CHAPTER 60

Familiarity Seeking

Growing and Learning from Repeat Experiences

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Modern life offers evermore opportunity for novel experiences. The appeal of finding new and exciting experiences is powerful, with a large psychological literature attesting to people's attraction to novelty's gleam (Garcia-Rada et al., 2024; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005; McAlister & Pessemier, 1982; Ratner et al., 1999; Read & Loewenstein, 1995; Sheldon et al., 2012). And yet, people instead often choose to relive experiences they have already had. People watch the same movies and TV shows, listen to the same songs, eat at the same restaurants, visit the same travel destinations, and so on. Why might people prefer repetition even when novelty seems to promise more? In this chapter, we unpack the psychology of familiarity seeking: when and why people are drawn away from novelty and toward reliving familiar experiences (i.e., *repeat consumption*).

The critical difference between novel and repeat experiences is simply that one has experienced the latter before, holding constant the objective features of the stimulus (O'Brien, 2022a). Having consumed the experience before (i.e., *reconsuming* the experience) transforms its experiential value and psychological significance compared to one's initial consumption experience. The psychological distinctions between reliving an experience and having it for the first time have important implications for the types of value an experience can offer.

Novelty and repetition offer different types of experiential value at different points in the consumption process. Prior to consumption, the value of an experience includes the appeal of novelty; after consumption, it includes the value of having already invested one's time and energy into the experience. During initial consumption, novelty makes experiences more exciting and stimulating, which makes them more enjoyable (Berlyne, 1970). During *reconsumption*, people have already consumed at least some of its novelty, built familiarity, gathered information, created memories, and incorporated it into their personal narrative (at least to some degree). Holding constant the experience itself, as well as ancillary factors like time, cost, and accessibility, the mere fact of having consumed an experience before matters.

People constantly decide between new and old experiences (Mehlhorn et al., 2015). When doing so, different experiential benefits and drawbacks become relevant. Novelty's benefits reside mainly in the hedonic pleasure domain—because novelty is inherently more uncertain than repetition (Mehlhorn et al., 2015; Speekenbrink & Konstantinidis, 2015), it tends to be more exciting (Raju, 1980), which can boost hedonic plea-

sure (Berlyne, 1970). However, because people also lack past experience with novel experiences by definition, such experiences tend to be less personally meaningful (Winet & O'Brien, 2022). By contrast, the benefits of repeat experiences reside in both the hedonic pleasure and personal meaning domains. Because repeats are more certain than novel experiences (Mehlhorn et al., 2015; Speekenbrink & Konstantinidis, 2015), repeats are a more dependable source of hedonic pleasure (Reber et al., 1998, 2004), and because they involve past personal experience by definition, they also tend to be more personally meaningful (Heintzelman & King, 2019; Routledge et al., 2011; Winet & O'Brien, 2022). Past experience gives reconsumption an experiential advantage because it both allows one to tap into the meaningful relationships one has already built while also providing valuable hedonic information, making repeat experiences a potent source of both types of value.

In what follows in this chapter, we unpack and expand upon these ideas in detail. We review three key questions:

1. What is valuable about repeat consumption?
2. When, why, and for whom is repeat consumption valuable?
3. What research remains on repeat consumption?

WHAT IS VALUABLE ABOUT REPEAT CONSUMPTION?

The appeal of novelty is self-evident. In contrast to already familiar experiences, novel experiences are more stimulating (Raju, 1980). They capture attention, making them more absorbing, immersive (O'Brien & Smith, 2019; Quoidbach et al., 2015; Sansone et al., 1992), and inherently more exciting experiences. Novelty makes experiences more intense—and more likely to reach peak enjoyment—because there is no prior exposure from which to hedonically adapt. Hedonic adaptation (and related constructs, e.g., satiation and habituation) reflect the idea that repeated exposure to stimuli weakens their intensity (Brickman et al., 1978; Campbell et al., 2014; Frederick & Loewenstein, 1999). Insofar as people seek to maximize pleasure and enjoyment (Hornsey et al., 2018), have experiences that leave a rosy trace in memory (Ratner et al., 1999), and expand their "experiential CV" (Keinan & Kivetz, 2011), novel experiences offer clear hedonic benefits over repeat experiences.

In contrast, repetition offers different and potentially more complex experiential benefits that make it less repetitive than one might think. While prior exposure may make repeat experiences less likely to reach peak hedonic value compared to novel ones, it also allows them to yield other, less obvious forms of value. Specifically, repeating experiences enables people to derive meaning from deeper personal connections, to derive enjoyment from a better understanding of their hedonic value, and to better extract their embedded novelty. O'Brien (2021) highlighted two primary pathways that well capture each of these ideas: one is "stimulus-level novelty" (i.e., finding missed or new nuances in an experience upon repeat consumption) and the other is "self-level novelty" (i.e., finding missed or new nuances *about oneself* by virtue of repeatedly consuming an experience; e.g., "I must *really* like this; this is *me*"). Below, we summarize and expand upon each of these kinds of benefits.

