


## RESEARCH ARTICLE OPEN ACCESS

# Payment and Pleasure: Monetary and Social Ties in Shared Consumption Experiences

Aimee E. Smith<sup>1</sup>  | Belinda Barton<sup>2</sup> | Natalina Zlatevska<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>UQ Business School, University of Queensland, St. Lucia, Queensland, Australia | <sup>2</sup>Bond Business School, Bond University, Robina, Queensland, Australia | <sup>3</sup>UTS Business School, University of Technology Sydney, Ultimo, New South Wales, Australia

**Correspondence:** Aimee E. Smith ([aimee.smith@uq.edu.au](mailto:aimee.smith@uq.edu.au))

**Received:** 16 January 2025 | **Revised:** 1 July 2025 | **Accepted:** 2 July 2025

**Funding:** Initial data collection in this study was funded by the UTS Behavioral Lab.

**Keywords:** anticipated happiness | experiential consumption | payment | social ties

## ABSTRACT

Despite rising living costs, consumers are increasingly investing in shared consumption experiences in the pursuit of happiness. However, in financially constrained contexts, payment distribution—that is, how the cost of an experience is covered among consumers—has become a more salient and psychologically meaningful component of the experience. This paper investigates how the payment distribution shapes anticipated happiness in shared consumption between two consumers. Across three experimental studies (total  $N = 2640$ ), we find that consumers anticipate greater happiness from an experience when paying the full amount (vs. 50:50) when the experience is shared with a strong (vs. weak) social tie. This effect is explained by the expectation of reciprocity, which becomes more salient in interactions with weak ties, and in turn reduces anticipated happiness (Studies 2 and 3). These findings reveal that who pays has important affective consequences when consuming experiences together with a strong social tie, offering new insight into the intersection of financial decision-making, social ties, and consumer wellbeing.

## 1 | Introduction

The ‘cost of living’ crisis has resulted in a wide-spread struggle for many everyday consumers in developed countries, with experts warning about the negative effects that this will have on population wellbeing (Fergusson 2022; Kilfoyle 2023). However, despite increasing financial pressure, US consumers are still spending more than ever on experiential purchases, with an estimated \$665.4 billion USD spent on recreation alone in 2024 (IBISWorld 2025). Consumers are even often paying for experiences with money that they do not have yet. For example, estimates reporting that 60% of admissions for Coachella festival in 2025 were paid for with credit, just so that consumers could attend (Kelly 2025).

From a wellbeing perspective, investing in shared consumption experiences like Coachella is a beneficial strategy, as experiential consumption has been shown to increase the happiness that

consumers anticipate feeling, particularly when they are shared with others (e.g., Howell and Hill 2009; Ratner and Hamilton 2015). However, despite its increasing importance, previous research has overlooked the role of payment, especially how it is divided upfront among consumers in these shared consumption experiences, and its consequences for well-being. Most of the research to date has focused on either (i) how payment distribution influences consumption in experiential settings where the fee is determined based on the volume of consumption (e.g., restaurants, Gneezy et al. 2004; Shani 2017) or (ii) how the benefits of experiential consumption compare to that of material consumption (Weingarten and Goodman 2021). Thus, it becomes important to ask: how does payment distribution affect anticipated happiness in shared consumption experiences?

The current research seeks to address this question by investigating how payment distribution (i.e., how admission fees are

This is an open access article under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/) License, which permits use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited and is not used for commercial purposes.

© 2025 The Author(s). *Psychology & Marketing* published by Wiley Periodicals LLC.

divided among participating consumers) influences anticipated consumer happiness in shared consumption experiences. We propose that variation in anticipated happiness is based on how payment distribution interacts with the strength of the social tie with the other consumer. Specifically, when consumers share an experience with a strong social tie, paying the full fee for both consumers is less likely to reduce happiness than when the social tie is weak. We expect that this is because close relationships, like those with strong social ties, are more likely to operate under communal norms, where reciprocity is not necessarily integral and contributions are not strictly tracked (Clark and Mils 1993). In contrast, weak social ties are likely to activate exchange norms, where balance and immediate reciprocity is required, reducing anticipated happiness (Miller et al. 2017).

