus (i.e., the stimulus itself is the correctly attributed positive target of consumers' reactions), thus tapping similar boosts that would be tapped by objective novelty.

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2.3 | Repeat consumption versus habits and routines

Other research across social and cognitive psychology investigates *habits*, defined as "psychological dispositions to repeat past behavior" (Neal et al., 2012, p. 492). In recent years, the construct of habits has transitioned from being understood as a simple stimulus–response link to a more sophisticated associative relationship involving procedural memory, contextual cueing, and interactions with other goals (for a review, see Neal et al., 2006). In all cases, however, habits are seen as reflecting relatively automatic tendencies. For example, we may develop a nightly habit of watching television and grabbing snacks during commercial breaks—and this behavior is habitual in that it is learned over time in response to the specific cues in the current environment (e.g., it is elicited by specific shows, at specific times, in specific kitchens, versus spontaneously occurring whenever and wherever we watch television) and in that we are not fully aware of when and why we are repeating these nightly procedures.

Habits closely resemble *routines*, although routine behavior is sometimes understood as a relatively more intentional form of repetition as compared to habitual behavior (Clark, 2000). People might actively work to keep a routine as opposed to having a routine automatically develop (e.g., a routine might entail knowingly attempting to have family dinner at the same time each night, even when unexpected events emerge or one's family is moved to a new context).

Is repeat consumption a form of habit or routine? Not exactly. For example, research on repeat consumption includes assessing a person's free choice to re-experience an enjoyable activity rather than passively responding to a routine. A person might freely choose to keep a nightly dinner routine not because they find it maximally enjoyable and "want" to repeat it per se, but instead because the person believes that doing so serves other goals, such as providing structure for one's children or aiding in developing healthy sleeping habits. Research on repeat consumption includes focusing on people's choices to maximize the focal goal at hand (i.e., one's real-time consumption experience in that moment). Moreover, much of the utility gained from habits and routines stems from repeating a *procedure* (and repeating it exactly as is), while repeat consumption focuses on people's consumption of and relationship to the stimulus itself.

2.4 | Repeat consumption versus continuous consumption

One final distinction worth considering is the extent to which repeat consumption, as defined, involves discrete consumption episodes (e.g., enjoying the same piece of artwork for 10 min a day over the next 5 days) as compared to a singularly sustained consumption episode (e.g., enjoying the same piece of artwork right now for 50 min). This nuance is paralleled in the hedonic adaptation literature in terms of a methodological distinction in how researchers have assessed adaptation rates: either via measuring people's reactions to a stimulus repeatedly (e.g., participants are shown the same image 10 times in a row and are asked to report their enjoyment after each exposure) or via measuring overall changes in people's reactions from the start to the end of a procedure (e.g., participants are asked to report their enjoyment only after the first exposure and the final exposure). Lucas and colleagues (e.g., Lucas, 2007; Lucas et al., 2003) have extended this latter approach to examine the lasting effects of naturalistic shocks on hedonic outcomes, such as by comparing people's self-reported general life satisfaction in the years leading up to a major life event (e.g., marriage) to their own self-reported life satisfaction in the years following that event—a proxy for the effects of repeat exposure to the same stimulus on processes like hedonic adaptation, but via an approach that neither involves "repetition" per se nor literally tracks people's repeat reactions to the stimulus.

I operationalize repeat consumption in terms of discrete consumption episodes (whether or not people's reactions are measured immediately after each and every exposure) as opposed to continuous consumption, as this feature seems to most clearly map onto manifestations of repeat consumption in daily life (e.g., rewatching one's favorite movie) and allows for more unique theorizing on the construct. Nonetheless, it is likely that such distinctions are also subjectively construed in response to context effects and framing manipulations. For example, O'Brien (2019, Study 3) exposed participants to the same enjoyable image for a 10-s "viewing period," for a total 5 consecutive viewing periods. Some participants were asked to report their enjoyment for the image after every single viewing period, whereas other participants were asked to do so only after the first period and fifth period. Participants who made many repeated ratings experienced more adaptation than participants who made only two ratings at the start and end—even though the stimulus, exposure cycle, and total exposure time were all held constant across conditions.

In sum, repeat consumption shares features with existing constructs while also filling important (and yet-understudied) gaps that they might not fully capture. Put simply, repeat consumption refers to the act of re-experiencing an enjoyable stimulus in order to enjoy it again.

3 | THE PSYCHOLOGICAL PROCESS OF REPEAT CONSUMPTION

What actually happens when people engage in repeat consumption? That is, what kinds of features might define our psychological experience as we are enjoying some stimulus again?

Recent lines of research highlight how our experience of repeated exposure may be unique from our initial novel exposure to that same stimulus. Critically, some of these features are unique such that repeat experiences are hedonically *superior* to first-time experiences. This emergent perspective advances important nuance to the traditional perspective in the literature, which instead paints a rather grim portrait of repeat consumption: As we repeatedly consume the same stimulus, we grow bored, our reactions dull—we

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adapt. While hedonic adaptation is surely a prominent and pervasive phenomenon, current depictions in the literature may be *overly* grim.

To unpack this idea, it is first helpful to consider what makes objective novelty so stimulating in the first place. A large literature in positive psychology and elsewhere highlights the hedonic power of novel object consumption (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005; Sheldon et al., 2012). The lesson from this approach is straightforward: If you grow bored with something, consume something else. One major reason for this power is that novel objects are not taken for granted, likely stemming from inherited tendencies to prioritize our resources toward responding to the unknown (Lyubomirsky, 2010). People attend to novel objects more closely, interact with them more thoroughly, and react to them more intensely than their familiar counterparts, all of which may be broadly summarized as fostering greater hedonic immersion in the moment of consumption. In turn, the more immersed people feel while consuming an enjoyable stimulus, the more likely they are to enjoy that stimulus (e.g., Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Killingsworth & Gilbert, 2010). In addition to promoting pure pleasure-based enjoyment, immersing into novel stimuli promotes other hedonic outcomes such as enjoyment derived from learning, forming new connections and interpretations, expanding one's sense of expertise and other self-perceptions, and satisfying one's curiosity (Berlyne, 1970; Hirschman, 1980; Pessemier, 1978; Raju, 1980).

