

When Are Shared Experiences Less Enjoyable Than Solo Experiences?

The Role of Clarity and Need for Coordination

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ABSTRACT

Consumers frequently engage in leisure activities with others, such as visiting an art gallery with a friend or going to a sports match with a family member, and they tend to assume that sharing experiences with another person will make them more enjoyable (Caprariello and Reis 2013; Ratner and Hamilton 2015). However, sharing experiences requires coordination with others, which can take the consumer's attention away from the consumption activity, potentially reducing their enjoyment of the activity compared to those who engage in the experience solo. In a series of studies in which consumers engage in real consumption experiences, we show that lack of clarity about a partner's interests can make it difficult for consumers to coordinate and focus on a shared activity. This lack of clarity can lead to consumers enjoying the experience less relative to solo experiences or shared experiences for which clarity is high. Notably, simple interventions can increase clarity of a partner's interests and consumers' enjoyment of shared activities, providing tools for service providers who want to retain customers and benefit from positive word-of-mouth.

Keywords: shared vs. solo experiences, clarity, coordination, enjoyment, consumption experiences

Consumers often share consumption experiences with others. Annually, nearly 70% of U.S. adults go to movies, sporting events and museums, and most attend these activities in the company of friends or family (National Endowment for the Arts, Survey of Public Participation in the Arts 2014). Given that U.S. consumers spend, on average, \$562 per person per year on activities like these (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2017), it is important for service providers to understand when shared leisure activities are more enjoyable for consumers, and when they might be less enjoyable than solo experiences. Greater enjoyment increases consumers' intentions to return and spread positive word-of-mouth, increasing their lifetime value to service providers (Gustafsson, Johnson and Roos 2005; Rust, Lemon and Zeithaml 2004).

Despite consumers' beliefs that sharing experiences with another person will make these experiences more enjoyable (Caprariello and Reis 2013; Ratner and Hamilton 2015), evidence is mixed on whether shared experiences are actually more enjoyable than solo experiences. Caprariello and Reis (2013) show that consumers' retrospective self-reported happiness after engaging in shared experiences is higher than their self-reported happiness after engaging in solo experiences, but their methodology allows for differences in the types of experiences reported across conditions. Controlling for type of experience (e.g., spending time in an art gallery), Ratner and Hamilton (2015) found no difference in enjoyment of the experience between solo consumers and those who went with a partner. Raghunathan and Corfman (2006) also controlled for type of experience, and they found that although consumers enjoyed shared experiences more than solo experiences when they were exposed to congruent social information (i.e., when a confederate expressed positive evaluations of pleasant stimuli), they enjoyed shared experiences less when they were exposed to incongruent social information (i.e., when a confederate expressed negative evaluations of pleasant stimuli).

Mixed evidence might emerge because there are some factors that can make shared consumption experiences more enjoyable than solo experiences, and other factors that can make them less enjoyable than solo experiences. On the plus side, shared experiences allow consumers to compare their evaluations with those of others, and congruent evaluations of an experience can affirm one's reactions and increase enjoyment (Raghunathan and Corfman 2006). Sharing an experience with someone else rather than going alone can also increase felt status (McFerran and Argo 2014) and reduce concerns about not being perceived as socially connected (Ratner and Hamilton 2015).

However, on the negative side, sharing an experience can require coordination with another person, particularly for many activities outside of the lab where the pace and structure are self-determined by the consumers of the activity (rather than guided by an experimenter or a museum docent). For example, one weekend afternoon, one of the authors and her friend decided to visit an art gallery featuring a new exhibit. She had been looking forward to learning about the exhibit and catching up with her friend. However, during the experience she found herself unable to absorb much of the art. Because she did not know how interested her friend was in the exhibit, she felt unsure about how much time to spend looking at and reading about each art piece, whether she should focus on the art or attend to her friend, and, more generally, how they should jointly navigate the exhibit. Her experience ended up being not very enjoyable because they spent most of the time standing in front of just a few paintings chatting, and she was not able to absorb the art as much as she had anticipated. She left the museum feeling dissatisfied with her experience. Should she have visited the gallery alone, or could she and her friend have done something differently to improve their experience?

In this research, we identify conditions under which consumers enjoy shared experiences more than solo experiences, and when they enjoy them less. Specifically, when activities are highly interdependent in terms of determining how to jointly coordinate the experience, we find that knowing their partner's level of interest in the activity influences the consumer's ability to coordinate with their partner. When consumers do not know their partner's level of interest in the activity, the difficulty of coordinating with their partner hurts their own ability to focus on and enjoy the experience. In the case of our coauthor, she had a hard time coordinating the experience and ultimately felt dissatisfied, because she was not sure how much her friend was interested in the exhibit. Under these conditions (low clarity in highly interdependent activities), consumers tend to enjoy shared activities less than engaging in the same activities alone, in which issues with interdependent coordination are eliminated. However, if consumers know their partner's level of interest in a shared activity (high clarity), they can more easily coordinate with their partner and enjoy a shared activity just as much as a solo activity, even if the activity is highly interdependent. Thus, if our coauthor and her friend had discussed their interests in the exhibits before entering the gallery, they might have found coordination easier and enjoyed the experience more. Alternatively, joining a guided tour to decrease the interdependence of the experience may have allowed our coauthor to focus more on the art and enjoy the experience even if she did not know how much the exhibit interested her friend.

Despite the importance of clarity and ease of coordination in influencing consumers' enjoyment of shared experiences, prior research has not examined how these factors impact enjoyment. In the next section, we draw from the literature on shared consumption as well as teamwork to develop our theorizing about the role of social coordination, and why clarity about a partner's interests affects ease of coordination. We then describe a pilot study to examine the

relationship between clarity about a partner's interest in an activity and the consumer's own enjoyment. Drawing from our theorizing and results from the pilot study, we present a conceptual model (Figure 1) that we test in a series of three studies in which participants engage in real consumption experiences with others or alone. These studies examine the effects of clarity about a partner's interest in the activity on ease of coordination, ability to focus on the activity, and enjoyment of the activity, and they compare participants' ability to focus on and enjoyment of shared versus solo activities. Based on the results of our studies, we propose interventions that can help consumers get the most out of shared experiences and suggest conditions under which consumers may find it more enjoyable to engage in solo experiences.

ENJOYMENT OF SOLO VERSUS SHARED EXPERIENCES

Prior work identifies various factors that can make shared experiences more enjoyable than solo experiences. Sharing experiences prompts consumers to engage in positive self-presentation (Dunn et al.2007) and increases felt status (McFerran and Argo 2014). Sharing experiences also reduces concerns about not being perceived as socially connected (Ratner and Hamilton 2015), which might contribute to higher enjoyment of an experience. Further, sharing experiences can also boost enjoyment when individuals discover that others share their evaluations of the experience. For example, Raghunathan and Corfman (2006) find that consumers enjoyed shared experiences more than solo experiences when they were exposed to congruent social information (a confederate who rated pleasant stimuli favorably or unpleasant stimuli unfavorably), but they enjoyed shared experiences less when they were exposed to incongruent social information. Similarly, Ramanathan and McGill (2007) find that consistency

in partners' moment-to-moment evaluations of an experience positively predicted their overall evaluations of a shared experience.

In addition to these factors that have been shown to impact shared versus solo experiences, a fundamental difference between shared and solo experiences not previously explored is that shared experiences can require coordination with other consumers. Although we usually associate coordination with the accomplishment of work or performance tasks, we argue that coordination also plays an important role in the enjoyment of shared leisure activities, particularly in highly interdependent leisure activities. Social coordination is the process of orchestrating the sequence and timing of one's own actions with others' actions during an experience (Marks et al. 2001; Reis and Collins 2004; Thompson and Fine 1999). For example, a consumer who visits an art gallery with a companion might try to time her own viewing of the pieces to coincide with her partner's movement between the pieces, and engage in conversation when it seems appropriate; a consumer who visits the same gallery alone does not have to think about these coordination decisions. Coordination with others during a task requires an investment of energy and attention beyond that required to perform the task itself (Finkel et al. 2006).

We argue that clarity about the other consumer's interest in the activity will affect consumers' ability to coordinate with their partner during a shared activity. Earlier research on teamwork suggests that clarity enhances ease of coordination, increasing the ability to achieve group and team outcomes. For example, team members who lack clarity about the overall objectives for the team and each other's roles are less able to coordinate with each other and integrate their own tasks with those performed by others, reducing overall team effectiveness (Gladstein 1984; Marks et al. 2001; Sawyer 1992). In close relationships, lacking clarity about a

partner's long-term objectives (e.g., to lose weight or save money) decreases one's ability to anticipate the partner's needs (Fitzsimons, Finkel, and Vandellen 2015; Köpetz et al. 2011) and makes coordination between partners more difficult. Notably, whereas prior work has examined the impact of clarity on group-level outcomes or a partner's outcomes, we examine the effect of clarity on a consumer's own outcomes, including the consumer's own enjoyment of an activity.

Building on these earlier findings, we propose that when consumers engage in shared leisure activities, low clarity about a partner's interest in the activity reduces ease of coordination and the consumers' ability to focus on the activity, reducing the consumer's enjoyment of the activity. For example, if a consumer knows that her friend is very interested in a new art exhibit, she may anticipate spending more time on each piece and engaging in deeper conversations about the art. Or, if she knows her friend is somewhat less interested in the exhibit, she can expect to spend a shorter viewing time but absorb as much as she can quickly. Either way, clarity about her partner's interests allows the consumer to coordinate more easily with her partner, helping her focus on the activity. Conversely, if she has low clarity, and is wondering about her friend's level of interest in the art and searching for cues in her friend's behavior, this will reduce the consumer's own ability to focus on the art. When the consumer is less able to devote attention to a shared activity, we should observe evidence in measures such as memory for details of the activity and subjective ability to focus.