In the present research, we empirically test these assumptions through three studies. We run three experimental studies manipulating the strength of the social tie (strong vs. weak) with another consumer and payment distribution (consumer paying the full amount vs. 50:50) in a shared consumption experience. Across these studies, we tested the interaction between the social tie and payment distribution on anticipated consumer happiness (Study 1–3) as well as the moderated mediation of expectations of reciprocity (Study 2–3). Findings provide valuable contributions for both theory and practice.

From a theoretical perspective, our findings contribute to an emerging body of research examining interpersonal dynamics in dyadic shared consumption experiences (e.g., Garcia-Rada et al. 2019; Garcia-Rada, Norton, and Ratner 2024; Wu et al. 2021). We highlight how payment distribution, which is often overlooked, can meaningfully shape anticipated happiness, depending on social tie strength. This adds critical nuance to existing understanding of the experiential advantage<sup>1</sup> by showing that the benefits of sharing experiences are contingent not only on what is consumed and with whom, but also on how costs are distributed.

From a practical lens, our findings provide actionable insights for consumers seeking to optimize happiness in shared consumption experiences. Specifically, they suggest that when sharing experiences with strong social ties, covering the full fee may enhance well-being for inexpensive experiences. Our results also have implications for experience providers and platforms, where payment decisions can be framed or facilitated in ways that align with social tie strength to support positive consumer outcomes.

## 2 | Theoretical Background

### 2.1 | Shared Consumption Experiences

Experiential consumption has been extensively studied. However, most of this research focuses on understanding its benefits relative to material consumption (see Weingarten and Goodman 2021 for meta-analysis). These benefits are largely due to the higher social component that experiential consumption allows for, unlike material goods, by allowing consumers to share meaningful moments, interact with others, and feel a sense of belonging (Caprariello and Reis 2013).

Although previous research has robustly uncovered that experiential consumption leads to more happiness than material consumption, emerging work suggests that the interpersonal nature of many experiences introduces important downstream consequences that warrant closer examination (e.g., Garcia-Rada, Kim, and Liu 2024). In particular, when experiential consumption involves social interaction, it can give rise to a range of complex interpersonal dynamics that shape emotional outcomes. One key factor in this equation is the nature of the social tie itself. Social ties—whether strong (e.g., close friends, family) or weak (e.g., casual acquaintances)—are known to influence emotional outcomes and the meaning derived from shared experiences (Garcia-Rada, Norton, and Ratner 2024). For example, Ratner and Hamilton (2015) uncovered that anticipated enjoyment in a shared experience was higher when with other people for public, hedonic experiences. Whereas, Garcia-Rada, Norton, and Ratner (2024) found that sharing with a close (vs. distant) other resulted in a higher preference for ‘togetherness’ than for ‘experience quality’. Taken together, these findings suggest that the emotional outcomes of shared experiences are not solely driven by the nature of the experience itself, but they are critically shaped by the social tie strength with the other participating consumer and the interpersonal dynamics it activates.

Introducing money into interpersonal dynamics is one of the most complex and consequential factors, often carrying strong implications for affective outcomes (Vohs 2015; Vohs et al. 2008). Money presents a relevant concern for many, but not all<sup>2</sup>, shared consumption experiences. To date, previous research has focused on the role of payment in experiences where consumption is metered (e.g., restaurants) and its consequences for consumption volume (e.g., Gneezy et al. 2004; Shani 2017). However, many experience providers, such as sport clubs, cinemas, and bowling alleys charge admission fees before consumption which is a fee that then must be divided up by the participating consumers. Despite the prevalence of these pre-paid, collectively consumed experiences, little attention has been paid to how payment distributions influence interpersonal dynamics and emotional responses within these settings. Therefore, it becomes important to ask: what is the effect of payment distribution on anticipated happiness? And does it differ based on the strength of the social tie? A literature summary can be seen in Table 1.