The key insight advanced by research on repeat consumption is that the experience of repetition may involve some degree of *these same features*. That is, repeat consumption may be surprisingly enjoyable not because literal repetition is surprisingly fun, but because literal repetition is surprising fictional. This emergent perspective suggests that repeat consumption is not as repetitive as it is currently portrayed, both in the literature and in popular imagination. Thus, a new way to understand repeat consumption is that it taps the same sorts of benefits that objective novelty taps (e.g., consider the excited enjoyment we experience from playing with a brand new gadget), simply stemming from a different source: objects that seem old and familiar on the surface (e.g., consider the remaining enjoyment left to experience upon revisiting our dusty gadget closet). Consuming old entities, like consuming new entities, entails experiencing new information that grabs our attention, helps us immerse, helps us learn and expand ourselves, and so on—that is, it entails similar such features of novelty that make for enjoyable consumption.

I propose that these features can be classified into two general categories: The act of repeat consumption often helps to unveil *stimulus-level novelty* and *self-level novelty*. Figures 1 and 2 show schematic overviews of repeat consumption and these proposed pathways as they will be detailed throughout the remainder of Section II.

3.1 | Stimulus-level novelty

Evidence for *stimulus-level novelty*—the possibility that old things often may be hiding untapped hedonic information if only we consume them again—begins with the fact that human attention is inherently limited. Various literatures highlight the limits of our attention as a natural function of the sheer amount of information that is available for us to process at each step of daily life. To avoid information overload, our minds therefore simplify immense stimulus complexities. "For sensitiveness and narrowness to occur together requires above all things a simplified world" observed James (1902), "leaving disorder in the world at large, but making a smaller world in which he himself dwells" (Lectures XI-XII). An enormous swath of research—from research on stereotyping (e.g., Macrae & Bodenhausen, 2000), "gist" representations (e.g., Reyna & Brainerd, 1995), attribute substitution (e.g., Kahneman & Frederick, 2002), heuristic processing (e.g., Gigerenzer, 2008), omission neglect (e.g., Kardes, 2013), and change blindness (e.g., Chabris & Simons, 2010); from humans as "cognitive misers" (e.g., Fiske & Taylor, 1991) to Kahneman's (2011) WYSIATI theory (What You See Is All There Is)—has since confirmed James' essential point. In one-shot (i.e., non-repeated) exposures to a stimulus, people encode and recall mere bits and pieces of what they experienced. We make molehills out of mountains.

The fact that we make molehills out of mountains means that many stimuli offer more nuances and missed details than it may have seemed at first glance. The "illusion of explanatory depth"

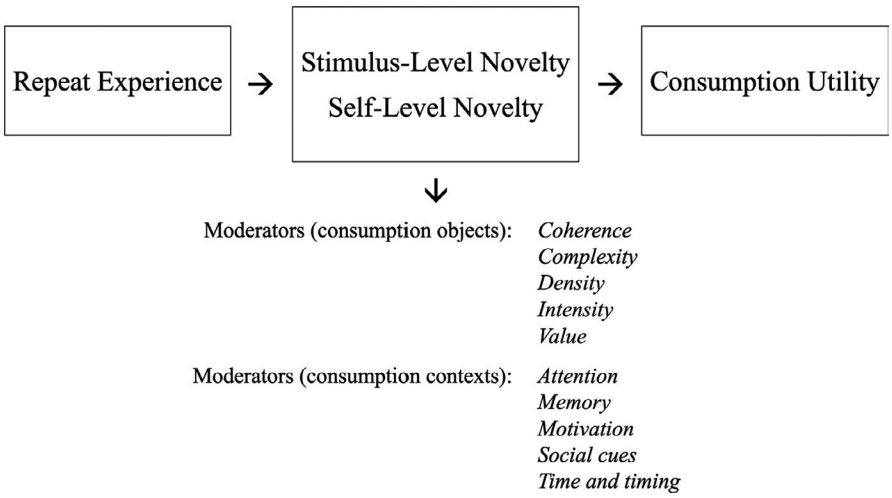

FIGURE 1 A model depicting the dual pathways (stimulus-level novelty and self-level novelty) proposed in the current article for how repeat experiences provide high consumption utility. The model also includes examples of likely moderators for what influences both of these pathways

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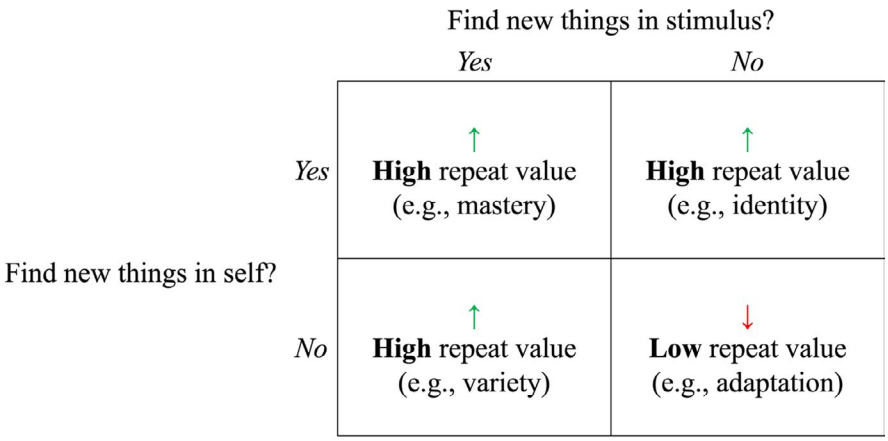

FIGURE 2 Organizing examples of stimulus-level novelty and self-level novelty in relation to repeat value [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

refers to the phenomenon that people underestimate the complexities of ostensibly simple stimuli (e.g., how a toilet works: Rozenblit & Keil, 2002). Research on the "curse of knowledge" finds that exposure to a problem's solution can disrupt our ability to appreciate the difficulty of that problem (Camerer et al., 1989). Likewise, the "focusing illusion" finds that people tend to overweight singularly known, prototypical features of a stimulus at the cost of overlooking smaller, but still impactful, features (e.g., O'Brien et al., 2018; Wilson & Gilbert, 2005). Research on overconfidence writ large likewise highlights the full extent to which people quickly grow overconfident in what they know about seemingly familiar stimuli (Kardas & O'Brien, 2018; Sanchez & Dunning, 2018; Wald & O'Brien, 2020).

These various literatures all suggest there often may be many novel features left to uncover after experiencing a stimulus just once (or a handful of times)—thus rendering repeat consumption to be surprisingly enjoyable. Below, I review specific evidence for this possibility.