Meaningful Personal Connection

Relived experiences provide benefits beyond hedonic pleasure. Indeed, not every experience's value comes from hedonic pleasure alone—people spend time caring for their elderly grandparents instead of having fun times with friends, they wake up early to train for marathons instead of sleeping in their cozy beds, and they go to therapy to work through difficult personal issues instead of scrolling endlessly on social media. People regularly seek experiences that are *meaningful,* even at the expense of hedonic pleasure (Vohs et al., 2019), because meaning is a separate but substantial source of experiential value (Wolfram, 2023). Meaning often comes from psychologically connecting one's present to one's past (Klein & O'Brien, 2017; Kristal et al., 2019; O'Brien et al., 2012; O'Brien & Kardas, 2016) and/or to one's future (O'Brien, 2015a, 2015b, 2022b, 2022c).

In turn, personal meaning is an especially powerful source of value (Ariely et al., 2008; Baumeister, 1991; Baumeister et al., 2013; King & Napa, 1998; Proulx & Inzlicht, 2012). Meaning has long been a difficult concept to define precisely (Leontiev, 2013), but scholars generally agree that it revolves around a sentimental link to "who you are," and the sense that one's understanding of the world and one's place in it make sense (Chater & Loewenstein, 2016; van den Bos, 2009). Key tenets involve a sense of purpose, mattering, and coherence (Heintzelman & King, 2013; Martela & Steger, 2016), giving foundation to the belief that one's life holds some significance beyond merely existing (Steger, 2012). Meaning is a value that connects to one's identity (Schlegel et al., 2011), relationships (Lambert et al., 2013), and the broader narrative of one's life (Baumeister & Newman, 2016; Rogers et al., 2023). Meaningful experiences are those that provide a sense of personal significance as answers to the questions of "Who am I?" and "How do the things in my life make sense?"

Repeat experiences lend themselves to personal meaning in ways that novel experiences do not (Carstensen, 2006; Carstensen et al., 1999; Ersner-Hershfield et al., 2008; Routledge et al., 2011). Whereas novel experiences often lend themselves to hedonic pleasure, which is immediately gratifying at face value, repeat experiences often lend themselves to personal meaning, which typically requires past investment of time and energy to harvest meaning in the present. That is, repetition makes experiences meaningful by tapping into existing relationships with those experiences. Rewatching a cherished movie from one's childhood may be very meaningful, for example, as one reflects on one's relationship with that movie and how it may have changed or stayed the same since one's previous time watching it (Libby et al., 2005).

Nurturing one's relationships creates emotional attachment (Aron et al., 1997). Much in the same way that people build meaningful and intimate relationships with social partners (Altman & Taylor, 1973; Kardas et al., 2022; O'Brien & Kassirer, 2019), they can also grow emotionally attached to material possessions (Lastovicka & Sirianni, 2011; Wheeler & Bechler, 2021) and experiences (Arnould & Price, 1993; Carmon et al., 2003). Experiences often predict greater happiness than material goods do precisely because they hold more meaning (Carter & Gilovich, 2012; Weingarten et al., 2023). Repeated interactions open the door in this way because they allow one to become more emotionally invested (Routledge et al., 2011). Emotional investment may not necessarily provide hedonic value but it does provide a basis for creating meaningful relationships. Tellingly, having a sentimental connection to a possession considerably slows the decline in how happy it makes a person as they interact with it repeatedly over time (Yang & Galak, 2015).

Having consumed an experience in the past can mean one's past investments of time and energy have had time to grow and mature into a meaningful relationship that one can tap into through repeated interaction. A repeat experience may not necessarily yield more hedonic pleasure than a novel experience, but it will generally carry more personal meaning as it becomes increasingly integrated into one's life and personal narrative (Vohs et al., 2019).

Reliving experiences thus often involves an existential process of meaning making, as it ties the past to the present and the present to the past (Russell & Levy, 2012). Implicitly or explicitly, reconsumption must be understood through the psychological linking of past consumption with present reconsumption of the same experience—without this link, repeats are functionally novel. Importantly, meaning is created by comparing past and present experiences, whether they are similar or different. The significance of a relived experience is defined in part by its meaning to the experiencer in the past. For example, hearing a lullaby from one's childhood may be meaningful not only because the song is powerful, but because it prompts one to reflect on its prior meaning and how much has changed (or not) since then.

Repetition creates opportunities to create and consume meaning, even when experiences seem to be mundane, *because* they are so often repeated. Meaning is not limited to special occasions and unusually powerful moments—people experience meaning throughout everyday life (Choi et al., 2017; Heintzelman & King, 2014), as meaning can

grow from mere familiarity (Noble, 1953). Even daily routines and merely familiar experiences tend to hold meaning (Heintzelman & King, 2019; Winet & O'Brien, 2022). This is not to say every repeat experience is meaningful or every novel one is meaningless. Repeat experiences can be meaningless simply because they go unnoticed (e.g., blinking), and novel experiences can be meaningful because they are deeply connected to one's life story (e.g., meeting the love of one's life). However, in general, repeat experiences are more likely to be meaningful because familiarity makes it easier to connect them with one's personal identity and life narrative.