### 2.2 | Affective Consequences of Payment

In answering the above question, it becomes important to understand the affective consequences of paying. There are two streams of literature that position competing affective outcomes of payment, namely the ‘pain of payment’ and ‘prosocial spending’. The ‘pain of payment’ refers to the negative emotional response that consumers experience when parting with money (Prelec and Loewenstein 1998). As such, consumers anticipate feeling negative emotions when they become aware that they may have to pay (Reshadi and Fitzgerald 2023). On the other hand, research on ‘prosocial spending’ robustly shows that spending money on others increases in anticipated happiness (Dunn et al. 2008, 2014). A consumer may expect to be happier if they were to pay for someone else, especially as

**TABLE 1** | Overview of research that looks at social ties or payments on happiness or in experiential consumption.

| Paper                                  | Social tie | Payment | Experience | Happiness | Main finding  |
|--|------------|---------|------------|-----------|---|
| Aknin et al. (2020)                    | ✓          | ✓       | ×          | ✓         | Participants experienced a small amount of happiness from spending money on others versus themselves.                                 |
| Bhattacharjee and Mogilner (2014)      | ✓          | ×       | ✓          | ✓         | Young participants were happier from extraordinary experiences, but older participants found ordinary experiences just as fulfilling. |
| Dunn et al. (2014)                     | ✓          | ✓       | ×          | ✓         | Participants that spent money on others reported greater happiness.   |
| Garcia-Rada et al. (2019)              | ✓          | ×       | ✓          | ×         | When consuming together, participants prioritized their romantic partner's preferences, even at a personal cost.                      |
| Garcia-Rada, Norton, and Ratner (2024) | ✓          | ×       | ✓          | ×         | Participants in close relationships prioritized being together over experience quality, driven by a desire to create shared memories. |
| Gneezy et al. (2004)                   | ×          | ✓       | ✓          | ×         | Diners consumed more when splitting the bill and act strategically to minimize personal losses.                                       |
| Liu and Min (2020)                     | ✓          | ×       | ✓          | ×         | Participants who initiated joint consumption decisions preferred explicit preference expressions from their partners.                 |
| Mead et al. (2011)                     | ✓          | ✓       | ×          | ×         | Socially excluded participants were more likely to engage in consumption aimed at fostering social connection.                        |
| Mogilner (2010)                        | ✓          | ×       | ✓          | ✓         | Participants were happier thinking about time than money because it motivated them to spend more time with strong social ties.        |
| Park et al. (2025)                     | ✓          | ✓       | ×          | ×         | Participants anticipated more discomfort asking for owed money from strong social ties.   |
| Ratner and Hamilton (2015)             | ✓          | ×       | ✓          | ×         | Participants faced psychological barriers when considering engaging in observable hedonic activities alone.                           |
| Shani (2017)                           | ×          | ✓       | ✓          | ×         | When diners expected to split the bill, they consumed more; when payment was uncertain, this effect disappeared.                      |
| Wu et al. (2021)                       | ✓          | ×       | ✓          | ✓         | Participants enjoyed shared consumption activities when they had a clear understanding of their partner's interests.                  |
| Xu et al. (2015)                       | ✓          | ✓       | ×          | ✓         | Participants experienced less psychological discomfort when they perceived they had a higher level of social support.                 |
| This study                             | ✓          | ✓       | ✓          | ✓         |   |

gifting experiences can foster more happiness (Chan and Mogilner 2017). In a shared consumption experience where admission is charged, these two forces may come into tension: while parting with money may be painful, it could also be anticipated to be emotionally rewarding. We expect that this emotional calculus may be especially sensitive based on who the experience is shared with.