3.1.1 | Revisiting, rewatching, replaying

O'Brien (2019) directly tested the repeat value of a wide variety of enjoyable stimuli. In Study 1, for example, participants consisted of museum goers at a local city museum. Upon consenting to the study, all participants went through the exhibit for the first time and then reported how much they enjoyed it. Unsurprisingly, they reported relatively high enjoyment. Critically, some participants were instructed to go through the same exhibit again for a second time in a row and then reported how much they enjoyed their return visit. Two critical findings emerged. First, participants rated their second time through as *just as enjoyable* as the first time. Second, participants did not anticipate this boost: Other participants were asked to predict their enjoyment for a return visit after going through for the first time, and (wrongly) predicted decline. O'Brien's (2019) Study 2 replicated these patterns in a study inviting participants to rewatch the same novel movie on Netflix for two nights in a row.

What might explain this discrepancy? Consider what one's actual experience might be like while going through the museum exhibit for a second time. Chances are that there is plenty left for us to discover and enjoy within the exhibit (after all, it is a museum), such as taking a closer look at favorite installations and exploring new hallways. Yet, we are prone to thinking we "have seen all there is to see" after minimal exposure. Our imagination appears to mimic the stereotypically grim pattern of hedonic adaptation; in reality, things are not so dull and static.

In other studies, O'Brien (2019) directly tested the role of novel discovery within the act of repeat consumption and its effect on consumption enjoyment. In Study 4, for example, the complexity of the repeated stimulus was manipulated such that, based on random assignment, some participants repeatedly viewed a simple (but enjoyable) collage of photographs that left little information to process at each exposure (e.g., simple blue orbs), while other participants repeatedly viewed a complex (and enjoyable) collage of photographs that left a great deal of information to process at each exposure (e.g., vast natural landscapes). Repeated exposure to complex stimuli elicited longer-lasting enjoyment as compared to repeated exposure to simple stimuli—despite similarly high initial viewing enjoyment. This finding suggests a connection between the amount of novel information left for us to enjoy and enjoyment during repetition.

In Study 5, participants were instructed to replay the same exact art-making game from scratch, involving free-form painting over a blank canvas using a variety of colors and tools at their disposal (the canvas cleared to blank before each repeat exposure). The results revealed a direct and highly significant relationship between the number of novel features that participants discovered during their replay sessions and the amount of enjoyment that they experienced during replay sessions—and, again, "predictor" participants failed to appreciate these boosts.

3.1.2 | Learning new things about others

Another information-rich stimulus that likely unveils novel information for us to enjoy is, put simply, *other people*. Perhaps the most information-rich stimulus we could possibly encounter entails the

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mind of another person. Despite holding the stimulus itself constant—that is, despite repeatedly interacting with the same single person—repeat "consumption" of social (versus non-social) stimuli is likely to be especially enjoyable.

Numerous studies have shown that opportunities to repeatedly interact with the same person (e.g., experiencing multiple back-to-back conversation rounds) indeed remains highly enjoyable, and in many cases grows *more* enjoyable. The well-established study paradigm of "fast friends" (Aron et al., 1997)—which entails strangers repeatedly interacting in the laboratory via guided conversation sessions—consistently shows improving trajectories of conversation ratings (e.g., enjoyment, closeness, intimacy) as two strangers gain additional opportunities to interact (for a review, see Davies et al., 2011). One critical mechanism underlying these improving trajectories is that repeated exposure allows people to learn new information about each other, resulting in the discovery of common ground and shared interests (e.g., Reis et al., 2011).

Kardas, Schroeder, and O'Brien (2020) directly tested these ideas in the context of repeat consumption. Under controlled settings, pairs of strangers were situated in a private laboratory room for a specified period of time (e.g., 30 min) that was evenly divided by conversation "rounds," such that each partner broke to a private computer to rate their experience after each round (e.g., breaking every 5 min for a total of 6 rounds). Of critical interest, these ratings included their experienced enjoyment and also the amount of novel conversation material that the pair was able to generate and discuss. As exposure increased, so did participants' enjoyment and conversation material. Again, however, stranger pairs did not anticipate this novel discovery dynamic, instead (mistakenly) assuming that they would quickly run out of things to discuss after the first round (despite reporting high enjoyment and ample material during this first round).

3.1.3 | The hedonic power of rediscovery

Another potential methodology for assessing the repeat value of a stimulus is to assess people's reactions to re-experiencing the stimulus after they may have forgotten about it altogether.

Quoidbach and Dunn (2013) conducted a version of such a methodology by which they instructed study participants to abstain from consuming a given stimulus (e.g., eating a specific kind of chocolate) for a given period of time (e.g., for a week). Based on random assignment, as compared to other participants who were free to repeatedly consume that same stimulus over the same period of time, abstaining participants reported greater enjoyment of the stimulus upon consuming it at later date (held constant across conditions) following the abstaining window. One reason for this boost is that abstaining participants were more likely to treat the stimulus as if it were a novel stimulus (e.g., paying more attention to it, savoring it more)—and so enjoyed it more (e.g., "Wow, I never realized this chocolate had a marshmallow-y aftertaste—delicious!").

Zhang et al. (2014) extended this idea. Participants completed "time capsule" studies in which they were instructed to document moments of their daily lives in real time. The experimenters then stored away their documentation for a lengthy period of time (e.g., 3 months), after which they returned it for participants to open and enjoy. Participants reported high enjoyment upon doing so, driven by feelings of rediscovery of those everyday moments. Again, however, participants did not fully anticipate such boosts, instead assuming that their repeat exposure upon opening the capsules would elicit a mundane reaction.

3.1.4 | When spoilers don't spoil

A more conservative test of repeat value would be to examine people's enjoyment for a stimulus after discovering its major features—but not all of its features.

Leavitt and Christenfeld (2011) tested this idea in the context of story spoilers. In a series of experiments that varied the kind of stories used as study stimuli (ranging from stories that involved twists and mysteries to more straightforward dramatic tales), participants read a story that they had never read before and rated their enjoyment of it. Based on random assignment, some participants first read "a spoiler paragraph that briefly discussed the story and revealed the outcome in a way that seemed inadvertent" (p. 1,152). These participants ended up enjoying the stories just as much as unspoiled control participants—if anything, they enjoyed the stories *more*.