Embedded Novelty

Relived experiences are also opportunities to consume embedded novelty that remains within an experience. Experiences contain some amount of novel experiential value that can be consumed, but it may not always be possible to consume all of their available novelty on a first pass. Rather, experiences can contain embedded novel elements that go unexperienced and can only be consumed by repeating the experience one or more times. By reliving an experience one has already had, one can attend to different psychologically valuable elements with each repetition (Forest et al., 2022; Russell & Levy, 2012).

When experiences are richer and more complex, there may be too many novel elements to fully consume in one sitting (e.g., museums: O'Brien, 2019), or their novel elements may not be easily accessible on a first pass. For example, movies with twist endings often contain clues throughout the movie that are only decipherable upon a rewatch and not during a first viewing.

Indeed, repeat experiences can contain elements that offer valuable novelty that one has not yet consumed. As when exploring museum exhibits, amusement parks, and video game worlds, one can gain access to an overwhelming breadth of opportunities to experience stimulating enjoyment, which can simply be too much to consume in one initial consumption experience. But without returning to museums, amusement parks, and video game worlds numerous times, exhibits go unseen, rollercoaster rides go unridden, and side quests go unanswered. Only through repeat consumption can one fully experience the many valuable novel elements that can be embedded within experiences (whether they are hedonically enjoyable or personally meaningful). Webs of interconnected elements can also create layers of meaning that allow one to interpret experiences at multiple levels. Doing so is a crucial element of the meaning-making process, as people seek to form a coherent understanding of the world (Chater & Loewenstein, 2016; Heintzelman & King, 2014; Martela & Steger, 2016). Reconsuming experiences allows for a better understanding of both the experience and oneself (Russell & Levy, 2012), enabling one to tap into deeper, more nuanced forms of meaning through repetition. For example, on a first pass of F. Scott Fitzgerald's classic novel *The Great Gatsby*, one may follow the events of the plot and note how each moment connects to the next—but only by rereading the book might one more easily look past the straightforward plot points and begin to appreciate how each moment connects to deeper underlying themes (such as the decline of the American Dream; Cain, 2020).

An Implication beyond Existential Ones: Hedonic Certainty

As people scroll through the TV looking for something to watch, they might want to find something highly enjoyable that they have not watched before. Indeed, people can spend hours looking for a potentially good fit. People do this because they intuitively understand that novel experiences offer a hedonic boost of stimulation and excitement (Raju, 1980) from having not been hedonically adapted to yet. They also likely intuit that the stimulation of novelty can serve as a hedonic buffer—if the experience turns out to be unenjoyable, they know that at least it will have the hedonic boost of being novel. Despite this advantage, novel experiences also have the disadvantage of being inherently more uncertain. As uncertainty tends to be aversive (Ellsberg, 1961), repeat experiences can be more attractive for their hedonic certainty.

Having already consumed an experience before makes it feel more hedonically cer-

tain. Merely being exposed to something repeatedly makes it less taxing on a person's cognition, which reduces perceived uncertainty (O'Brien, 2013; Song & Schwarz, 2009; Zajonc, 1968), which in turn makes people feel more positively toward it (i.e., the mere exposure effect and processing fluency; Alter & Oppenheimer, 2009; Reber et al., 1998, 2004). Moreover, past experience yields valuable hedonic information that reduces uncertainty about what the experience has to offer. For example, watching a TV show allows one to learn how enjoyable the show is. More specifically, past experience increases certainty about the experience's general hedonic value, its variability in dispensing that value, and the malleability of that value.

Expected Hedonic Value

Reliving an experience has the hedonic advantage of giving people a more well-defined sense of how enjoyable reconsumption will be beforehand. When deciding whether to reconsume an experience, a person already has prior knowledge of what to expect in terms of hedonic pleasure because they have had that exact experience before. This past experience makes relived experiences more hedonically predictable than novel experiences by helping preview its *expected hedonic value*. For example, a person considering whether to watch a movie will have a clearer expectation of how enjoyable it will be if they have (vs. have not) seen it before.

In practice, people have expectations about the hedonic value of many novel experiences, but these are formed using nonexperiential information. For example, one might expect to enjoy a movie for which one had read positive reviews or seen attractive promotional materials. Such descriptive information is insufficient to fully communicate the qualia of an experience (i.e., the internal, subjective, perceptual aspects of an experience; see Jackson's [1986] "Mary, the Color Scientist" thought experiment). Ultimately, the gap between *learning* about an experience and *having* it is a psychologically substantial one that can influence the kinds of decisions people make (Kardas & O'Brien, 2018; Klein & O'Brien, 2018; Li et al., 2023; O'Brien & Ellsworth, 2012a; O'Brien et al., 2018; O'Brien & Roney, 2017; Wald & O'Brien, 2022).