It is important to note that social coordination costs are distinct from conflicts of interest (Rusbult and Van Lange 2003). A conflict of interest may occur when two people do not want to do the same activity (Rusbult and Van Lange 2003), such as when one wants to go to an art museum and the other wants to attend a baseball game. In contrast, social coordination costs can arise when two people both agree to engage in the same activity (either going to the art museum

or to the baseball game) and their actions as they engage in the activity depend, at least in part, on their partner's actions. We propose that clarity about a partner's interests will facilitate social coordination regardless of whether the partner's interests are highly congruent with the consumer's own interests. For example, knowing that one person is less interested in an exhibit than the other might prompt a pair to decide they should navigate the exhibit individually and pick a place to meet afterwards.

Further, we propose that the degree to which consumers are able to focus on the activity, whether they are alone or with someone else, predicts how much they will enjoy the experience. Prior work supports this prediction: the ability to focus during a task and high involvement in experiences has been shown to increase enjoyment (Barasch, Zauberger and Diehl 2018; Holbrook and Hirschman 1982; Novak, Hoffman, and Duhachek 2003). Conversely, incidental events that divert a person's attention away from a positive focal activity decrease enjoyment (Isikman et al. 2016). When a consumer feels that she is not able to focus on an activity that she is interested in because she is distracted by coordinating with her partner, her enjoyment of the experience will be dampened. Thus, when consumers have low (vs. high) clarity about a partner's interests, we should observe reduced ability to focus on the activity and lower enjoyment of the activity. We test this prediction in a pilot study.

*PILOT STUDY: DOES CLARITY OF A PARTNER'S INTERESTS INFLUENCE ONE'S OWN
ENJOYMENT?*

Motivated by our coauthor's frustrating experience at the art gallery, the goal of our pilot study was to compare shared and solo experiences visiting the same art gallery. We predicted

that participants who had a high level of clarity about their partner's interests and participants who went alone would enjoy the experience more than those who had a low level of clarity about their partner's interests, because low clarity would reduce participants' ability to focus on the art and their enjoyment of the experience.

Participants and Design

We recruited pairs of participants ($N = 84$; 42 pairs)¹ and solo participants ($N = 79$) to visit an art gallery on a university campus and then respond to a series of questions about their experience. After their visit, each participant responded individually to a survey in which we asked them how much they had learned about the artwork, how much they had enjoyed their experience in the gallery, and how well they understood what their partner wanted to get out of the experience (on 7-point scales where 1 = "not at all", 7 = "very much"). We also surprised them with a quiz measuring how much they remembered about the artwork. This quiz provided a more objective measure of participants' ability to focus on the activity, complementing the subjective measure of how much they felt they had learned. At the end of the survey, participants provided demographic information and rated how well they knew the person with whom they participated in the study (on a 7-point scale, where 1 = "not well," 7 = "very well").

Results

We analyzed the data using a random coefficient model ("RCM") to control for the non-independent nature of the data for pairs of participants who visited the gallery together². We

¹ Five participants in four pairs did not report their clarity about their partner's interests, leaving 38 pairs in the analysis.

² We used an RCM to control for the non-independent nature of the data from pairs of participants in the analyses of all of our studies.

found that having a clear understanding of their partner's interests was a significant predictor of both enjoyment ($b = 0.18$; $F(1, 74.34) = 5.07, p = .027$) and learning (self-reported learning: $b = 0.18$; $F(1, 74.36) = 3.77, p = .056$; memory: $b = 0.24$; $F(1, 75.82) = 5.15, p = .026$) for participants who visited the gallery with a partner. First, we examined its impact on enjoyment. Participants who lacked clarity about what their partner wanted to accomplish (1 SD below the mean) said they enjoyed the experience significantly less ($M_s = 5.06$ vs. 5.53 ; $t(78) = 3.38, p = .001$) than solo visitors. In contrast, participants who had a clear understanding of what their partner wanted to accomplish (1 SD above the mean) said they enjoyed the experience as much ($M_s = 5.58$ vs. 5.53 ; $t(78) = 0.35, p = .73$) as solo consumers.

Next, we examined participants' ability to focus on the activity, using both self-reported learning and scores on the memory test about the artwork in the gallery. Participants who lacked clarity about what their partner wanted to accomplish (1 SD below the mean) said they learned significantly less ($M_s = 4.12$ vs. 4.73 ; $t(78) = 3.54, p = .001$) and scored lower on the memory test ($M_s = 6.88$ vs. 7.43 ; $t(78) = 2.76, p = .007$) than solo visitors. In contrast, participants who had a clear understanding of what their partner wanted to accomplish (1 SD above the mean) learned as much ($M_s = 4.70$ vs. 4.73 ; $t(78) = 0.20, p = .84$) and performed as well on the memory test ($M_s = 7.55$ vs. 7.43 ; $t(78) = 0.60, p = .55$) as solo consumers.

Discussion

This study provides preliminary support for our prediction that clarity about a partner's interest in the activity affects the consumer's own ability to focus on the activity and enjoyment of the activity. Clarity about a partner's interest in the activity was a significant predictor of both a subjective measure (self-reported learning) and a more objective measure of ability to focus

(scores on a memory test), and it also predicted enjoyment, suggesting that clarity plays a key role in shared experiences.

One limitation of this pilot study is that clarity about the partner's interests was measured, leaving open the possibility that alternative mechanisms explain the results. For example, partners who have a closer relationship may enjoy a shared activity more and also feel they have a better understanding of their partner's interests. Indeed, we observed a moderate correlation between consumers' clarity about the partner's interest and our measure of relationship strength ($r = .41$). In our next study, we manipulate clarity about the partner's interests to rule out this explanation. Another possibility is that participants who felt they understood their partner's interests perhaps had similar levels of interest in the activity (i.e., high congruence in interests). In our next study, we measure participants' a priori interest in the activity to test the role of congruence in the partners' interests.

One advantage of measuring clarity is that we can examine the relative impact of each participant's clarity about the partner. When we looked at the correlation between each participant's clarity and their partner's clarity, these measures were not strongly correlated ($r = .204, p = .077$). When we simultaneously entered own clarity about the partner and the partner's clarity about the participant, we found that own clarity about the partner significantly predicted both measures of ability to focus (memory and self-reported learning; $ps < .050$) and enjoyment ($p = .033$), but the partner's clarity about the participant did not predict the participant's ability to focus on both measures ($ps > .109$) or enjoyment ($p = .409$). This suggests that it is the participant's own lack of clarity that distracts the participant from focusing on and enjoying the activity.

DEGREE OF COORDINATION WITHIN SHARED EXPERIENCES

Some shared experiences may be less interdependent and require less coordination between participants than others. For example, if two friends go on a guided tour of an art gallery, rather than navigating the gallery on their own, they have less responsibility for jointly deciding on their path through the gallery, how long to spend looking at each piece, or whether to talk about other topics as they go. If they are following a guide, the guide will determine the sequence of pieces they see and how long they spend examining each, and social norms will deter them from talking while the guide is describing each piece. Similarly, if two people decide to join an exercise class, they will both follow the lead of the instructor as they work out, and less coordination between the two is required.

Other shared activities require a higher level of coordination (Finkel et al. 2006). Shared experiences that are more interdependent, such as navigating an art gallery without a guide, cooking a meal together, or playing a game of tennis, demand more coordination. Gallery visitors might wonder how much time to spend on each piece and whether to stay together as they view the art; those cooking a meal might debate whether to make each dish together or have one cook the entrée and the other the sides; tennis players might not be sure how competitively the other wants to play. When tasks are more interdependent, coordination is more important for effective functioning (De Dreu and Weingart 2003).

Notably, most prior work examining enjoyment of shared experiences has focused on less interdependent activities that require little coordination between participants, such as watching a video during a lab session or tasting a drink (Raghunathan and Corfman 2006; Ramanathan and

McGill 2007). These activities were orchestrated by the experimenters, leaving little latitude for participants to determine how to coordinate with their partners.

When shared activities are more interdependent, ease of coordination with the partner is more critical for shared experiences. We know from past research that working with a difficult partner in highly interdependent activities can create inefficient social coordination, which requires attention and depletes mental resources (Finkel et al. 2006). For example, working with an error-prone confederate on a data entry task reduced participants' performance on a subsequent individual exam due to depletion of mental resources (Finkel et al. 2006). We propose that even when the activity partner is not trying to be difficult, coordination can be challenging for highly interdependent shared experiences when consumers' clarity about the partner's interests is low.

Because more social coordination will be required for highly interdependent shared activities than for less interdependent activities, we expect the impact of clarity to be stronger for highly interdependent activities. When the activity requires less social coordination, consumers will face fewer social coordination decisions, making clarity about their partner's level of interest less important. In contrast, when an activity is highly interdependent, each person must anticipate their partner's actions to coordinate successfully, making clarity particularly important.

To summarize, we propose that low (vs. high) clarity about a partner's level of interest in the activity will reduce ease of coordination, drawing more of the consumer's attention away, and leaving less attention for focusing on the activity itself. Further, we suggest that clarity about the other person's interests will have a stronger effect for highly interdependent activities than for activities that are less interdependent. The degree to which consumers are able to focus on and enjoy the activity in shared experiences, then, will be a function of the clarity consumers

have about their partners' interest in the activity and the degree to which the shared experience is interdependent.

CONCEPTUAL MODEL

We capture these hypothesized relationships in our conceptual model (Figure 1). One comparison embedded in the model is between shared experiences and solo experiences; we propose that, for both shared and solo experiences, the consumer's ability to focus on the activity will predict enjoyment of that activity. Further, within shared experiences, we propose that low clarity about a partner's interest in the activity will reduce the consumer's ability to focus on and enjoy the activity, compared to consumers with high clarity about their partner's interests, as we observed in our pilot study. These effects of clarity within shared experiences will be mediated by ease of coordination with the partner. Finally, the effects of clarity about a partner's interests should be stronger when the shared activity is highly (vs. less) interdependent.