These patterns have been replicated in a number of different contexts using a variety of entertainment stimuli, from horror movies (e.g., learning about upcoming twists and jump scares beforehand: Johnson et al., 2020) to jokes (e.g., learning the punchline beforehand: Topolinski, 2014). While other research has found slight variations by individual differences in preferences for spoiled versus unspoiled content (e.g., participants who are more deeply involved and invested in the plot tend to show less positive responses to spoilers), such undermining effects are surprisingly small, with the typical effect being that enjoyment remains just as high in the presence (versus absence) of spoiler knowledge (Ellithorpe & Brookes, 2018; Johnson & Rosenbaum, 2018). As Johnson and Rosenbaum (2018) summarize: "The present studies also show that involvement with a narrative does seem to matter when it comes to spoiler effects, but involvement or type of medium can't fully explain why spoiler effects seem to be so small and inconsistent, despite persistent lay theories about their danger" (p. 608).

The stimulus-level novelty perspective within research on repeat consumption may help explain this apparent conundrum. Consumption enjoyment may remain high in the presence of spoilers because there nonetheless remains much left to learn about the stimulus. In fact, spoiler knowledge might uniquely unveil new connections and interpretations to be made as people then revisit earlier content (e.g., being able to discover looming subtle signals of "who the killer is" thanks to one's knowledge of the reveal). People derive a high degree of enjoyment from making new connections and interpretations in the stimuli they consume (Yoon et al., 2020). In fact, such "aha!" experiences often can *only* be achieved through repetition (Topolinski & Reber, 2010).

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3.1.5 | Real-time hedonic immersion

Finally, many hedonic stimuli are—by definition—designed to evoke strong affective or sensory reactions and absorb our attention in the moment of consumption. Hence, people may be likely to pay closer attention and discover new insights about the stimulus merely by virtue of the strong immersive pull afforded by hedonic experience.

A large literature on "empathy gaps" directly examines this idea, which can be applied to understanding the role of stimulus-level novelty in repeat consumption. Empathy gaps refer to the phenomenon that, while people are in a "cold" state (i.e., thinking about a stimulus outside of the moment of directly consuming it), they struggle to fully appreciate the degree to which their attention will be captured by "hot" states (i.e., all of those experiential layers that manifest while actually consuming it: Kardas & O'Brien, 2018; Loewenstein, 1996; O'Brien & Ellsworth, 2012a; Van Boven et al., 2013; Wald & O'Brien, 2020).

For example, participants in one experiment (Morewedge et al., 2010, Study 1) failed to anticipate the full extent of their reactions and sensations involved in the moment of crunching on salty potato chips, which they would come to discover only during the act of consumption; in a "cold" state, chips simply seemed like chips; in a "hot" state, they were revealed to be much more. In another experiment (O'Brien and Roney, 2017, Study 3), participants showed a similar effect when thinking about massage experiences: Participants underestimated the extent to which their attention would be absorbed by a massage while receiving it, neglecting the many salient experiential features involved in such a stimulus that would come to dominate their attention. As another example, Hsee and Zhang (2004) highlighted the case of comparison shopping. Shoppers often overweight just one or two salient features while in store (e.g., saliently noticing that one television is larger than the other)—yet at home, not only do we lack those comparisons, but now many other features of our singular purchase are discovered and attended to (e.g., its various options, formats, and uses)—and these experiential features end up dominating our enjoyment in the long run (e.g., even if our chosen television had been the "smaller one"). Many hedonic stimuli likely offer multiple layers of new experiential information to notice and enjoy upon repeat consumption.

3.2 | Self-level novelty

Another way to think about the novelty that might be gleaned from repeat consumption is in the form of *self-level novelty*. In some sense, someone who repeatedly consumes the same stimulus or completes the same activity over and over again is becoming a *different kind of person* than someone who stops at one exposure. To the extent that people are aware of the emergence of such changes in themselves (and view those changes positively), this newly revealed information should operate like any other form of enjoyable novel information.

Large literatures highlight people's sensitivity toward detecting self-relevant changes such as changes in *self-concept*—their online inferences about the kind of person they are based on the kinds of events that they are experiencing (for a review, see Swann, 1983). People care deeply about maintaining a positive reputation in the eyes of others (e.g., Grant & Dutton, 2012; Leary, 2012), and worry that just a small negative signal of possible decline in their positively held traits will be sufficient for undermining their desired reputational status (e.g., O'Brien, 2020; O'Brien & Klein, 2017). Moreover, these concerns are not necessarily mistaken. Public perceptions of a person's reputational status (e.g., "He's a nice guy") can quickly degrade when that person conveys scant evidence to the contrary (e.g., acting in a less-than-nice way just once: Klein & O'Brien, 2016). People are highly attuned to changes in perceived self-concept in the eyes of others—something that repeat consumption might serve to signal and reinforce anew.

Even more relevant for repeat consumption, these kinds of motivations need not be social in nature. Under conditions that are designed to ensure a private context in which others are not and cannot monitor one's behaviors, people still care deeply about upholding "who they are" via working to signal and reinforce these traits solely to themselves, for themselves. A highly relevant theory on this front is Bodner and Prelec's (2003) model of diagnostic self-signaling, which builds upon classic research in social psychology on the power of self-perception (e.g., Bem, 1972). A central proposition of this model is that people intentionally engage in particular behaviors (in part) because they derive some form of utility from signaling to themselves that they must be "that kind of person" after all. The model is centered around revealing new self-relevant information about oneself, to oneself. To restate one of many examples highlighted by the authors: "A person who takes the daily jog in spite of the rain may see that as a gratifying signal of willpower, even if no one is there to observe the feat" (Bodner & Prelec, 2003, p. 1).

Of course, in marketing contexts in particular, the notion that people engage in consumption for self-serving reasons (e.g., to reinforce their self-perceived traits, values, preferences, and identities) represents a foundational framework that has received a host of empirical support (for a review, see Belk, 1988). In one relevant application of this idea for the domain of repeat consumption, Dunning (2007) reviewed evidence for his proposal that the choices people make in what to consume and when to consume them largely reflect their desires to satisfy "self-image motives"—the proposal that through our consumption behaviors, we seek to discover (and then affirm) "who we are." Accordingly, stimuli that allow us to discover and affirm "who we are" should, unsurprisingly, make for an enjoyable and rewarding experience.