Having even a single instance of past experience changes one's certainty about it. Whereas novel experiences may meet, exceed, or fall short of expectations, repeat experiences are relatively more certain, as prior experience serves as a rich and reliable source of hedonic information.

Expected Hedonic Variance

Reliving experiences also gives people a more well-defined sense of how variable enjoyment might be from one consumption event to the next. Just as past experience makes repeat consumption more hedonically predictable by setting clearer expectations about its hedonic value, it does the same by helping define the *expected hedonic variance*. For example, if a person has socialized with someone before, they will have a clearer expectation of how enjoyable interacting with them will be on average *and* of the possible range of enjoyment from the experience.

Having multiple instances of past experience changes the degree of certainty regarding the various possible hedonic values one could experience. For experiences that one recognizes will be perfectly replicable from one consumption event to the next, expected hedonic variance is not relevant (e.g., a movie will be exactly the same in each repeat viewing). For experiences that will differ in some way from one consumption event to the next, however, multiple past experiences can allow for stronger predictions about how good or bad the experience might possibly be (e.g., going to a restaurant will be a similar but not perfectly identical experience on each visit and repeated experiences clarify the possible range of enjoyment). The hedonic variance information provided by past experiences adds a layer of hedonic certainty with which a person could set more accurate hedonic expectations. This benefit is something repeat experiences can provide that novel experiences generally cannot.

Hedonic Curation

Reliving experiences also makes it possible to selectively experience their more rewarding elements (Russell & Levy, 2012). When

deciding whether to relive an experience, people can use their existing knowledge of its hedonic landscape to *curate* their reconsumption experience (i.e., to focus on the enjoyable parts and avoid the unenjoyable parts).

The process of curation could involve strategically shifting one's attention—but the "strategic" part can come only from repetition. Because attention is selective, one can pick and choose which aspects of an experience to attend to. For example, when rewatching a movie in theaters that one has seen before, one can pay close attention to one's favorite scenes and deliberately not pay attention during unpleasant ones. Repeat experiences have the advantage of making it possible to use prior knowledge of the hedonic highs and lows to shape the reconsumption experience to one's liking, which is a benefit that novel experiences generally cannot provide.

WHEN, WHY, AND FOR WHOM IS REPEAT CONSUMPTION VALUABLE?

As reviewed in the first section of this chapter, repeat experiences differ from novel ones because they offer unique hedonic and meaning-related benefits. This begs the question of what factors increase or decrease the "repeat value" of an experience. Next we review how some candidate factors—stimulus complexity, cognitive effort and risk preferences, control over reconsumption, experiential timing, experiential architecture, memory and attention, and social forces—bear on when, why, and for whom repeat consumption is valuable.

Complexity

Many experiences have some degree of consumable novelty contained within them, and complex experiences have a high degree of such novelty (Berlyne, 1970; Cox & Cox, 2002; O'Brien, 2019). Complex experiences can be so rich with novel elements and interwoven relationships that they cannot all be consumed on a first pass. Thus, complexity is a crucial feature of experiences that impacts their reconsumability (O'Brien, 2019). Simpler experiences, like watching paint dry, being stuck in traffic, and waiting on hold, will yield less meaning or hedonic pleasure upon reconsumption, whereas more complex experiences, like rewatching movies with plot twists, traveling to a major city, or getting to know a new person, will yield relatively more meaning, hedonic pleasure, or both.

Reconsumption provides more experiential value for complex experiences because it makes it possible to consume more novelty of different types. Reliving complex experiences can provide access to novelty of greater breadth (e.g., trying all of the wines at a restaurant), or greater depth (e.g., learning to appreciate the specific notes of a given wine). Complex experiences can also contain embedded novelty that is hedonic (e.g., delicious foods on the menu that one has not yet eaten), or meaningful (e.g., learning the history behind each dish). Whether a complex experience's novelty lies in its breadth or depth, or in its hedonic or meaningful elements, such experiences benefit from reconsumption because additional experiential value is contained within their abundance of novelty.

Cognitive Effort and Risk Preferences

Cognitive Fluency

Reconsumption is attractive in part because it is easier on the mind. People are cognitive misers who tend to find repeat experiences more pleasurable than novel ones because they require less cognitive effort to process (Alter & Oppenheimer, 2009; Zajonc, 1968), adding to a sense of comfortable familiarity. As such, repeat consumption should be more attractive when one is unwilling or unable to dedicate cognitive resources to the experience (e.g., cooking a reliable go-to meal may be more appealing than trying a new recipe when one is preoccupied with stressful life events). Among people who feel cognitively overloaded or distracted, reliving experiences should thus be especially attractive.