Although there are many differences between shared experiences and solo experiences that may influence relative enjoyment – such as the comfort of being with someone else, knowledge the other person might provide about the focal activity, or the potential for the companion to say or do something irritating – that we do not include in our model, we propose that the degree to which activities require coordination and clarity of a partner's interests are two critical factors in predicting whether shared activities will be more or less enjoyable than the same activities done alone. We test our model in a series of three experiments.

Insert Figure 1 about here

STUDY 1: MANIPULATING CLARITY ABOUT A PARTNER'S INTERESTS

The primary objective of study 1 was to provide direct evidence that when engaging in a shared activity, low (vs. high) clarity about a partner's interests reduces ease of coordination with a partner, reducing consumers' ability to focus on and enjoy the experience. We compared shared activities for which consumers had either a high or low level of clarity about their partner's interests to solo activities. To provide additional process evidence beyond our pilot study, we also measured ease of coordination.

Design, Stimuli, and Procedures

Two hundred and eighty-three participants (45.2% male) from a large university in North America were recruited and received credit in an introductory marketing course for their participation. Participants assigned to the shared experience conditions were paired with the student sitting next to them to engage in a "movie festival tour" ($N = 208$; 104 pairs). These pairs were randomly assigned to either the high clarity or low clarity shared experience conditions. Those assigned to the solo experience condition ($N = 75$) engaged in the same activity alone.

The movie festival tour activity involved exploring posters of movies being featured in a local film festival ("AFI DOCS"). To increase engagement, participants were told they had the chance to win a free pass to see a movie of their choice at this festival. After individually reading a brief description of the movie festival, all participants indicated their a priori level of interest in learning about the movies ("To what extent are you interested in learning about the movies to be featured in the festival?") on a seven-point scale (1 = "not at all," 7 = "very interested") and answered an unrelated question ("How much do you enjoy taking marketing classes?" 1 = "not at

all,” 7 = “very much”).

Next, participants in the solo condition proceeded directly to the movie festival tour on their computer workstations. Participants in the two shared experience conditions moved their chairs to a single workstation to engage in the movie festival tour together. In the shared experience conditions, partners used a single computer to explore the posters, requiring them to coordinate the pace and order in which they viewed the posters. We manipulated clarity about the partner’s interests in the activity by asking half of the pairs to show each other their answers to the question about their level of interest in the film festival before they began the activity (high clarity condition), and the other half to show each other their responses to the question about marketing classes (low clarity condition). Thus, participants in both the high and low clarity conditions exchanged information about themselves with their partners, but only those in the high clarity condition disclosed their level of interest in the activity.

Next, participants were given four minutes to explore posters and descriptions of five documentary movies featured in a local documentary movie festival. Participants could read detailed descriptions of each movie by hovering their mouse over a particular poster (see appendix for a sample, and web appendix A for the full stimuli). After exploring the movies, all participants completed the remaining portion of the study individually.

Measures

After completing the movie festival tour, participants in the two shared experience conditions responded to a measure to check the clarity manipulation (“During the movie festival tour, how clear was it to you how interested your partner was in learning about the movies to be featured in the movie festival?”; 1 = “not clear at all,” 7 = “very clear”). Next, all participants

rated the need for social coordination (“To what extent did you perceive a need to coordinate in order to navigate through the experience of reading about the movie festival?”; 1 = “not at all,” 7 = “very much”).

All participants indicated how much they enjoyed the experience (“How much did you enjoy the experience?”). In addition, to assess downstream consequences of enjoyment, we also measured their level of satisfaction with the experience (“How satisfied were you with your movie festival tour?”) and how interested they would be in attending this AFI DOCS movie festival (7-point scales, 1 = “not at all,” 7 = “very much”). To measure the extent to which participants were able to focus on the activity, all participants responded to two questions (“How much did you learn about the movies in the movie festival?” and “How much were you able to focus on the movie descriptions during the experience?”; $r = .74$). Participants in the shared experience conditions also rated their ability to socialize with their partner during the experience (“How well were you able to socialize with your partner during the experience?”), allowing us to examine whether other aspects of the experience were impacted by lack of clarity. Next, participants in the shared experiences conditions responded to four questions measuring how easy it was for them to coordinate with their partner (“How natural versus awkward did you feel going through the movie festival with your partner?”, “How easy was it for you to know how long to spend on one movie?”, “How easy was it for you to know when to talk with your partner during the movie festival tour?”, “How easy was it to know what to talk about (e.g., movies in this festival; movies outside of this festival or related topics; personal topics) with your partner during the movie festival tour?”; $\alpha = .80$). We collected demographic information at the end.

Results

Manipulation checks. Using a random coefficient model (“RCM”) to control for the non-independent nature of the dyadic data, we regressed perceived need for coordination during the experience on experience condition. As intended, participants in both shared experience conditions (high- and low-clarity) perceived a greater need to coordinate as they navigated through the experience than participants in the solo experience condition ($M_{\text{high-clarity}} = 4.47$, $SD = 1.53$ vs. $M_{\text{solo}} = 3.37$, $SD = 1.50$; $F(1, 209.22) = 21.17$, $p < .001$; $M_{\text{low-clarity}} = 4.36$, $SD = 1.51$ vs. $M_{\text{solo}} = 3.37$; $F(1, 216.69) = 18.28$, $p < .001$). Perceived need for coordination did not differ across the two shared experience conditions ($M_{\text{high-clarity}} = 4.47$ vs. $M_{\text{low-clarity}} = 4.36$; $F(1, 124.75) = 0.25$, $p = .620$).

The RCM analysis on perceived clarity about the partner’s interests also revealed a significant effect of condition ($F(1, 104) = 7.95$, $p = .006$). As intended, participants in the high (vs. low) clarity conditions felt they understood their partner’s interests more clearly ($M_{\text{high-clarity}} = 4.49$, $SD = 1.69$ vs. $M_{\text{low-clarity}} = 3.74$, $SD = 1.68$), confirming the effectiveness of our clarity manipulation.

Ease of coordination. Next, we regressed the index for ease of coordination on experience condition. As predicted, the RCM analysis revealed that participants who had high (vs. low) clarity about the partner’s interests in a shared experience found coordinating with the partner easier ($M_{\text{high-clarity}} = 4.09$, $SD = 1.30$ vs. $M_{\text{low-clarity}} = 3.61$, $SD = 1.19$; $F(1, 104) = 6.15$, $p = .015$). In the high (vs. low) clarity condition, participants found it less awkward to navigate the movie festival with their partner, easier to know how long to spend on each movie, and easier to know when to talk with their partner and what to talk about.

Ability to focus on the activity. As predicted, the RCM analysis showed that participants who had high (vs. low) clarity about their partner’s interests were marginally better able to focus

on the activity ($M_{\text{high-clarity}} = 3.73$, $SD = 1.21$ vs. $M_{\text{low-clarity}} = 3.38$, $SD = 1.25$; $F(1, 133.65) = 3.19$, $p = .077$). Participants who had a low clarity shared experience were less able to focus than solo participants ($M_{\text{low-clarity}} = 3.38$ vs. $M_{\text{solo}} = 3.97$, $SD = 1.45$; $F(1, 201.99) = 8.83$, $p = .003$), while those who had a high clarity shared experience had just as much ability to focus as solo participants ($M_{\text{high-clarity}} = 3.73$ vs. $M_{\text{solo}} = 3.97$; $F(1, 201.99) = 1.40$, $p = .238$; see Figure 2).

Insert Figure 2 about here

Enjoyment. The RCM analysis on enjoyment of the experience revealed that, as predicted, participants who had high (vs. low) clarity about the partner's interests enjoyed the experience more ($M_{\text{high-clarity}} = 4.28$, $SD = 1.38$ vs. $M_{\text{low-clarity}} = 3.54$, $SD = 1.24$; $F(1, 117.56) = 11.61$, $p = .001$). Participants who had a low clarity shared experience enjoyed it less than solo participants ($M_{\text{low-clarity}} = 3.54$ vs. $M_{\text{solo}} = 4.01$, $SD = 1.59$; $F(1, 190.83) = 4.78$, $p = .030$), while participants who had a high clarity shared experience enjoyed it just as much as solo participants ($M_{\text{high-clarity}} = 4.28$ vs. $M_{\text{solo}} = 4.01$; $F(184.59) = 1.40$, $p = .239$; see Figure 3).

High (vs. low) clarity about a partner's interests also increased participants' satisfaction with the shared experience ($M_{\text{high-clarity}} = 4.48$, $SD = 1.45$ vs. $M_{\text{low-clarity}} = 3.77$, $SD = 1.32$; $F(1, 122.37) = 9.59$, $p = .002$). Participants who had a low clarity shared experience were less satisfied than solo participants ($M_{\text{low-clarity}} = 3.77$ vs. $M_{\text{solo}} = 4.27$, $SD = 1.61$; $F(1, 192.03) = 4.78$, $p = .030$), while those who had a high clarity shared experience were just as satisfied as solo participants ($M_{\text{high-clarity}} = 4.48$ vs. $M_{\text{solo}} = 4.27$; $F(1, 186.14) = 0.81$, $p = .371$).