Previous research on the pain of payment suggests that the negative emotional response is exacerbated when the benefits of the spending are less tangible or immediate to the spender (Reshadi and Fitzgerald 2023; Shah et al. 2016). Experiential consumption is innately intangible (Weingarten et al. 2023), but the anticipated benefits might be even less clear and more intangible when the experience is shared with a weak social tie (Wu et al. 2021). Specifically, when sharing the experience with a weak social tie, there might be little consensus about their preferences, reactions, and expectations (Granovetter 1973). Wu et al. (2021) found that when there was a lack of clarity about the other consumer's interests, such as that likely present with a weak social tie, it reduced the consumer's enjoyment of the experience.

On the other hand, the affective benefits associated with prosocial spending are suggested to be significantly higher when spending on strong social ties (e.g., Aknin et al. 2011). Unlike with weak social ties, there is less likely to be as much ambiguity with strong social ties, as consumers may be more assured about the consequences and outcomes of the shared consumption experience (Raghuathan and Corfman 2006). As such, consumers in shared consumption contexts may be happier to make choices that involve sacrifice, such as paying for others, in pursuit of anticipated affective outcomes with close others as the outcome is more assured, probable, and concrete (Rudd et al. 2014). For example, Garcia-Rada, Norton, and Ratner (2024) found that with close (vs. distant) others, synonymous with strong (vs. weak) social ties, consumers were more likely to prioritize shared memories over experience quality.

In sum, when consuming with weak social ties, it may be more painful for the consumer to pay the full amount which would not result in an increase in anticipated happiness. Yet, where a consumer enters a shared consumption experience with a strong social tie, anticipated happiness will likely be greater. As a result, we hypothesize:

**H1.** *The effect of payment distribution on anticipated happiness is moderated by social tie strength, such that paying the full amount (vs. 50:50) leads to greater anticipated happiness with a strong (vs. weak) social tie.*

## 2.3 | Expectations of Reciprocity

When it comes to payment, the concept of reciprocity plays a central role in shaping relational and affective outcomes (Fehr and Gächter 2000). Reciprocity may be explicitly negotiated among participants but is more often implicitly regulated by social expectations. The social expectation surrounding reciprocity is often theorized as a distinction between communal and exchange norms (Clark and Mils 1993), which serve as unwritten rules that guide how individuals give and receive

benefits in interpersonal contexts (Clark and Mils 1993). Communal norms emphasize responding to the needs of others without expecting direct repayment, whereas exchange norms govern interactions based on balance and equivalence, where benefits are matched, and reciprocation is expected.

In a shared consumption experience, where there is the possibility for repayment (i.e., where one of the consumers has paid the full admission), there is a higher likelihood for exchange norms to exist. Clark and Mils (1993) explain that communal norms, rather than exchange norms, are typically associated with strong social ties, as strong social ties are more likely to provide benefits out of concern for the other's welfare, without expecting immediate or equivalent repayment.

However, expectations of reciprocity are not absent in relationships with strong social ties, but rather that the expectation for immediate or equivalent repayment is less salient, unlike with weak social ties (Johnson and Grimm 2010). For instance, Park et al. (2025) found that when repayment was required, individuals preferred more personal and informal forms of repayment from strong social ties, avoiding impersonal methods like payment apps that could signal transactional intent. This suggests that even when reciprocity occurs, consumers may avoid behaviors that explicitly activate exchange norms with strong social ties.

Further, exchange norms—understood as expectations of reciprocity—are operationalized by three key components (see Miller et al. 2017). First, the consumer is explicitly aware of repayment obligations or a debt of some form. Second, there is a heightened urgency and immediacy surrounding settling debts. Third, there is a sense of distress or discomfort by awareness of the debt. Together, these components introduce a negative affective component, which suggests that when expectations of reciprocity increase, there will be a reduction in anticipated happiness.