Together, this wide variety of research on the psychology of self-oriented consumption may provide a unique clue into the psychology of repeat consumption. When people engage in repeat consumption, they may learn new things about themselves and about the kind of person they are by virtue of repetition. Just as people seek out objective novelty so as to feel like they are growing into more interesting and exciting kinds of people (Ratner & Kahn, 2002), engaging in repeat consumption may come with its own unique suite of positive self-signals revealing to people that they are growing in

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new positive ways, thus influencing their hedonic experience for the better. Below, I propose some likely culprits for what these "new positive ways" might be.

3.2.1 | Perceived mastery and expertise

Feeling like one has shallow knowledge of a particular topic is an aversive psychological state that people are motivated to reduce (e.g., the "feeling of not knowing it all" effect: Yang et al., 2019). Repeat consumption may uniquely promote feelings of newly learned mastery and expertise as a function of discovering new information about the stimulus at each repeated exposure, thereby sustaining enjoyment.

Consider O'Brien's (2019) museum study as reported earlier: Not only might participants' high enjoyment for their return visit reflect experiencing missed details in the exhibit during the second time around, but in experiencing these details, they also might come away feeling more expert about the exhibit. In turn, when people perceive themselves to possess mastery and expertise about a stimulus, they tend to enjoy it more. Campbell and Ariely (2015) directly tested this idea. Participants were merely manipulated to *feel* like experts via receiving false feedback on a knowledge test about a particular tea. Participants who had been randomly assigned to receive high test scores then reported higher consumption enjoyment upon drinking the tea as compared to participants who had been randomly assigned to receive low test scores.

This possibility suggests that people might derive more enjoyment from repeatedly consuming complex stimuli as opposed to simple stimuli; not only might they derive enjoyment because they literally uncover new information at each exposure, but because the act of uncovering new information at each exposure reveals newly acquired mastery and expertise in oneself (which itself is enjoyable). Berlyne's (1970) classic model of reward value supports this possibility. According to the model, seeking out novelty and variety in simple stimuli can be helpful for combating "tedium," but people should try to *avoid* novelty and variety within sets of complex stimuli. Instead, people should repeatedly consume the same complex stimulus so as to build "positive habituation"—that is, to gain sufficient exposure to a stimulus in order to shed initial uncertainty and better understand it. For example, according to Berlyne, people would be wise to repeatedly expose themselves to complex foreign words as opposed to simple known words, because doing so will allow people to gain new knowledge. The experience of gaining new knowledge elicits high reward value in part because it reveals a more expert self-concept.

3.2.2 | Fandom and commitment

Repeat consumption likely conveys to consumers a unique sense of fandom and commitment that would not be conveyed through objective novelty or variety seeking. With every repeated exposure, people not only reinforce their fandom and commitment but also grow even stronger on these dimensions; a person who has read the same book many times before has changed into a different kind of person (e.g., they might now view themselves as a "true" fan) as compared to how they had viewed themselves after reading that book just once. Moreover, this process may be self-sustaining, as people derive reputational utility from the mere act of continuing individual streaks of behavior (Walker & Gilovich, 2020).

Fandom and commitment represent highly motivating drivers. A core component of Deci and Ryan's (1985) influential self-determination theory posits that people who feel intrinsically connected to a particular activity—for example, via feeling like they belong and truly care about the outcome—experience more enjoyment for that activity. For example, feeling committed to the sport of soccer is positively associated with enjoyment for playing soccer among youth teams (Dionisio et al., 2008), and feelings of fandom for the *Harry Potter* book series are positively associated with enjoying those books and participating in *Harry Potter* events (Tsay-Vogel & Sanders, 2017). The more committed people feel to their jobs (Yousef, 2017), schools (Wang & Eccles, 2013), and romantic partners (Anderson & Emmers-Sommer, 2006), the more enjoyment and satisfaction they report with and toward those same jobs, schools, and partners.

Repeat consumption therefore provides a unique opportunity for revealing and reinforcing one's fandom and commitment. Perhaps one reason why people show surprisingly weak adaptation to eating the same yogurt—the same flavor, the same brand—every night for a week straight (Kahneman & Snell, 1992) is that it signals to them that they must be an especially committed customer. In O'Brien's (2019) Netflix study as reported earlier, perhaps one reason why participants enjoyed their rewatch experience to a surprising degree is because the act of watching the same movie two nights in a row unveils a new degree of fandom in themselves. Explicitly framing repeated exposures to a stimulus as conveying loyalty to the product or brand (e.g., as opposed to emphasizing the boredom one may simultaneously experience) leads people to enjoy that stimulus more across repeated consumption (Fishbach et al., 2011).

3.2.3 | Expanding identity-centric attributes

Certain kinds of consumption stimuli are especially tied to our self-concepts and identities. A wide variety of research across marketing and elsewhere documents a robust effect such that, in one-shot (i.e., non-repeated) exposures, people derive greater enjoyment and reward value from consumption experiences that contain identity-relevant features (e.g., drinking from a mug that portrays the logo of one's cherished alma mater) as compared to similar consumption experiences that lack identity-relevant features (e.g., drinking from a mug that portrays an unrelated school logo: for a review, see Rahinel & Redden, 2013). Consistent with this effect, to the extent that repeat consumption of identity-relevant stimuli serves to remind us of "who we are" and to build toward strengthening those identity-centric attributes, the act of repeatedly consuming them should remain highly enjoyable.

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Initial support for this possibility comes from the literature on experiential versus material consumption. People tend to associate their experiential consumption (e.g., vacations, social interactions) with their identities to a greater degree than they associate their material consumption (e.g., furniture, electronic equipment) with their identities (for a review, see Gilovich & Kumar, 2015). In turn, Nicolao et al. (2009, Study 3) found that people adapt less quickly to experiences than to things: Participants who received an experiential reward (e.g., watching a fun video) reported more enjoyment when bringing that reward to mind over the following 2 weeks as compared to participants who brought to mind a material reward (e.g., a pencil) over the same period. Generally speaking, not only might repeatedly consuming an experience remind people of identity-relevant attributes (and thus boost enjoyment), but doing so may reveal new and different aspects of the experience (e.g., remembering different days of one's past vacation at each episode of recollection)—thereby bolstering one's representation of this identity-central attribute (Gilovich & Kumar, 2015). Given this logic, one could reinterpret previously cited findings through such a lens. For example, in Zhang et al.'s (2014) time capsule studies as reported earlier, one reason for participants' surprising degree of enjoyment may be because reminders of past daily life contributed to their perceptions of identity-centric attributes.