Insert Figure 3 about here

Finally, high (vs. low) clarity about a partner's interests during a shared experience significantly increased participants' interest in visiting the movie festival ($M_{\text{high-clarity}} = 4.53$, SD

= 1.60 vs. $M_{\text{low-clarity}} = 3.91$, $SD = 1.74$; $F(1, 126.29) = 6.00$, $p = .016$). Notably, participants who had a solo experience were not significantly more interested in attending than participants who had a low clarity shared experience ($M_{\text{solo}} = 4.19$, $SD = 1.71$ vs. $M_{\text{low-clarity}} = 3.91$; $F(1, 204.70) = 1.65$, $p = .200$), perhaps because consumers are reluctant to engage in public, hedonic activities alone (Ratner and Hamilton 2015). Interest in visiting did not differ between the solo and high clarity experience conditions ($M_{\text{solo}} = 4.19$ vs. $M_{\text{high-clarity}} = 4.53$; $F(1, 211.41) = 1.14$, $p = .288$).

Mediation. To test our conceptual model, we conducted two mediation analyses. First, focusing on shared experiences, we tested whether having high (vs. low) clarity about the partner's interests in a shared experience enhanced ability to focus on the activity and enjoyment by increasing the ease of coordination. A serial mediation analysis with clarity about the partner's interests as the independent variable, ease of coordination as the first mediator, ability to focus on the activity as the second mediator, and enjoyment as the dependent variable (Process Model 6; Hayes 2017) showed that the indirect effect of clarity on enjoyment through coordination and the ability to focus was significant ($b = 0.05$, 95% CI = [0.01, 0.09]), confirming the proposed process.

Second, for completeness, we tested whether ability to focus on the activity mediated the effect of condition on enjoyment for all three experience conditions (Model 4). Using low clarity experience as the reference group, the relative indirect effect of having high versus low clarity in a shared experience on enjoyment through ability to focus was significant ($b = 0.17$, 95% CI = [0.003, 0.346]), so was the relative indirect effect of solo experience versus low clarity shared experience ($b = 0.29$, 95% CI = [0.09, 0.487]), confirming the proposed process.

Robustness checks. We conducted several additional analyses to test the robustness of the effects. First, we tested whether the effects of clarity are moderated by the participant's own

level of interest in the activity. Participants were moderately interested in learning about the movies ($M = 4.39$, $SD = 1.67$), and their a priori interest did not differ across the three conditions ($M_{\text{high-clarity}} = 4.40$ vs. $M_{\text{low-clarity}} = 4.30$ vs. $M_{\text{solo}} = 4.49$; $p = .749$). We regressed participants' enjoyment on level of clarity, participants' own level of interest (mean-centered) and the interaction between clarity and own interest. The effect of clarity remained significant ($b = 0.72$; $p < .001$) and the effect of interest was positive and significant ($b = 0.23$; $p = .001$), but the interaction between clarity and interest was not significant ($b = 0.12$; $p = .261$). Thus, although interest in the activity increased enjoyment, the effect of clarity did not depend on participant's own interest in the activity.

Next, we examined whether the effects of clarity are moderated by congruence between the partners' a priori levels of interest. We regressed participants' enjoyment on level of clarity, congruence of partners' interests (measured as the absolute difference between the participant's and their partner's interest level), and the interaction between clarity and congruence. The effect of clarity remained significant ($b = 0.72$; $p < .001$), and the main effect of congruence emerged as significant ($b = -0.20$; $p = .043$), such that the greater the difference between participant's and the partner's interest in learning about the movies, the less the participant enjoyed the experience. The significant main effect of congruence on enjoyment of a shared experience replicated prior work by Raghunathan and Corfman (2006). The interaction between congruence and clarity on enjoyment was not significant ($b = -0.12$; $p = .429$), suggesting that the effect of clarity does not depend on congruence in the partners' interests.

As a third robustness check, we examined the effect of ability to navigate the experience, which may have positive effects on learning (Ariely 2000). One procedural difference between the solo and the shared experiences was that only half of the participants in the shared experience

conditions had control over the mouse, while all participants in the solo experience condition had control over the mouse. When we controlled for who held the mouse within the shared experience conditions, our analysis showed that ability to focus on the activity and enjoyment did not differ between mouse-holders and non-mouse-holders ($ps > .34$).

Finally, we tested whether participants compensated for lower ability to focus on the activity content by socializing with their partner, which may have provided other benefits. Strikingly, the results show that those who had low (vs. high) clarity about their partner's interests also felt less able to socialize with their partner ($M_{\text{low-clarity}} = 3.08$, $SD = 1.58$ vs. $M_{\text{high-clarity}} = 3.92$, $SD = 1.61$; $F(1, 104.08) = 10.39$, $p = .002$). Thus, low clarity about a partner's interest in an activity seems to have multiple negative effects for the consumer him or herself, hurting both ability to focus on the activity and ability to socialize with the partner.

Discussion

The results of study 1 highlight the critical role of clarity about a partner's interests when predicting whether shared experiences will be more or less enjoyable than solo experiences. We find that having low (vs. high) clarity about a partner's interest in a shared activity reduces ease of coordination and the consumer's ability to focus on the activity. When participants shared their responses to a 7-point scale item about marketing classes (in the low clarity condition) rather than a similar question about their interest in the movie festival (in the high clarity condition), they felt more awkward navigating the movie festival with their partner and believed it was more difficult to know how long to spend on each movie, and more difficult to know when to talk with their partner and what to talk about. In turn, this lower perceived ease of coordination translated into lower ability to focus on the movie festival and lower enjoyment of

the experience. These effects of clarity on enjoyment further translated to downstream variables of managerial relevance such as lower satisfaction with the experience and lower interest in attending the movie festival.

Study 1 also addressed several limitations of the pilot study. Manipulating clarity and assigning participants to a partner in the lab allowed us to rule out the possibility that the beneficial effects of clarity are explained by a closer relationship between activity partners. Notably, we demonstrate that communication between partners in itself (sharing answers to a different question in the low clarity condition) is not sufficient to increase clarity about the partner's interests, ability to focus on the activity, or enjoyment of the activity. Further, because we measured each participant's interest in the activity at the beginning of the study (a priori interest), we were also able to demonstrate that neither participant's own interest nor the congruence of the partners' interests did not moderate the effect of clarity.

STUDY 2: MANIPULATING INTERDEPENDENCE OF THE ACTIVITY

We predicted that the more a shared activity requires partners to coordinate with one another to navigate through the experience, the more high (vs. low) clarity about a partner's interests in the activity will affect their ability to focus on the experience and their enjoyment. When a shared activity is less interdependent, requiring less coordination between participants, we expect that the effects of clarity on ability to focus on the activity and enjoyment will be attenuated. In study 2, we tested this prediction by manipulating the level of interdependence of the activities. As in study 1, we compared shared experiences with solo experiences to test whether and when clarity about the partner's interests will predict whether consumers will enjoy

a shared experience more or less than a solo experience.

Design, Stimuli, and Procedures

Two hundred and forty-four students ($M_{\text{age}} = 20.07$; 54% male) from a large university in North America participated in the study as part of an introductory marketing course and received course credit. Participants in the shared experience conditions ($N = 160$; 80 pairs) were paired with the student sitting next to them to engage in the activity and participants in the solo experience conditions ($N = 84$) engaged in the activity alone. To manipulate interdependence, participants were also randomly assigned to predetermined pacing versus participant-determined pacing during the focal activity. In the predetermined pacing condition, participants viewed an automated slideshow of photographs and descriptions of the images, whereas in the participant-determined pacing condition, participants decided how long to view each photograph and associated description by hovering their mouse on the photos. Notably, although the pacing manipulation was identical across the shared and solo experience conditions, participant-determined pacing introduced more interdependence into the shared experience because participants had to jointly decide the sequence in which to view the photos and how much time to spend viewing each one.

When the study began, all participants were informed that they would explore nine photos from the National Geographic Instagram account (see appendix for a sample, and web appendix A for the full stimuli). After reading a brief description of the activity, each participant was asked to indicate their own interest in viewing the photos. Next, participants in the shared experience conditions moved their chairs next to each other to explore the photos together on one person's computer. All participants saw thumbnails of the nine photos they would explore.

In the predetermined pacing condition, each photo and its description was shown on the screen for 40 seconds (a length pretested to be sufficient to both read the description and observe the photo) before the screen automatically advanced to the next photo. Therefore, the pace and flow of navigating through the experience was externally set. In the participant-determined pacing condition, participants were free to navigate the photos at their own pace and in whatever sequence they wanted over the course of six minutes (the same total amount of time as in the low interdependence condition). Participants could select specific photos to view by clicking on the thumbnail they were interested in.

After exploring the photos, participants in the shared experience conditions moved back to their own seats. All participants then answered questions individually about their experiences.

Measures

Participants first indicated how much they enjoyed the experience (1 = “not at all,” 7 = “very much”). To measure ability to focus on the activity, we asked participants how much they felt they had learned from the experience (1 = “not at all,” 7 = “very much”). To limit common method bias, we also included an objective measure of participants’ ability to focus, as we did in the pilot study. Specifically, participants completed an 11-item memory test about the photos and descriptions they saw (see web appendix B); the number of questions answered correctly was their objective memory score. After completing the memory test, participants rated their clarity about their partner’s interests (“During the experience, how clear was it to you how interested your partner was in learning about the photos?”; 1 = “not clear at all,” 7 = “very clear”). As a manipulation check for interdependence of the activity, participants in the shared experience conditions rated the extent to which they needed to coordinate with their partner about how to

navigate through the experience as the experience unfolded (1 = “not at all,” 7 = “a great deal”). We collected demographic information at the end.

Results

Manipulation check. As intended, participants in the shared experience condition with participant-determined (vs. predetermined) pacing felt a greater need to coordinate with their partner about how to navigate through the experience ($M = 4.08$, $SD = 1.67$ vs. $M = 2.45$, $SD = 1.50$; $F(1, 158) = 41.24$, $p < .01$), confirming the effectiveness of our manipulation of interdependence.