Status Quo and Flights to Familiarity

Difficult decisions put people in the unenviable position of not knowing what to choose (Chernev et al., 2015). In such cases, people often flock to the familiar by preferring to preserve the status quo, thus choosing to re-

peat past experiences (Samuelson & Zeckhauser, 1988). Similarly, decision pressure, such as stress and time pressure, causes people to prefer familiar experiences over novel ones (Vanbeselaere, 1980), even when the novel ones would be more enjoyable (Litt et al., 2011). Choice difficulty can push people to return to the familiar because it is perceived as a more emotionally comfortable option.

Risk Preferences

Individual differences and contextual factors also impact people's willingness to take risks, which should influence the appeal of reconsumption. Factors like personality and domain can predict preferences for riskier versus safer options, such as by taking a chance on novel experiences over familiar ones. When people face the prospect of loss (Tversky & Kahneman, 1992), focus less on the future (Boyd & Zimbardo, 2005), or are more extraverted or disagreeable (Joseph & Zhang, 2021), they are more likely to exhibit risk-taking behavior. Thus, when disposition or context leads to a low tolerance for uncertainty or increased risk aversion, people may become more interested in repeat consumption.

Control over Reconsumption

The degree of control one has over reconsumption can shape the experience. Thus far, most of this chapter has focused on volitional reconsumption—meaning experiences that one chooses to repeat. However, it is also possible to repeat experiences without control, either because it is forced upon a person or because one does not realize repetition is happening. Even when reconsumption is volitional, the degree of control one has over the experience can vary. The sense of control a person has over the initial choice to reconsume, or the way the experience is reconsumed, or both may affect the appeal of repeating experiences relative to consuming novelty.

Volitionality

Many reconsumption experiences are volitional, but this is not necessarily the case, and the degree of volitionality can also vary. Some reconsumption is involuntary because it is stumbled upon unexpectedly, or happens below conscious awareness, as with habitual behavior (Neal et al., 2006; Wood et al., 2002). Other reconsumption is involuntary because one's brain chemistry makes it hard to resist (e.g., as with obsessive–compulsive disorder; Rosa-Alcazar et al., 2008). And perhaps most commonly, many repeat experiences are nonvolitional because they are imposed by external factors, such as when doing repetitive labor at work or in school in order to earn money and higher grades. In principle, repeat consumption should offer greater experiential value when it is volitional.

Malleability

Another way that people can exert control over reconsumption is through hedonic curation, as discussed in the first section of this chapter. During reconsumption, people can use their prior knowledge of the experience to modify their experience to emphasize preferred elements and deemphasize less preferred ones (Russell & Levy, 2012). Reconsumption experiences whose composition can be more easily or more effectively modified to suit the experiencer's tastes will be more appealing (e.g., rewatching a movie at home may be more desirable than rewatching in a movie theater because one can fast-forward and rewind to one's heart's content). One can also selectively grant attention to certain elements and not others (e.g., by closing one's eyes when anticipating a jump scare in a scary movie or by paying closer attention during one's favorite scenes). The ability to shape one's experience is unique to repeat experiences because with novel experiences, one lacks the prior knowledge necessary to curate effectively. Thus, the extent to which a given experience is malleable (i.e., *can be* curated) should change its repeat value.

Building Expertise

Repeating experiences allows people to master them. People play games, learn to play instruments, and practice free-throws, which all require repetition. Building competencies like these can foster a sense of meaning in life (Martela et al., 2018), and they require

repetitive practice. Experiences that become enriched by mastery through reconsumption should have especially high repeat value.

Experiential Timing

Gaps and Spacing

As the gap between an initial consumption event and a later reconsumption event grows, reconsumption may feel more novel due to disrupted hedonic adaptation. Similar to how inserting interruptions within an experience can keep experiences fresh by slowing hedonic adaptation (Nelson & Meyvis, 2008; Quoidbach & Dunn, 2013), spacing out consumption and reconsumption may do the same. Presumably, longer gaps would allow hedonic adaptation to slow even more, and may even reset it completely.

Another reason that longer gaps might keep experiences fresh is that people's memories of initial consumption events fade with time. Once information about an experience has been consumed, it can be hard to return to a preexperience state (e.g., curse of knowledge, hindsight bias; Birch & Bloom, 2007; Roese & Vohs, 2012). However, the passage of time may enable one to forget the familiar elements of an experience to reenjoy them later as if they were new again (Russell & Levy, 2012). In fact, even merely perceiving temporal distance can make repeat experiences feel more novel (Galak et al., 2014).

Digesting Ideas

Allowing time to pass can also be important for mentally or emotionally processing an experience. Sometimes the meaning of an experience takes time to digest, so to speak. The "spiral curriculum" details this concept, which posits that students learn better when topics are revisited intermittently (as opposed to all at once) and with increasing depth, because this structure allows students to better integrate the material into their existing schemas (Harden, 1999). Relatedly, complex matters can be better understood by allowing time for unconscious processing (Dijksterhuis & Nordgren, 2006). To repeat some experiences immediately would be to do them a disservice because time allows their meaning to coalesce in order to make sense. For complex experiences that require longer periods of digestion, reconsumption might feel premature without enough time in the interim.