Taken together, we expect that expectations of reciprocity will be higher when there is a potential debt present (i.e., when the consumer pays the full amount), which in turn will reduce the consumer's anticipated happiness. However, we expect that expectations of reciprocity will be significantly lower for experiences with strong social ties than weak ones. Thus, we hypothesize:

**H2.** *The effect of payment distribution on anticipated happiness is mediated by the expectation of reciprocity, and this mediation is moderated by social tie strength. Specifically, paying the full amount increases expectations of reciprocity, which reduce anticipated happiness. This effect is stronger when the experience is shared with a weak (vs. strong) social tie.*

## 2.4 | Alternative Explanations

Although we focus on expectations of reciprocity as the key mechanism, previous research suggests that there may be other reasons why payment distribution on the side of the consumer may affect anticipated happiness differently in shared consumption experiences with strong (vs. weak) social ties. For example, people are often motivated to be generous toward others because of impression management concerns, or put simply, how

they come across to others (Leary and Kowalski 1990). In these cases, generosity towards others, like paying in a shared consumption experience, results in positive meta-perceptions, whereby the consumer thinks that they will be viewed positively by the other consumer (Bluvstein Netter and Raghurir 2021). However, in line with expectations of reciprocity, with weak social ties, paying for the other person may come as more of a surprise and positively influence positive meta-perceptions.

Alternatively, there may also be considerations for how the payment distribution affects the relationship with the other consumer, which may affect anticipated happiness. For example, paying for a weak social tie might be anticipated to create discomfort or awkwardness, as it violates the exchange norms typically governing such interactions (Clark and Mils 1993; Miller et al. 2017). In contrast, paying for a strong tie may be viewed as an investment in the relationship, reinforcing closeness and communal norms (Garcia-Rada et al. 2019; Garcia-Rada, Kim, and Liu 2024), and thereby enhancing anticipated happiness. In addition, Garcia-Rada, Norton, and Ratner (2024) found that people anticipate having better conversations with strong social ties in shared consumption experiences, suggesting that the emotional and relational benefits of such interactions may be amplified when spending occurs with strong social ties. This aligns with research showing that the quality of conversation during experiences is a key determinant of anticipated and actual happiness (Bastos and Brucks 2017).

Taken together, there are valid alternative arguments for the hypothesized interaction between social tie and payment distribution and its hypothesized effect on anticipated happiness. However, we propose that expectations of reciprocity offer the most parsimonious and theoretically grounded explanation. For example, while impression management, perceived awkwardness, and relationship investment considerations may shape responses to payment distributions, these mechanisms ultimately map onto underlying expectations about how resources should be distributed within different types of relationships (Clark and Aragón 2013; Clark and Mils 1993). That is, communal norms prescribe that strong social ties should provide benefits non-contingently, whereas exchange norms heighten the expectation of reciprocity, particularly in weak social tie contexts. As such, whether payment is seen as appropriate, rewarding, or uncomfortable likely hinges on whether the act aligns with the

normative expectations for that relationship type—making the expectation of reciprocity the most central mechanism.

### 3 | The Present Research

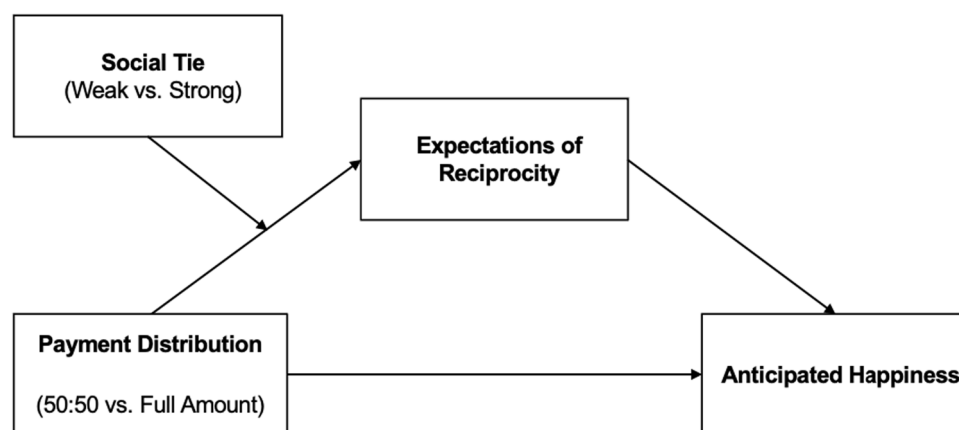
To investigate the effect of payment distributions in shared consumption experiences with a strong (vs. weak) social tie on the anticipated happiness, we conducted three experimental studies. First, we tested the main moderated effect in H1 (Study 1), observing the effect of payment distributions (full amount vs. 50:50 vs. no payment) per social tie (strong vs. weak) on anticipated happiness. Second, we tested the moderated-mediated effect of payment distribution (full amount vs. 50:50) per social tie (strong vs. weak) through expectations of reciprocity and its effect on anticipated happiness in H2 (Study 2). Finally, we tested alternative mediations and possibilities that may be multiply driving the observed effect (Study 3). A conceptual model for hypothesized effects can be seen in Figure 1.