Ability to focus on activity. We observed similar effects for both the objective measure (i.e., memory of the activity content) and the subjective measure of ability to focus on the activity. First, focusing on shared experiences, we regressed participants’ objective memory scores on clarity about the partner’s interests, predetermined vs. participant-determined pacing, and the interaction between pacing and clarity using a random coefficient model. The analysis revealed a significant main effect of pacing ($b = -2.73$; $F(1, 147.98) = 7.47$; $p = .007$), such that participants in the participant-determined (vs. predetermined) pacing condition were less able to recall information from the photos. It also revealed a significant interaction between pacing and clarity ($b = 0.42$; $F(1, 152.88) = 4.33$; $p = .039$). As predicted, in the participant-determined pacing condition, greater clarity about the partner’s interests increased ability to focus on the activity (simple slope: $b = 0.34$; $p = .028$), replicating prior findings. However, in the predetermined pacing condition, the effect of clarity on memory disappeared (simple slope: $b = -0.06$; $p = .60$). Spotlight analysis further showed that when clarity was low (1 SD below the mean), participants in the participant-determined (vs. predetermined) pacing condition recalled

less content ($b = -1.34$; $p = .002$), but when clarity was high (1 SD above the mean), participants in both pacing conditions were equally able to remember information about the photos ($b = -.19$; $p = .62$; see Figure 4).

Insert Figure 4 about here

Next, we compared the memory of participants who had a shared experience with that of participants who had a solo experience. Whether solo participants explored the photos at their own pace versus at a predetermined order did not influence how much they remembered. Replicating the findings of the pilot study, in which participants also determined their own pacing, in the self-determined pacing condition, the memory scores of solo participants were significantly higher than that of low clarity shared experience participants (1 SD below the mean; $M_{\text{solo}} = 8.43$ vs. $M_{\text{low clarity}} = 6.98$; $p < .001$). Solo participants remembered marginally more than high clarity shared experience participants (1 SD above the mean; $M_{\text{solo}} = 8.43$ vs. $M_{\text{high clarity}} = 7.97$; $p = .08$). In the predetermined pacing condition, however, participants in the shared conditions remembered as much as solo participants regardless of clarity about their partner's interests ($M_{\text{solo}} = 8.66$ vs. $M_{\text{low clarity}} = 8.36$ vs. $M_{\text{high clarity}} = 8.14$; $ps > .05$).

We conducted a similar set of analyses on the subjective measure of the ability to focus, which revealed a marginally significant main effect of pacing ($b = -1.28$; $F(1, 144.89) = 3.02$; $p = .084$). Though the interaction was weaker ($b = 0.20$; $F(1, 149.92) = 1.66$, $p = .199$), simple slopes analyses suggested that for participants in the shared experience conditions, clarity about the partner's interests increased subjective learning in the self-determined pacing condition ($b = 0.27$; $p = .04$). However, in the predetermined pacing condition, clarity did not affect subjective learning ($b = .09$; $p = .29$). Further, in the self-determined pacing condition, solo participants felt that they learned more than low clarity shared experience participants ($M_{\text{solo}} = 4.74$ vs. $M_{\text{low clarity}}$

= 4.13; $p < .001$), but the same amount as high clarity share experience participants ($M_{\text{solo}} = 4.74$ vs. $M_{\text{high clarity}} = 4.93$; $p = .20$), replicating our prior findings. When pacing was predetermined, participants in the shared experience conditions felt that they learned as much as solo participants regardless of level of clarity ($M_{\text{solo}} = 5.17$ vs. $M_{\text{low clarity}} = 4.80$ vs. $M_{\text{high clarity}} = 5.01$; $ps > .05$).

Enjoyment. We conducted a similar RCM analysis on enjoyment of shared experiences and observed a significant main effect of pacing ($b = -1.90$; $F(143.24) = 4.88$, $p = .029$) and a significant interaction between pacing and clarity ($b = 0.39$; $F(1, 148.11) = 4.85$, $p = .029$). As predicted, clarity about the partner's interests increased enjoyment when pacing was self-determined ($b = 0.48$; $p = .001$), but when pacing was predetermined, the effect of clarity was not significant ($b = 0.07$; $p = .47$). Spotlight analysis showed that at low levels of clarity (1 SD below the mean), accompanied participants in the self-determined (vs. predetermined) pacing condition enjoyed the experience marginally less ($b = -0.69$; $p = .06$); at high levels of clarity (1 SD above the mean), participants in both pacing conditions enjoyed the experience equally ($b = 0.43$; $p = .22$; see Figure 5).

Insert Figure 5 about here

We then compared solo experiences with shared experiences. In the self-determined pacing condition, low clarity shared experience participants (1 SD below the mean) enjoyed the experience less than solo participants ($M_{\text{solo}} = 4.50$ vs. $M_{\text{low clarity}} = 3.80$; $p < .001$). Notably, different from our prior studies, we found that in the self-determined pacing condition, when the activity was more interdependent, high clarity shared experience participants (1 SD above the mean) enjoyed the experience significantly more than solo participants ($M_{\text{solo}} = 4.50$ vs. $M_{\text{high clarity}} = 5.18$; $p = .001$). This result suggests that when clarity is high, consumers may derive enjoyment from a shared experience in part from its social aspects (Epley and Schroeder 2014),

even those related to coordination. In contrast, in the predetermined pacing condition, solo participants enjoyed the experience as much as high clarity shared experience participants ($M_{\text{solo}} = 4.92$ vs. $M_{\text{high clarity}} = 4.75$; $p = .37$), and more than low clarity shared experience participants ($M_{\text{solo}} = 4.92$ vs. $M_{\text{low clarity}} = 4.49$; $p = .03$).

Mediation. To test our conceptual model, in which ability to focus on the content plays a critical role in the process, we conducted a moderated mediation analysis for participants in the shared experience conditions, using clarity about the partner's interests as the independent variable, ability to focus on content as the mediator, pacing as the moderator, and enjoyment as the dependent variable (Model 8). As predicted, ability to focus on the activity mediated the relationship between clarity and enjoyment in the self-determined pacing condition (95% CI = [.22, .41]), but not in the predetermined pacing condition (95% CI = [-.08, .22]).

Discussion

Study 2 shows that the degree to which a shared activity is interdependent, manipulated in this study by allowing participants to determine the pacing of the activity (or not), moderates the effect of clarity about a partner's interests on the consumer's ability to focus on the activity and enjoyment. When a shared activity is highly interdependent, requiring a lot of social coordination, low clarity about a partner's interests hurt the consumer's ability to focus on the activity and enjoy the activity. In contrast, when a shared activity is less interdependent, requiring less social coordination, the effect of clarity on consumers' ability to focus and enjoyment is attenuated. For service providers who wish to improve consumers' enjoyment of shared experiences, this finding suggests that if they cannot increase consumers' clarity about their partner's interests, they might take steps to make shared activities less interdependent, such

as offering a guided tour to visitors who come together instead of encouraging them to explore on their own.

Because engaging in an activity alone eliminates the need to coordinate with a partner, including a solo condition allowed us to further test the effects of social coordination during a shared experience. Participants who were alone were able to focus more on the activity and enjoyed the activity more than those who engaged in a highly interdependent shared activity when they had low clarity about the partner's interests. Service providers can leverage this result by encouraging consumers to go solo if they are not clear about their partner's interests.

STUDY 3: ENCOURAGING CONSUMERS TO GAIN CLARITY

In this study, we tested a more naturalistic manipulation of clarity, in which we simply prompted participants to engage in discussion with their partners before beginning the activity. We collaborated with an art gallery and manipulated clarity by asking some participants to discuss what they wanted to accomplish with their partner before entering the gallery, giving some participants a choice about whether to have this discussion, and not mentioning the opportunity for discussion to others. Thus, we were able to test consumers' lay beliefs about the effects of clarity by examining whether consumers would take simple steps to increase clarity about their partner's interests when they were given an opportunity to do so.

Design, Stimuli, and Procedures

The study was conducted at an art gallery located at a hotel and conference center. One hundred and seventy-six participants (38.7% male, $M_{\text{age}} = 39.98$) walking through the conference

center were recruited to participate in the study. For 60% of the participants in the shared experience conditions, we manipulated clarity by either asking participants to discuss their interests with their partners before their visit to the gallery (high clarity condition; 20 pairs) or not asking them to do so (low clarity condition; 20 pairs); we allowed the other 40% of the participants in the shared experience conditions to choose whether they wanted to engage in such a discussion (choice condition; 26 pairs). We also recruited solo participants to compare the experiences of solo consumers with those of accompanied consumers with either high or low clarity about their partner's interests.

Interns were instructed to recruit participants walking alone for the solo experience condition ($N = 44$) and pairs of participants walking together for the shared experience conditions ($N = 132$; 66 pairs). Among the 66 pairs recruited, 32% were friends, 24% were colleagues, 17% were family members and 24% were significant others, extending the results of studies 1 and 2 to pairs of participants in closer relationships. All participants were given a \$5 voucher redeemable at the hotel café for their participation.

After participants had agreed to take part in the study, they were escorted to a set of tables where they filled out an informed consent form. They were told that as part of the study, they would visit an art gallery hosting a special exhibit, and then fill out a survey regarding their experience in the gallery. Prior to their visit, each participant read a brief description of the exhibit and indicated their level of interest in the exhibit.

Next, the experimenters escorted participants to the entrance of the gallery and gave them a brochure of the exhibit. Before entering the gallery, accompanied participants assigned to the high clarity condition were instructed to take a few minutes to discuss what they wanted to accomplish during the visit, whereas accompanied participants assigned to the low clarity

condition were asked to enter the gallery directly. Pairs in the choice condition were asked to choose between going directly into the gallery and discussing what they wanted to accomplish before entering the gallery. Solo participants were instructed to enter the gallery directly.