Sequence and Architecture

Streaks

Reconsumption can be more appealing when it is part of a streak. When occurrences happen repeatedly as part of an unbroken chain of events, this can motivate people to stay on track with their goals and behave consistently (Klein & O'Brien, 2016, 2023; O'Brien, 2020, 2022b; O'Brien & Klein, 2017). Because continuing an intact chain of repeat experiences can be meaningful in and of itself (Silverman & Barasch, 2023), repeating experiences may be more appealing when doing so prolongs a streak.

Variety and Sequential versus Simultaneous Choice

All else equal, people generally prefer more stimulation over less, and the degree to which reconsumption is stimulating can differ as a function of how it is ordered. Variety can provide appealing stimulation (Kahn, 1995; McAlister & Pessemier, 1982; Ratner et al., 1999), even among already familiar experiences, with many positive psychologists proposing that incorporating variety into people's daily lives will help combat hedonic adaptation and maximize happiness (Sheldon et al., 2012).

Reconsumption can be made more appealing by adding variety to its ordering. For example, among two familiar restaurants, one may find it more appealing to alternate between them because it adds variety and provides a break (Quoidbach & Dunn, 2013). How choices are constructed can also influence repeat value. For example, people prefer more of the same candy bar when choosing sequentially (i.e., one at a time in the moment) compared to when choosing simultaneously (i.e., all at once for the future; Simonson, 1990).

Endings

Another important structural factor is the point at which reconsumption occurs within the span of the entire consumption and re-

consumption process—particularly whether it occurs during an ending. People prefer endings that end "well"—enjoyably (Diener et al., 2001; O'Brien & Ellsworth, 2012b; Ross & Simonson, 1991) and/or meaningfully (e.g., "full-circle endings"; Schwörer et al., 2020; Winet & O'Brien, 2022). As endings approach, surer sources of value, and meaning in particular, become more attractive. People nearing the end of life, for example, increasingly prefer to spend time with close family and friends over interesting new strangers (Carstensen, 2006; Carstensen et al., 1999; Fredrickson & Carstensen, 1990). In the face of endings big and small, reliving experiences becomes more attractive because doing so is more certain to provide enjoyable and meaningful endings.

Knowing the Architecture

Beyond changing one's in situ experience, prior knowledge of an experience's structure can also increase the appeal of reconsumption. Much like having an event program at a wedding, knowing where one is within an experience changes how the experience feels and what to expect. Having a road map allows people to organize their understanding of an upcoming experience into a broader framework, which can increase its experiential value. For example, counterintuitively, story spoilers often do not spoil stories (despite ruining the surprise) because having an overarching framework helps make sense of the experience and is rewarding in its own right (Leavitt & Christenfeld, 2011).

Attention and Memory

Attention

For a reconsumption event to be recognized as a repeat experience, one must notice and attend to the initial consumption event. Without having paid attention in the first place, reconsumption becomes no different from first-time consumption. For example, someone passing through a national park without looking up from their phone is not consuming the national park experience; for them to revisit the park later would be functionally equivalent to visiting for the first time. Experiences that were simply missed (e.g., by attending to something else), or that failed to reach some minimum threshold of conscious awareness (e.g., inconspicuous experiences like blinking), are technically repeat experiences but are not perceived as such. When an experience captures less attention initially, its repeat value should be higher. Even so, purely habitual or otherwise boring repeat experiences should offer little repeat value due to a lack of sufficient attention being paid at any stage (Neal et al., 2006; Smith, 1981; van Tilburg & Igou, 2012).

Savoring offers an antidote to various attention-related issues with reconsumption—by attending closely to the positive aspects of an experience, one can increase their experiential value (Bryant & Veroff, 2017). Through savoring, one can extract embedded layers of novelty and appreciate the meaning and connections one has to those experiences (as found in, for example, research on mindfulness: Siegel, 2007). If one savors an initial consumption experience, this may allow one to develop a stronger personal connection that could provide more meaning upon reconsumption. For example, by savoring a walk through a familiar park, one might be more attuned to how the flowers have grown and the seasons have changed, thus strengthening one's sense of meaning and emotional connection.

Memory

Memory is crucial for reconsumption because repeat value necessarily depends on remembering (or not remembering) past consumption events. Without such memory, one cannot reap the benefits of one's existing hedonic knowledge or existing relationship with the experience. Poorly remembered experiences may thus be more stimulating when reexperienced, but may also lack the deeper benefits of familiarity. For example, a person who visited a national park as a child but does not remember it may find revisiting the park hedonically exciting, but not so personally meaningful. Well-preserved memories should further deepen the meaningful value of repeat consumption. It could also be argued that reconsumption can occur using *only* one's memories. For example, one cannot actually spend time with loved ones who have passed away, but one may still be able to relive those experiences

in one's mind (e.g., the "replay value" of cherished memories). The experiential benefits of this memory-based reliving of experiences will be different than actually reliving those experiences because they are limited by the details available via memory. No new information will be available, meaning that hedonic certainty will be amplified and the control one has over one's own memory may allow for particularly effective hedonic curation. Revisiting memories in this way may also strengthen one's personal connection to these experiences, leading people to become especially protective of them (Zauberman et al., 2009).