More direct support for this possibility comes from Chugani et al. (2015). Across their experiments, participants were instructed to repeatedly consume products that had strong ties to their perceived identity (e.g., University of Texas students were asked to evaluate a landscape painting of campus) and, further, were reminded their identity before consuming the stimulus (e.g., "Take a moment to describe why being a Longhorn is important to you"). These participants, as compared to participants who instead were randomly assigned to less identity-salient conditions, experienced slower adaptation to repeatedly consuming identical stimuli.

3.2.4 | Building meaning

Revisiting old and familiar experiences from one's past shares an intimate connection with felt meaning in the present (e.g., Routledge et al., 2012; Winet & O'Brien, 2020). By virtue of pursuing repeat consumption—which is, in some sense, an act of revisiting the past—people may be especially likely to infer that the stimulus must be highly meaningful to them, and increasingly so with each and every repeated exposure. Numerous studies suggest that people derive a great deal of enjoyment and reward value from highly meaningful consumption objects (for a review, see Deci & Ryan, 1985).

This idea has been directly tested in the context of repeat consumption. In one study (Yang & Galak, 2015, Study 3), participants were instructed to search for a photograph via Google that contained high sentimental value for them personally (e.g., a photograph of the chapel where one was married) and to upload this photograph into the experimental survey. Then, they were shown this photograph six times in a row (via 10-s exposure sessions) and rated their experienced happiness in response to viewing the photograph after the first exposure and the final exposure. Their change in happiness ratings was compared to the ratings of other participants who were individually yoked to each photograph, meaning that participants in this no-meaning control condition completed the same procedures except that they (presumably) had no such sentimental knowledge or ties with their presented photograph. The hedonic reactions among these participants declined to a significantly greater degree than among participants who had meaningful associations with the same photographs. In related studies, Catapano et al. (2017) found that participants experienced slower adaptation to repeatedly consuming the same stimulus if they had previously rated the stimulus as being personally meaningful.

One could also revisit other findings via this lens, such as the social interaction studies of Kardas et al. (2020) as reported earlier. To the extent that participants viewed themselves as engaging in an increasingly personally meaningful experience (as is generally true in terms of the progression of conversations: Aron et al., 1997), this growing sense of meaning may partly explain why participants experienced sustained enjoyment over the course of conversation.

3.2.5 | Becoming a "better" kind of person

Finally, for particular types of stimuli, repeat consumption may also satisfy people's motivations to continually grow and improve in their personalities and life trajectories (e.g., Klein & O'Brien, 2017; Markus & Ruvolo, 1989; McAdams, 2008; O'Brien, 2015a, 2015b; O'Brien & Kardas, 2016; Wilson & Ross, 2001). To the extent that repeatedly consuming a stimulus conveys people's movement toward to longer-term goals, the act of repetition may elicit a high degree of enjoyment and reward value. This may be especially true relative to the act of lightly exploring ever-newer activities, which may be fun in the moment but may never quite culminate toward advancing personal progress.

O'Brien and Kassirer (2019) directly tested this idea in the context of repeated pro-sociality. Based on random assignment, some participants were instructed to repeatedly help the same other-oriented target in the same way for a specified number of consecutive experiences (e.g., dropping the same amount of money, in the same tip jar, at the same café, each day for five days in a row) and reported their happiness and other hedonic outcomes after each exposure; other participants were instructed to repeatedly help themselves in the same way for the same repetition cycle (e.g., purchasing the same coffee, priced the same amount, from the same café, and so on, each day for five days in a row). In terms of their hedonic experiences, participants were slower to adapt when engaging in repeated other-oriented behavior as compared to when engaging in repeated self-oriented behavior. One potential reason for these differential rates of adaptation may be because someone who helps others many times in a row is becoming a *different kind of person* (i.e., a *better* kind of person) as compared to who that person was after helping others just once—and, as posited here, newly revealed self-relevant

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information sustains our experience. By the same logic, someone who helps themselves many times in a row is not exactly learning anything new about themselves across self-oriented repetition (and, if anything, may be inferring something negative about themselves). Imas (2014) documented a similar effect in terms of behavior: Participants worked just as hard for small versus monetary sums if their earned amount was to be donated to others, whereas they were highly sensitive to these payoffs (such that they worked less when being paid less) if their earned amount went to themselves.

Again, one could also revisit past findings through this lens: In the social interaction studies of Kardas et al. (2020) as reported earlier, yet another contributor to participants' sustained enjoyment across repeat consumption could because the act of repeatedly conversing with the same other person might signal to participants that they are developing other kinds of desirable traits that people may prototypically strive to develop (e.g., extraversion or empathy).

4 | PRESENT ADVANCES AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS IN RESEARCH ON REPEAT CONSUMPTION

We live in an era of unprecedented access to ever-more and ever-newer options for how to enjoy our time. And yet, people commonly revert back to reconsuming old and familiar favorites instead. Research on repeat consumption seeks to understand what the experience of repeated exposure is actually like in real time and when and why people behave this way. Upon rewatching our favorite movie or rereading our favorite book, we might often discover rich new layers of information within those stimuli that we had missed or have since forgotten about from the first time around. In the case of Augustin Alanis, the *Avengers* superfan, consider the sheer number of scenes and surprises over the course of a 3-hr movie that one cannot possibly encode in a single viewing—this is *stimulus-level novelty*. Likewise, in the act of repeatedly consuming those stimuli, we might often discover something new about ourselves in the process. Consider the fact that, with each repeated viewing, Alanis grows into an even bigger superfan—this is *self-level novelty*. Repeat consumption therefore shares in common the traditional benefits of seeking novelty and variety in the things we consume, yet instead those benefits stem from old and familiar sources. Some of these benefits can *only* be gleaned through repeat consumption.

These emerging findings advance a new look at the classic psychological principle of hedonic adaptation and related exposure effects. Traditionally, researchers have taken a grim view of hedonic adaptation as something inevitable and to be avoided by pursuing novelty and variety (e.g., "Hedonic adaptation can be resisted, but only with conscious, active efforts": Lyubomirsky, 2010, p. 219). Numerous findings in consumer research paint hedonic adaptation as an inevitably combative force against longer-lasting enjoyment ("What we miss is one simple thing: Once we have owned the car for a few weeks, other things will be on our minds while driving and we would feel just as well driving a cheaper alternative": Schwarz & Xu, 2011, p. 144). The research reviewed in this article suggests otherwise. Some gold things might stay.