Sixteen objects were displayed in the portion of the gallery participants toured. The brochure contained a short description about the exhibited artwork and background information about the artist for each piece. After visiting the gallery, participants returned to the experimenter tables to fill out a survey. Finally, participants were compensated for their participation.

Measures

Participants rated how much they had enjoyed their experience at the art gallery (1= “not at all,” 7= “very much”). Participants then reported their ability to focus on the artwork, whether they had as much time to read the brochures as they wanted to, and how much they felt they had learned from the experience on separate seven-point scales (1 = “not at all”, 7 = “very much”). These three items were averaged to form a subjective measure of participants’ ability to focus on the activity ($\alpha = .65$). As in study 2, we also included an objective measure of a consumer’s ability to focus on the activity by having them take a 12-item memory quiz about the artwork in the gallery (see web appendix B). Participants in the shared experience conditions also rated their ability to coordinate with their partner (“To what extent were you and your partner able to coordinate and figure out how you would navigate the gallery?”; 1 = “not at all,” 7= “very much”), and as a manipulation check, their clarity about the partner’s interests in the exhibit (“How clear was it to you what your companion wanted to do in the gallery?”; 1 = “not clear at all,” 7 = “very clear”). Finally, we collected demographic information.

Results

Solo visitors did not differ from accompanied visitors in their interest in the exhibit ($p = .63$), their frequency of visiting art galleries or their knowledge about art ($ps > .85$). Visitors in the shared experience conditions also did not differ on these measures ($ps > .20$).

Manipulation check. As intended, a RCM analysis suggested that participants who had a shared experience and were assigned to the high (vs. low) clarity condition reported higher clarity about their partner's interests ($M_{\text{high clarity}} = 5.90$, $SD = 1.19$ vs. $M_{\text{low clarity}} = 4.80$, $SD = 1.62$; $F(1, 40) = 10.76$, $p = .001$).

Ease of coordination. An RCM analysis revealed a significant main effect of clarity on ease of coordinating with the partner ($F(1, 38.40) = 7.36$, $p = .01$). As predicted, participants in the high (vs. low) clarity condition felt better able to coordinate with their partner during the experience ($M_{\text{high clarity}} = 5.63$, $SD = 1.61$ vs. $M_{\text{low clarity}} = 4.46$, $SD = 1.94$).

Ability to focus on the activity. We regressed participants' ability to focus on the experience on clarity. Focusing on shared experiences, we found that as predicted, participants who had a shared experience with high (vs. low) clarity about their partner's interests scored higher on the memory test ($M_{\text{high clarity}} = 7.83$, $SD = 2.23$ vs. $M_{\text{low clarity}} = 5.65$, $SD = 2.49$; $F(1, 68.38) = 11.51$, $p = .001$). Further, replicating prior findings, compared to solo participants, accompanied participants in the low clarity condition had worse memory for the artwork ($M_{\text{solo}} = 7.64$ vs. $M_{\text{low clarity}} = 5.65$; $b = -1.99$, $F(1, 80.54) = 12.23$, $p = .001$; see Figure 6). The memory of solo participants and high clarity participants did not differ ($M_{\text{solo}} = 7.64$, $SD = 2.20$ vs. $M_{\text{high clarity}} = 7.83$, $SD = 2.23$; $b = -0.19$, $F(1, 80.54) = 0.11$, $p = .741$; see Figure 6).

Insert Figure 6 about here

A similar analysis on the subjective measure of participants' ability to focus on the

activity likewise revealed that participants in the high (vs. low) clarity condition felt that they were better able to focus on the activity ($M_{\text{high clarity}} = 5.80$, $SD = 0.85$ vs. $M_{\text{low clarity}} = 4.73$, $SD = 1.27$; $F(1, 63.21) = 16.04$, $p < .001$). Furthermore, solo participants felt better able to focus on the activity than low clarity shared experience participants ($M_{\text{solo}} = 5.60$, $SD = 0.92$ vs. $M_{\text{low clarity}} = 4.73$, $SD = 1.27$; $F(1, 82.56) = 12.45$, $p < .001$), and as much as high clarity share experience participants ($M_{\text{solo}} = 5.60$ vs. $M_{\text{high clarity}} = 5.80$; $F(1, 82.56) = 0.70$, $p = .404$).

Enjoyment. Although participants' enjoyment of the experience did not differ across conditions, high clarity shared experience and solo participants enjoyed the experience directionally more than low clarity shared experience participants ($M_{\text{high clarity}} = 6.13$ vs. $M_{\text{solo}} = 6.14$ vs. $M_{\text{low clarity}} = 5.85$). We acknowledge that, in addition to clarity, other factors, such as the quality of the content, can influence enjoyment of an experience. Given that the quality of art in this gallery was very high, and enjoyment was quite high across conditions, it appears we might have encountered a ceiling effect in this study.

Mediation. We conducted two mediation analyses to test our conceptual model. First, for the shared experience conditions, we conducted a serial mediation analysis with clarity about the partner's interests as the independent variable, ease of coordination and ability to focus on the activity as the first and the second mediators, respectively, and enjoyment as the dependent variable (Model 6). At the confidence interval of 95%, the indirect effect of clarity on enjoyment through coordination and the ability to focus was significant ($b = 0.22$, 95% CI = [0.06, 0.30]), confirming the proposed process.

Second, we tested whether ability to focus on the activity mediated the effects of experience on enjoyment. Using low clarity shared experience as the reference group, the relative indirect effect of high vs. low clarity on enjoyment through ability to focus was

significant ($b = 0.60$, 95% CI = [0.30, 0.93]), so was the relative indirect effect of solo vs. low clarity experience ($b = 0.48$, 95% CI = [0.19, 0.86]), confirming the proposed process.

Choosing to increase clarity. Given the benefits that accrue from clarity about a partner's interests, the shared experience/choice condition allowed us to test whether consumers spontaneously choose to engage in behaviors that increase their clarity about their partner's interests. Notably, 92% of participants in the choice condition (24 out of 26 pairs) chose not to discuss what they each wanted to accomplish in the gallery before going into gallery. Most pairs replied with a response such as "we are good" or "we can just go," and only a small percentage (8%) chose to have such a discussion, illustrating that consumers opt out of simple steps to increase clarity, even when given an opportunity to do so.

To examine whether those in the choice condition who opted out of discussing their interests could have been better off if they had discussed what they wanted to accomplish, we conducted analyses comparing opt-out choosers' ability to focus on the activity with that of those in the high and low clarity conditions. In line with our theorizing, opt-out choosers were less able to focus on the artwork compared to those in the high clarity condition (memory score: $M_{\text{chooser}} = 6.69$ vs. $M_{\text{high clarity}} = 7.83$; $t(125) = 2.23$, $p = .024$; subjective ability to focus: $M_{\text{opt-out chooser}} = 5.34$ vs. $M_{\text{high clarity}} = 5.80$; $t(125) = 2.07$, $p = .04$). Notably, opt-out choosers' ability to focus on the activity was better than that of low clarity participants (memory score: $M_{\text{opt-out chooser}} = 6.69$ vs. $M_{\text{low clarity}} = 5.65$; $t(125) = 2.03$, $p = .044$; subjective ability to focus: $M_{\text{opt-out chooser}} = 5.34$ vs. $M_{\text{low clarity}} = 4.73$; $t(125) = 2.73$, $p = .01$). Asking people whether they would like to discuss their interests might have started an informal conversation within some pairs to talk about what they wanted to accomplish, which in turn improved their ability to focus on the activity.

Discussion

Replicating our prior studies while using a more naturalistic manipulation of clarity, this study showed that having high (versus low) clarity about a partner's interests increased ease of coordination during a shared experience, increasing the consumer's own ability to focus on the activity.

Study 3 provides clear implications for service providers who want to improve customer satisfaction during shared consumption experiences: they may be able to improve consumers' shared experiences by simply nudging them to engage in a short discussion with their partner about what they each want to accomplish before engaging in the activity. How difficult a nudge will this be? After visiting the gallery, we asked participants in the high clarity condition to indicate how comfortable it was to discuss their interests with their partner, and we asked participants in the low clarity condition to indicate how comfortable they expected this discussion to be. Low clarity participants expected that discussing their interests would be less comfortable than high clarity participants said it actually was ($M_{\text{low clarity}} = 4.64$ vs. $M_{\text{high clarity}} = 5.95$; $t(122) = 3.05$, $p = .003$), suggesting that discussing interests with an activity partner is more comfortable than people expect.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Across a pilot study and three studies examining real shared experiences, we found that when consumers had low (vs. high) clarity about a partner's interests, social coordination became more difficult, which in turn reduced the consumer's own ability to focus on the activity, as measured by both objective memory for the content (pilot study, studies 2-3) and subjective

feelings about how much one has learned (pilot study, studies 1-3). Providing support for our conceptual model (figure 1), ease of coordination mediated the effect of clarity on ability to focus on a shared experience (studies 1 and 3). Further, highlighting that clarity is more important for shared activities in which consumers must make interdependent decisions, the interdependence of the activity moderated the effect of clarity on participants' ability to focus on the activity and enjoyment (study 2). Despite the importance of clarity, we found that consumers underestimated how comfortable it would be to attain clarity about their partners' interests and the benefits of doing so (study 3). For example, 92% consumers chose to opt out of discussing their interests with their partners, even when explicitly given the time and opportunity to do so, and even when doing so significantly improved consumers' experiences using several different dependent measures (study 3).

The current research makes several theoretical contributions. First, it adds to our understanding of how the presence of another person influences a consumer's own experiences. Whereas prior literature has focused on how sharing experiences with others increases enjoyment (Caprariello and Reis 2013; Epley and Schroeder 2014; Ramanathan and McGill 2007), this paper shows that shared experiences are not always more enjoyable than solo experiences. It identifies clarity of the other person's interests as a key moderator when enjoyment depends on the consumer's ability to focus on the activity content. We believe there are many shared activities like those we study in which consumers care about the activity content, such as sports matches, museum exhibits, garden tours, aquariums, and cultural activities.