Social Forces

Relationship Building

Having meaningful social relationships is crucial for well-being, and repetition plays a vital role in fostering such relationships. People bond by sharing both a breadth and a depth of experiences with each other, through which they become increasingly vulnerable and interpersonally connected (Altman & Taylor, 1973; Taylor & Altman, 1987; Vanlear, 1987). This process necessarily involves repeatedly sharing experiences, like joint activities and conversation. Certainly, a healthy social life involves balancing the exploration of new social connections with reinvesting in one's existing relationships. This tendency changes over time, such that people tend to focus on their existing relationships as they get older by spending time with close friends and family instead of with new and interesting strangers (Carstensen, 2006; Carstensen et al., 1999; Fredrickson & Carstensen, 1990). It is perhaps telling that people who face major life endings (e.g., death) rely most on the relationships they have built most firmly through decades of repeated interactions.

Vicarious Experience

Another more indirect form of reconsumption involves incorporating other people's perspectives into one's own. The ability to empathize with others and incorporate their perspective into a collective "we"-perspective, can make novel experiences feel like reconsumption experiences and vice versa. Novel experiences can feel like repeats when they have already been experienced by someone else because it feels redundant at the broader group level (Winet et al., 2022). Repeat experiences can also feel novel again when reexperiencing them alongside someone who is experiencing them for the first time because one tends to adopt the other person's inexperienced perspective (Jung et al., 2020). When consuming experiences with social partners, others' perspectives can influence the appeal of reconsumption because they can make familiar experiences feel novel and novel experiences feel familiar.

WHAT RESEARCH REMAINS ON REPEAT CONSUMPTION?

Despite this quickly growing literature, there is much left to be understood about the psychology of familiarity and repeat reconsumption. We end this chapter by highlighting some of the most interesting and pressing directions from our view.

Practical Directions

Encouraging Repeat Consumption

In the preceding section of this chapter, we discussed various factors that make repeat experiences more or less appealing, but much is left to learn about which strategies work best and when. Future research should pit various strategies against each other to determine their benefits and drawbacks.

One promising direction seems to be emphasizing the novelty that remains embedded within experiences. By making salient how much novelty is left untapped within experiences, people may become more likely to repeat those experiences, rather than seek out new ones. Akin to how video games communicate the percentage of their worlds the player has explored, businesses and organizations might consider a similar strategy. For linear games, this percentage score is merely a progress marker, but for open-world games (which better reflect real life), this is a measure of unexplored optional novelty. Simply making people aware of

the amount of untapped novelty contained within an experience may increase the likelihood with which people choose to repeatedly explore things like websites, menus, and tourist attractions. For example, local tourism boards could encourage people to spend more time in the area by making it easier for people to keep track of which local attractions they have and have *not yet* experienced. These boards could distribute local attraction checklists and email people a percentage marker highlighting how many of the local attractions they have experienced and how many they still have left to experience.

Climate Change Action

There is growing global awareness of the importance of minimizing the harms of climate change, which promises to have grave implications for human society and well-being (Masud et al., 2015). As Earth's resources become increasingly strained, the need to reconsume and eschew novelty has become more important than ever. Understanding the psychological drivers of climate-friendly forms of repeat consumption, like repair and reuse, may prove invaluable.

Waste is created in the process of buying and disposing of products. Indeed many companies create products that are meant to be disposed of, as with fast fashion and products created using single-use plastics. Cheap materials degrade quickly, making them difficult to reuse. However, emerging research seeks to explore the psychology driving consumers' desire to prolong the lives of their products, rather than replace them with new ones. Recent work has explored how to encourage repair behaviors, investigating which factors lead people to reinvest in their existing possessions by bringing them back into usable condition (Godfrey et al., 2022). Other work explores the psychology underlying perceptions of degradation, revealing the qualities that lead consumers to believe items retain value, as opposed to categorizing them as trash, such as whether they are physically distorted (Trudel et al., 2016). This work speaks to a broader understanding of how people may be convinced of the enduring value of reconsumption opportunities, thereby encouraging more sustainable behavior. One actionable strategy was documented by O'Brien and Smith (2019), who found that reexperiencing the same consumption object using novel *methods* of consumption (e.g., eating the same old popcorn, but with chopsticks) can help revive people's enjoyment. Strategies like these could be scaled up to encourage familiarity seeking and reuse behaviors more broadly.