This basic insight invites exciting avenues for future research. Below I highlight some especially fruitful questions to unpack.

4.1 | Isn't repeat consumption an opportunity cost?

Every episode of repeat consumption means time not spent consuming countless yet-unrealized experiences. Even if our rewatch of an old favorite proves to be highly enjoyable, perhaps our time would have been *even better* spent enjoying something new. Repetition poses real opportunity costs. However, the critical insight from research on repeat consumption is that people may also incur opportunity costs by intuitively eschewing the familiar. Opportunity costs are traditionally depicted as foregoing a *breadth* of experiences (e.g., as forewarned in popular models of exploration-exploitation trade-offs: March, 1991), yet foregoing *depth* within the same experience may be similarly costly. This same logic extends for goals beyond enjoyment per se. Returning to the old and familiar, like pursuing novelty and variety, may *also* serve to satisfy our curiosity, expand our knowledge, develop our preferences, and so forth, in ways that are yet underemphasized in the literature.

O'Brien (2019, Studies 6–7) directly tested these trade-offs. When participants were given the choice for repeating an enjoyable activity (e.g., rewatching a fun video for a second time in a row) versus completing a new activity (e.g., searching for fun new things to do on their phones), most participants chose novelty and did so with the goal to maximize their enjoyment. Yet, in these particular contexts, with these particular stimuli, novel options proved to be *less* enjoyable than repeat options. Participants defaulted to what "looked new" on the surface, yet this misled them. In daily life, chasing novelty also comes with other costs (e.g., unknown quality risks; added search time; a bigger price tag) that are not incurred by simply returning to an old favorite.

4.2 | What kinds of stimuli are more versus less worth repeating?

Future research should seek to establish a clearer taxonomy for organizing stimuli according to their repeat value. Not all movies will be as richly worthwhile to rewatch as, apparently, *Avengers: Endgame*. As put by O'Brien (2019): "Watching paint dry will not unveil new colors" (p. 521). In general, the complex a stimulus is, the higher repeat value it likely has (Berlyne, 1970), but more research is needed to unpack the definitional features of "complex." O'Brien (2019) suggested some examples: "Some [such activities] simply contain too much information to encode at first pass, from sprawling museums to lengthy movies. Others contain later information that alters earlier information, such as movies with plot twists. Still others require time to unfold, such as acquired tastes for some artwork and warming up to some social events" (p. 521). To add here, perhaps one broader

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moderator is the whether a stimulus contains social elements, such that socially imbued stimuli may be one surer bet for what is worthwhile to repeat (e.g., Kardas et al., 2020).

Other clues may be found outside the hedonic realm. Meyer et al. (2018) found that repeated exposure to the Cognitive Reflection Test—a set of problems requiring more careful reasoning in order to answer correctly—did *not* improve accuracy. Medina et al. (2011) found that language acquisition often occurs through singular moments of insight rather than compounded past exposure. These findings suggest that if people are so unfamiliar with a stimulus that they do not know what to track in the first place (e.g., an abstract arthouse film), repeat consumption may not be particularly enjoyable. Conversely, when a stimulus immediately conveys all relevant information at first pass, repeat consumption may also not be particularly enjoyable. For example, one moderator in the literature on "thin slicing" is the type of trait being judged, with more immediately observable traits (e.g., extraversion) eliciting more accurate first impressions (for a review, see Carney et al., 2007).

On this note, however, any effort to grow a clearer taxonomy of repeat value will need to better incorporate the role of self-level novelty. Even if a hedonic stimulus conveys all relevant information at first pass, people may highly enjoy repeat consumption. Future research should more finely unpack the relative roles of discovering new information within the stimulus across repetition versus repeatedly sticking with the same exact information at each pass; perhaps one reason why we love returning to our favorite city is not because we learn new things about the city at each visit, but because we immediately run to our favorite unchanging spots and enjoy them exactly as they were before (e.g., something like a *curation* component of repeat value). People sometimes actively avoid repeating old favorites due to "strategic memory protection"—not wanting their fond memory to be overturned by new information—which, consistent with the psychology of self-level novelty, is tied to identity concerns (Zauberman et al., 2009). Other kinds of methods and measures might shed helpful light on these issues, such as by rerunning O'Brien's (2019) aforementioned museum study except tracking where people actually go and spend their time in the exhibit from first to second exposure, utilizing eye-tracking to measure how long they attend to repeat information from first to second exposure, and so forth.

Such a taxonomy might include not only people's actual experiences of repeat value across different stimuli, but also include their *anticipated* reactions—as people often struggle to distinguish beforehand which kinds of stimuli are worth sticking with versus abandoning (Klein & O'Brien, 2018). Documenting systematic discrepancies in perceived versus actual repeat value would allow for the development of strategies for helping people more wisely allocate their time.

4.3 | What kinds of contexts boost versus undermine repeat value?

In a similar vein to building a taxonomy of things, future research would also benefit from a clearer taxonomy of the contexts in which those things are consumed that may boost versus undermine their repeat value. One overarching factor might be the extent to which motivated versus non-motivated thought processes are recruited. For example, in O'Brien's (2019) museum study as reported earlier, perhaps participants enjoyed their return visits in part because they were *required* to go through again as part of the experiment; when people feel "stuck" with having to repeat an experience, perhaps they become more motivated to make the most of it (whereas, when people freely choose to repeat an experience, perhaps their enjoyment is diluted by concerns of choice regret). Other such motivations at the moment of choice may also affect people's experience of repetition (e.g., differences between repeating an experience because one loved it the first time versus because one hated it the first time but has decided to give it another shot), as might the presence of competing motivations (e.g., becoming more motivated to engage in repeat consumption, despite anticipating being bored oneself, when sharing the experience with a first-timer friend).

Time and timing may also play a role. Under limited time horizons, such as when people approach the end of life (e.g., Carstensen et al., 1999) and also more temporary endings like the last day of desserts before starting a diet (e.g., Winet & O'Brien, 2020), people become more likely to prefer familiar, personally meaningful activities—in other words, they seem to become more likely to seek out and enjoy repeat consumption. Related findings show that experiencing too much variety within an overly restricted window of time can backfire for enjoyment (Etkin & Mogilner, 2016). Temporal markers writ large, such as an emphasis on fresh starts (e.g., Dai et al., 2014) or strong endings (e.g., O'Brien & Ellsworth, 2012b), and the remaining availability of a stimulus in the future (e.g., Kristal et al., 2019), may generally wield influence over people's enjoyment for novel options versus repeat options.