Second, this research adds to our understanding of the importance of social coordination during shared consumption activities. Prior work on coordination has shown that a partner's inefficient behaviors (e.g., a partner makes a lot of mistakes while cooking) can reduce ease of

coordination (Finkel et al. 2006). We add to this literature by showing that lack of clarity about the partner's interests serves as an important and novel antecedent of coordination difficulty. In addition, whereas prior literature suggested that coordination challenges with a difficult partner in a previous task undermine one's performance in subsequent tasks, our results show that when lack of clarity about a partner's interests reduces ease of coordination, it can have immediate negative effects on the consumer's ability to focus on and enjoy a shared leisure experience.

Notably, prior experiments examining enjoyment of shared experiences have typically used less interdependent experiences with limited need for individuals to navigate with a partner through an experience. For example, research examined accompanied experiences in a video watching context in which no verbal communication was allowed during the experience (Ramanathan and McGill 2007), or in which accompanied (vs. solo) consumers were presented with stimuli in a set sequence (Bhargave and Montgomery 2013; Raghunathan and Corfman 2006). In such settings, the effect of clarity about the partner's interests on one's own experiences is likely to be attenuated (as in study 2's predetermined pacing condition). In contrast, we examine more highly interdependent experiences that require moment-to-moment interdependent decisions. We believe the highly interdependent experiences we examine mimic many real-life experiences, making it critical to examine the effects of clarity in these more naturalistic contexts.

In our studies, the effect of clarity about a partner's interests impacted shared experiences over and beyond the effect of congruence of interests, but will this always be the case? We acknowledge that congruence of interests is likely to play an important role both in choosing activities and in the enjoyment of shared experiences, and we find some evidence for a main effect of congruence on enjoyment, replicating prior work (Raghunathan and Corfman 2006).

Although we do not find that congruence explains the effect of clarity or moderates the effects of clarity in our studies, we can imagine conditions under which incongruence is extreme enough to attenuate the positive effects of clarity. For example, for a consumer who really likes art, finding out during a visit to an art gallery that her friend really does not like art, may result in her enjoying the experience less than if she had been unaware of her friend's strong lack of interest. We conducted a study on MTurk to test the effect of clarity under more extreme incongruence in interests. In this study, we asked participants to recall an activity in which they were "interested in the activity content (e.g., artwork in the gallery, the game at a sporting event, etc.)" and had low (vs. high) clarity about a partner's interests, and we further varied within the high-clarity conditions how interested the partner was in the activity compared to themselves (much less interested, slightly less interested, similarly interested, slightly more interested, much more interested; see stimuli and statistics in the web appendix C). Clarity had a positive effect on ability to focus on the activity and enjoyment across all levels of the partner's interest except when the partner's interest was much lower than the participant's own interest, in which case clarity had no effect on ability to focus and enjoyment. We suspect that incongruence attenuates the effect of clarity in this study, but not in our other studies, because here the incongruence between the partners' interests was quite large.

In our main studies, participants were moderately interested in the content (e.g., movies in a film festival) and we found that their own interest in the activity did not moderate the effects of clarity. However, there are some situations in which consumers are not very interested in the activities in which they engage with another person. For example, a consumer might attend an art exhibit to spend time with a friend rather than because she is interested in the art. If the consumer is not interested in the content, clarity about her partner's interest might not impact enjoyment;

indeed, an implicit assumption of our theorizing is that consumers are at least somewhat interested in the activities in which they engage. To test this, we included several additional conditions in the MTurk study just described, in which we specified that people should recall an activity in which they were “not very interested in the activity content (i.e., artwork in the gallery, the game at a sporting event, etc.)” We found that when recalling activities in which own interest was low, clarity about the partner’s interests did not impact their enjoyment of the experience (see web appendix C for stimuli and statistics). This suggests that a low level of interest in the activity is a boundary condition for the proposed effects. Notably, even when engaging in activities that were part of our lab studies, that participants had not sought out, participants reported a moderate level of interest in the activities. This speaks to the robustness of our effects in the real world, where consumers often select activities in which they are interested.

To what range of activities do our predictions apply? In another study that we conducted on MTurk, we asked participants to recall a shared experience in which they believed they had either low vs. high clarity about their partner’s interest in the activity. The activities participants recalled were quite varied, including attending concerts, shows, and sports games, and going to museums, aquariums and theme parks. Across these activities, we found that consumers who had low (vs. high) clarity about their partner’s interests reported lower ease of coordination, lower ability to focus on activity, and lower enjoyment of the experience. Consistent with the studies we report in the paper, these findings suggest that there are many activities that consumers enjoy less when their ability to focus is diminished by lack of clarity about their partner’s interests. Moreover, this study identified several downstream effects of low clarity: consumers who had low (vs. high) clarity about their partner’s interests were less willing to recommend the activity to friends and regretted paying for the activity (a detailed description of this study and analyses

are provided in web appendix D).

From a managerial perspective, our results are relevant to both for-profit (e.g., sports teams) and non-profit service providers (e.g., museums). The results of our studies identify three interventions consumers and service providers can leverage to increase enjoyment of shared experiences. First, as shown in studies 1 and 3, sharing responses to a survey question about interest in an activity (study 1), or engaging in a simple discussion with a partner about what each wants to accomplish prior to engaging in the activity (study 3) is powerful enough to increase consumers' clarity about their partner's interests and attenuate coordination difficulties. Service providers can encourage consumers who plan to share experiences with others to exchange information about their interests before participating in the experience. Second, as illustrated in study 2, service providers who manage venues such as art museums or historic sites can increase the structure of their activities by offering guided tours or other structural cues; greater structure should increase ease of coordination during shared experiences when clarity is low.

If obtaining information about a partner's interests is difficult, the results of our studies suggest a third intervention: venturing out alone. This can be a good option especially when the activity, if shared, is highly interdependent. Although solo consumption does not offer the social benefits of having company, removing the coordination challenges introduced by a lack of clarity about another person's interests allows solo consumers to better focus on the activity and enjoy the activity than accompanied consumers who have low clarity about their partner's interests. Being deliberate about whether and how an experience is shared can increase enjoyment, particularly when people care about the content they encounter during the experience. In this regard, service providers can encourage consumers to engage in solo experiences by educating

them about the benefits of going alone, making solo consumers feel comfortable and welcomed, and/or making the activities seem more like learning experiences (Ratner and Hamilton 2015). Such outreach can benefit not only consumers, by preventing them from missing out on rewarding solitary experiences, but also service providers, who seek to capture revenue that is otherwise being unspent.

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FIGURE 1
CONCEPTUAL MODEL

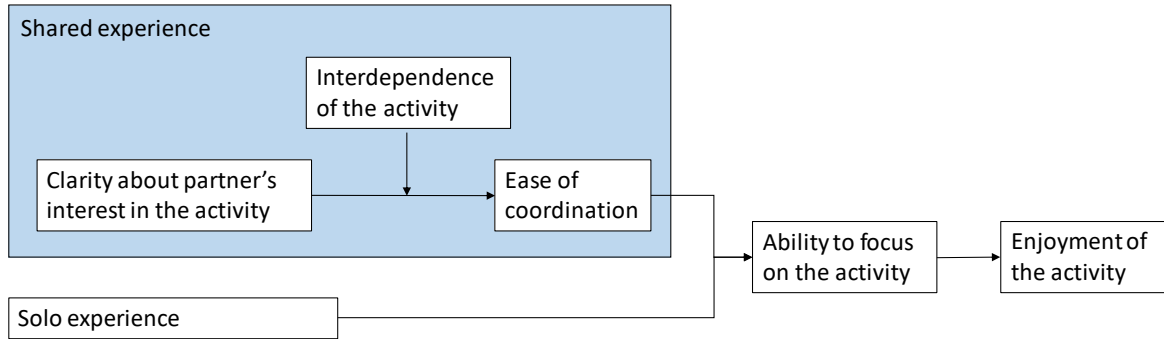
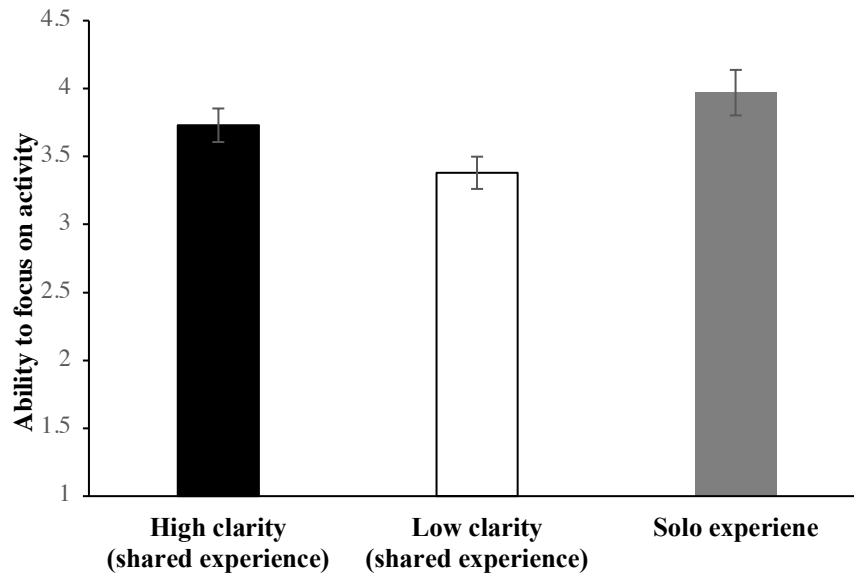