Conceptual Directions

Experiences provide different kinds of experiential value at different points in the reconsumption process. Future research could explore how repeat value may be impacted by the architecture of embedded experiential value, the ways in which that value can be accessed, and the time course over which that value may be extracted.

Enjoyment–Meaning Tradeoffs

In the first section of this chapter, we discussed how reconsumption allows one to tap into both meaningful and hedonic benefits, but it remains unclear how these values potentially interact over time. Hedonic adaptation predicts enjoyment will diminish with repeated experience, but how might a growing sense of meaning counterbalance this decline? Future research could chart the progression of both types of value for different types of experiences to determine where they intersect, and considering both hedonic pleasure and meaning combined, which points are the most and least valuable overall. For example, perhaps going to a baseball game for one's hometown team is most enjoyable during one's very first game because that is when the experience is most new and exciting, but with each subsequent game, it becomes gradually less enjoyable due to hedonic adaptation. Simultaneously, that first game may also be when it is least meaningful because one has not yet become emotionally invested in the team—but by attending more games, this personal connection grows and each subsequent game becomes increasingly meaningful. To understand when fandom might be at its peak, one could calculate when people's combined sense of enjoyment and meaning tends to be highest over time. Potential fans could use this understanding

to recognize ex ante how much time they should expect to invest before becoming a true fan, and marketers (for example) could use this same information to anticipate lucrative marketing opportunities.

Bottom-Up versus Top-Down Processing

An alternative framework for thinking about repeat consumption is through the lens of bottom-up versus top-down processing. As people relive the same experience over and over, they may turn their attention away from the concrete, sensory elements of an experience and begin to incorporate an *interpretation* of the experience that gets continually reshaped through repeated exposure. Perhaps this framework could help explain why certain experiences are "acquired tastes," which start out being hedonically *unpleasant*, but eventually become enjoyable through repeated experience. Common examples include sophisticated media (e.g., jazz and classical music) and beverages with stimulating properties (e.g., coffee and alcohol). Embedded novelty may play a key role, but a shift from bottom-up to top-down processing may provide another explanation. When people first try coffee, for example, they may only notice its bitterness from a bottom-up perspective. But after having many cups over time, they may begin to associate the taste, however bitter, with the pleasant feeling of being caffeinated. Eventually they may grow to "enjoy the taste," but not because of its literal taste—rather, they enjoy the expectation and background knowledge their minds overlay onto the taste. This tendency to shift to a top-down mode of processing suggests a potential psychological mechanism of repeat consumption that may help explain other related patterns as well. For example, as people repeat experiences, they may increasingly value more abstract elements, such as by choosing to read an analysis of a movie before rewatching it in order to better understand and appreciate its themes on a second viewing (see also Redden, 2008).

Within-Experience Reconsumption

The current research on novelty- and familiarity seeking focuses on what people prefer at a between-experience level (i.e., from one discrete consumption experience to the next)—but future research could also explore how preferences for consumption and reconsumption operate at a *within-experience* level. A single experience may deliver both novelty and familiarity dynamically as it unfolds over time. For example, a movie may contain both scenes with fast-paced novelty (e.g., by introducing new characters and plot points) and ones that return to familiarity (e.g., by having existing characters address familiar plot points). In ongoing research, we are exploring how narrative techniques like "callbacks" (i.e., referencing older material anew) use reconsumption at the within-experience level to imbue media experiences with new meanings, thus increasing their experiential value (Winet & O'Brien, 2025). Future work should continue to explore how other forms of repetition at the within-experience level can change and potentially improve experiences.

Meta-Novelty and Meta-Familiarity

Finally, can the experience of novelty itself feel repetitive, and can the experience of repetition itself feel novel? Uncertainty and novelty are intrinsically linked. The appeal of novelty comes from its relative unpredictability, and yet when one expects the unexpected, this may create a sense of *meta-familiarity* that is distinct from how novel the content itself is. Likewise, an unexpected familiar experience may create a sense of *meta-novelty* that is distinct from how familiar the content itself is. For example, social media offers endless novel content to scroll through—and yet, it may begin to feel repetitive to consume such a continuous stream of novel content. Meanwhile, to stumble upon something familiar in one's feed could be more unexpected than encountering yet more novelty and thus may feel more "novel" at a meta-level. Might repeat experiences receive a hedonic boost from feeling "novel" at a meta-level? Could novel experiences receive any of reconsumption's unique benefits by feeling "familiar" at a meta-level? These are questions that arise from the idea that the novelty and familiarity of *novelty and familiarity* might be consumable, which may be worth exploring in future research.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

All told, the current chapter highlights the exciting state of research on familiarity and repeat consumption. The literature on meaning and personal growth has pointed to the obvious value of gaining exposure to new stimuli and new experiences, but what is perhaps less obvious is that meaning and personal growth can also be gained from repeating and reliving familiar experiences. In the years to come, we look forward to seeing continued new discoveries about the power of the old and the familiar.

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