4.4 | How to encourage repeat consumption when needed?

Although people commonly engage in repeat consumption in daily life, our attraction to novelty and variety is surely the more dominant pull. Classic models of variety seeking highlight people' erroneous tendencies to schedule too much variety in the future and avoid banking repeat options (e.g., Simonson, 1990). People are strongly drawn to novelty (see O'Brien, 2019) and thus under-utilize many valuable repeat consumption opportunities, from too rarely revisiting cherished photos (Tully & Meyvis, 2017) to neglecting their ever-present ability to revisit happy memories (Wilson et al., 2014).

Not only might people be undermining their own enjoyment by overlooking remaining repeat value, but our tendency to do so may also play a broader role in contributing to growing consumption waste (see one call from OECD, 2014, about the need for a better understanding of the psychology of waste). In some sense, combatting this problem is a win–win: Consumers may surprisingly enjoy sticking with the things they already possess, while also sparing production costs and discarded landfill. The solution, then, is to develop

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strategies for helping people better appreciate the hedonic value left remaining in already-owned goods and already-experienced activities, fighting their intuitions to the contrary (e.g., O'Brien, 2019). One set of strategies could focus on reframing techniques, as in Fishbach et al.'s (2011) aforementioned studies on framing repeat consumption as an act of loyalty (e.g., versus boredom). Another set of strategies could focus on directly manipulating aspects of the consumption environment so as to revitalize people's attention toward old and forgotten stimuli. For example, O'Brien and Smith (2019) found that introducing novelty and variety into one's *method* of consumption (e.g., repeatedly eating popcorn with chopsticks versus hands; repeatedly sipping a drink via unusual household containers) can help combat adaptation and sustain enjoyment, holding constant the *object* of consumption (e.g., eating the same popcorn, sipping the same drink), via leading people to slow down and more fully immerse themselves into the experience. Beyond enjoyment, Zhang (2015) found that instructing expert guitarists to flip their guitars upside-down and play with their non-dominant hands led them to better remember what it was like to play for the first time, and thus, they subsequently gave more effective advice to first-time players. The connecting psychological thread across such findings is to consider less costly ways to encourage people to engage in repeat consumption, when doing so is desirable. When left to their own devices, people may intuitively dump things after consuming them merely once or twice because they assume there is no hedonic value left, and thus reignite enjoyment by (wastefully) acquiring ever-newer stimuli.

4.5 | Interdisciplinary connections?

Finally, the construct of repeat consumption might be fruitfully integrated into other fields of scientific study. At the intersection of sociology and social psychology, there exists a growing line of research on ritualistic consumption and how rituals might enhance enjoyment (for a review, see Hobson et al., 2017). One interesting distinction for future research to disentangle is that the utility of ritualistic consumption is presumably gained from a *lack* of novel discovery (e.g., precisely repeating the same action each time), whereas much of the utility from repeat consumption revolves around novelty. The notion of rituals also calls attention to the many aspects of daily life that seem to contain a cyclical, repeated component; stories contain repeated themes, songs call back to repeated refrains, and so on. Heintzelman et al. (2013) documented an intriguing link between people's exposure to "objective coherence" out in the world (e.g., the recurring nature of changing seasons) and their own felt meaning in life. More research should examine the multitude of psychological functions that repeat consumption may potentially serve beyond the level of hedonic experience (e.g., measuring more behavioral and physiological measures of enjoyment and affective outcomes in addition to self-report measures).

Indeed, the notion that people underappreciate the emergence of novelty via repetition may inform many outcomes beyond hedonics. In classroom settings, students may intuitively complain about having "already heard" a lecture or "already learned" a concept and hence skip the class, underestimating how continued exposure might promote continued learning. This idea could also be extended to explicitly negative stimuli that people may not enjoy at all—either the first time they consume it or no matter how many times they consume it. To the extent that people underestimate the number of new layers of information left remaining to be revealed at each subsequent exposure, their experience of repeat consumption will presumably depend on whether those additional layers themselves are enjoyable or aversive. Just as people are too quick to think that they have "seen all there is to see" in a positive stimulus and so miss out on further pleasure, they may be too quick to downplay the rich annoyances left remaining in a negative stimulus and so inadvertently opt into further pain (e.g., quickly concluding that one "basically gets" a lengthy commute, without realizing that each morning will create its own new headache).

A final connection might be made between repeat consumption and human development. Anyone who has interacted with a toddler knows that repeating the same exact stimulus over and over again (e.g., continuously looping the same song or movie) is often a *thrilling* experience for certain kinds of others, perhaps to our own bewilderment. Both stimulus-level novelty and self-level novelty offer possible explanations. People at stages of development involving extremely fluid learning capacities and few other attentional demands—infants, for example, can enjoy a television show unbothered by work stress and fully immersed into this first-time experience—may be especially attuned to stimulus-level novelty, and thus be especially likely to enjoy repeat consumption. By the same logic, people at stages of development involving critical self-concept change and formation may also be especially likely to engage in and enjoy repeat consumption as they establish a new identity (e.g., teenagers who dive deeply into a specific movie or album).

5 | CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Experience changes our perspective on what we are experiencing. The same city feels different at our return as compared to our first visit. The same book takes on new meaning when read later in life. The same movie unveils missed details and new connections upon a closer look. When it comes to the things we consume, it appears we cannot step into the same river twice.

The current article highlights emerging developments in research on *repeat consumption*. All of us have at some point sought out an old favorite in order to enjoy it again. In recent years, a diversity of research has shed light on the real-time experience of repeat consumption—which often entails more novelty than we might assume at first glance—and its underlying processes and functions. Sometimes, pursuing breadth (i.e., what looks new on the surface) may prove to be decidedly dull, while pursuing depth (i.e., being stuck with the same old thing) may prove to be highly rewarding. Exciting discoveries lie ahead if we return to where we have already been.

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How to cite this article: O'Brien E. A mind stretched: The psychology of repeat consumption. *Consum Psychol Rev.* 2021;4:42–58. https://doi.org/10.1111/arcp.1062

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