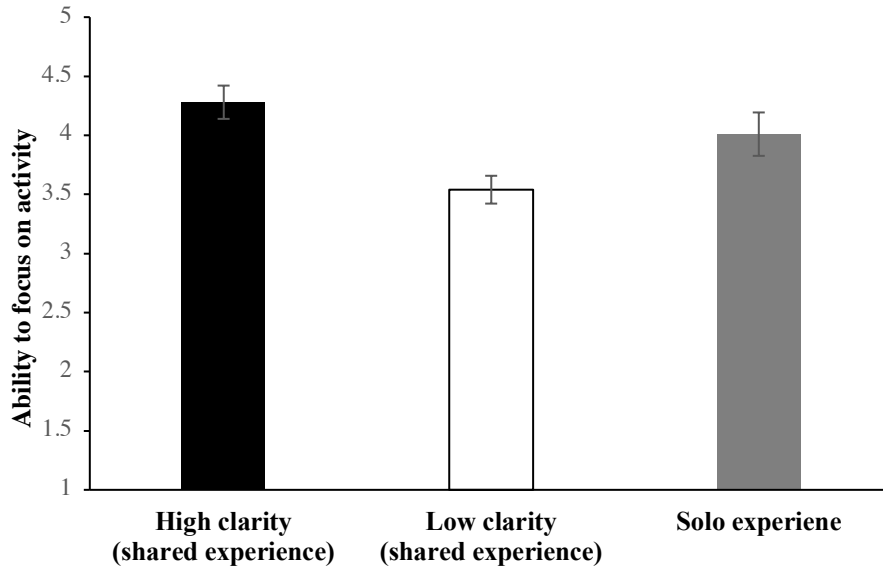
FIGURE 2
EFFECTS OF EXPERIENCE CONDITION ON ABILITY TO FOCUS (STUDY 1)



NOTE. Error bars represent standard errors of the mean.

FIGURE 3

EFFECTS OF EXPERIENCE CONDITION ON ENJOYMENT (STUDY 1)



NOTE. Error bars represent standard errors of the mean.

FIGURE 4

EFFECTS OF CLARITY AND INTERDEPENDENCE ON OBJECTIVE ABILITY TO FOCUS (STUDY 3)

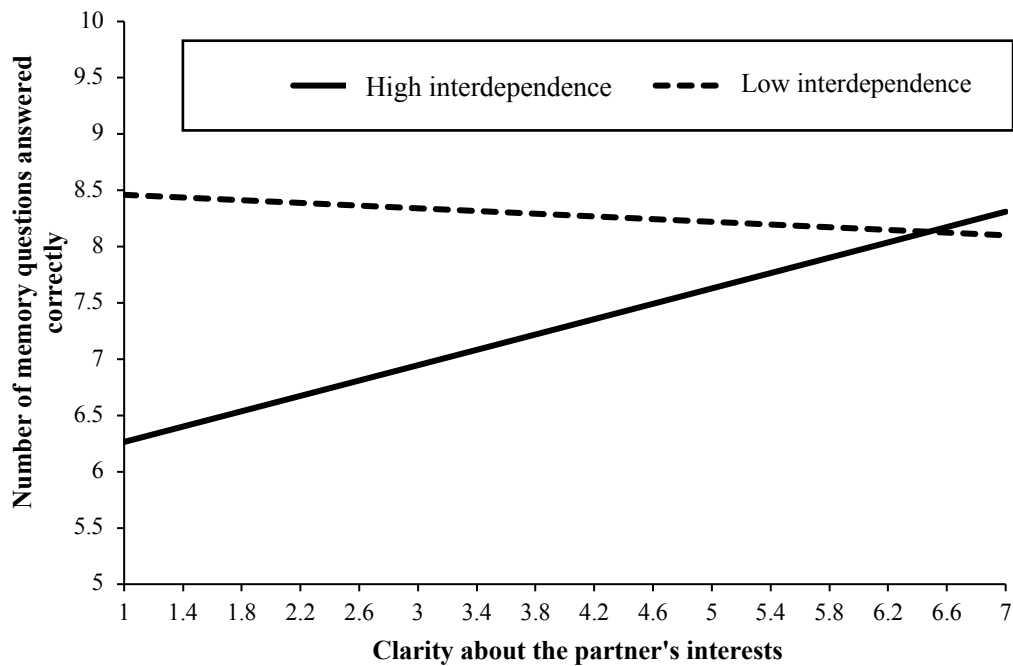


FIGURE 5

EFFECTS OF CLARITY AND INTERDEPENDENCE ON ENJOYMENT (STUDY 2)

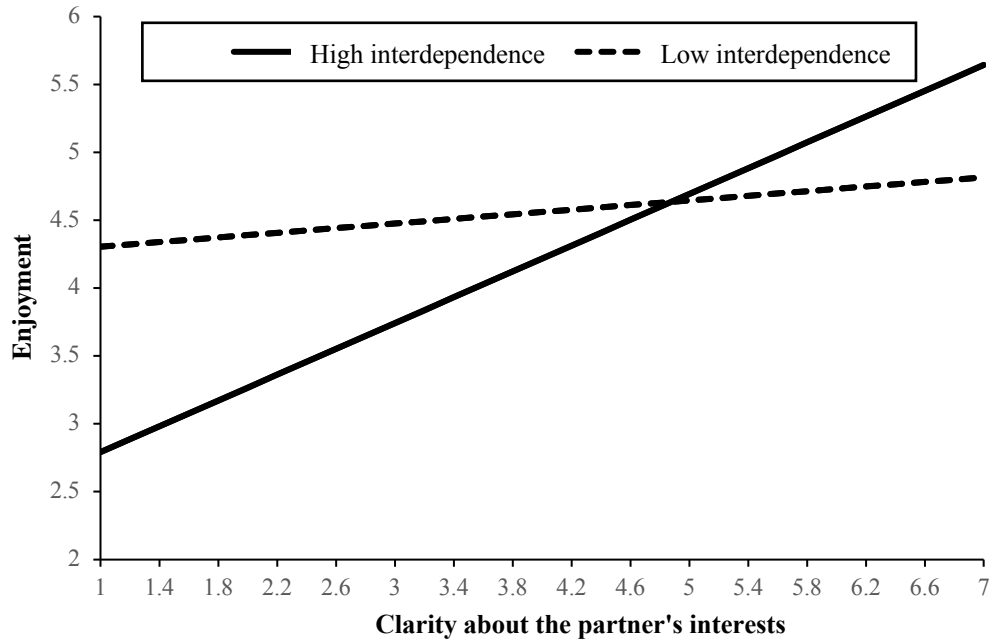
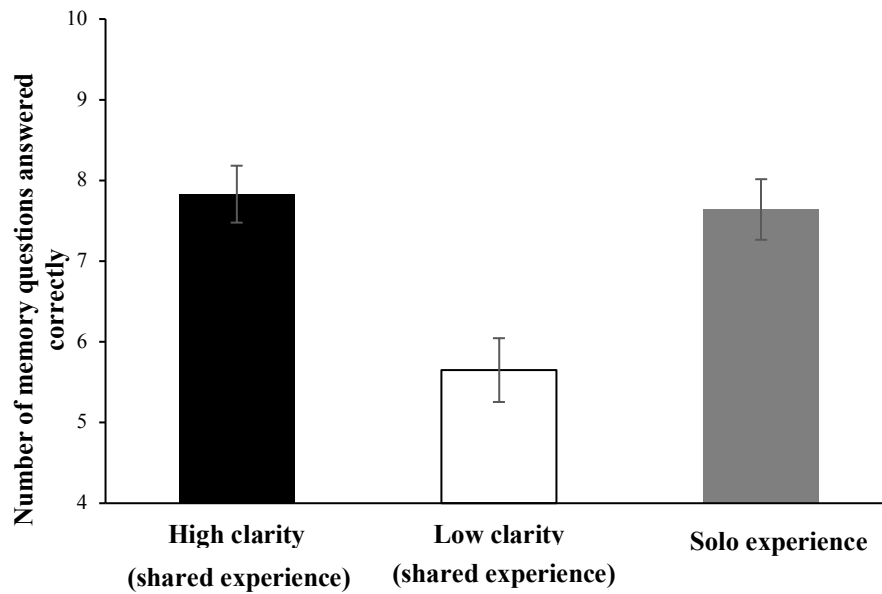


FIGURE 6

EFFECTS OF EXPERIENCE CONDITION ON OBJECTIVE ABILITY TO FOCUS
(STUDY 3)



NOTE. Error bars represent standard errors of the mean.

Appendix

STIMULI SAMPLE

STUDY 1:

 <p>Director: Brad Horn Year: 2014 (86 min)</p> <p>FIRST AND 17</p>	<p>In 2013 Da'Shawn Hand, a star defensive lineman at his Woodbridge, Virginia high school, was the top-ranked football recruit in America. Aggressively pursued by every top football college in the country, Hand must navigate the intricacies of pressures, emotions and drama facing him as a high school senior trying to graduate while making one of the most important decisions of his life. With scholarship offers from more than 90 schools, Hand faces the prospects of his future as Decision Day looms. This movie is directed by Brad Horn and edited by Jayne Orenstein. The movie won was named Multimedia Project of the Year by the Associated Press Sports Editors.</p> <p>FIRST AND 17</p>
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STUDY 2:



A young girl in the Masanga community of Sierra Leone attends an alternative Bondo ceremony that does not include female genital mutilation or cutting (FGM/C). Bondo ceremonies serve as highly-regarded rites of passage for Sierra Leonean girls as they enter adulthood and thus secret all-women communities, but decoupling FGM/C from the girls' ceremonies has allowed the community to continue to practice some of their traditions without harming their physical and mental health. During the Bondo ritual, girls can spend up to a month in the bush learning skills from how to be a good wife and mother to successful member of society.