In line with Open Science, we preregistered all studies. Participants were removed from the final analysis if they entered bogus or incomplete names (i.e., initials) or failed the attention check. This decision was made a priori as this signaled they were not paying full attention or taking the task seriously. We report the key analyses in this paper, including these excluded observations in Web Appendix A for robustness.

The distribution of attention check failures and participants entering bogus or incomplete names did not substantially vary across conditions (see Web Appendix B). All materials and data used in experimental studies in this study, and analytical code for all studies, is available on Open Science Framework (OSF): <https://osf.io/kw5ac/>.

### 4 | Study 1

In Study 1 we conducted a web-based scenario study to test the effect of payment distribution on anticipated happiness across two social tie conditions. We provided consumers with a familiar scenario and compared their self-reported anticipated happiness across these conditions to determine their effect. This study is preregistered at: <https://osf.io/8ha4g/>.



**FIGURE 1** | Conceptual models for experimental Study 1-3.



## 4.1 | Participants and Procedure

We recruited 752 US participants<sup>3</sup> from Prolific and invited them to participate in a 2 [social tie: strong vs. weak] x 3 [payment distribution: full amount vs. no payment vs. 50:50] between-subjects experiment. Participants were asked to enter the name of either their best friend (strong social tie) or a casual acquaintance (weak social tie) (adapted from Lee and Kronrod (2020)). Participants then read a scenario where they were asked to imagine going to the cinema with that person. The scenario contained information about the payment distribution in which the participant had either: paid the entire fee (full amount), the other person paid the entire fee (no payment), or that they both paid their own admission (50:50). We specifically chose cinema admission to ensure a scenario that had equal admission pricing and was representative of a shared consumption experience that the sampled participants would be familiar with. After reading the scenario, participants then responded to a series of measures.

In line with the preregistration, we excluded 78 observations from the final analysis due to 3 participants providing incomplete responses, 34 participants failing the attention check, and 41 participants entering bogus or incomplete names. This left a final sample of 674 unique participant observations ( $M_{\text{age}} = 40.35$ ,  $SD_{\text{age}} = 12.76$ , 50.45% female, 49.28% male).

## 4.2 | Measures

### 4.2.1 | Anticipated Happiness

Participants were asked to respond to a 2-item measure of happiness on a 9-point scale. Specifically, participants were asked: "When you think about this purchase, how happy would it make you?" (1 = not happy, 9 = extremely happy) and "How much would this purchase contribute to your happiness in life?" (1 = not at all, 9 = very much) (Van Boven and Gilovich 2003;  $\alpha = 0.88$ ,  $r = 0.80$ ).

### 4.2.2 | Manipulation Check

To check that the tie strength manipulation had been successful, participants responded to the following 3 items: (1) "How strong is your relationship with [social tie]?" (1 = not very strong, 7 = very strong), (2) "How important is [social tie] to you?" (1 = not very important, 7 = very important), (3) "How central is [social tie] in your life?" (1 = not very central, 7 = very central) (Lee and Kronrod 2020;  $\alpha = 0.94$ ).

## 4.3 | Results

### 4.3.1 | Manipulation Check

Findings revealed that the manipulation check was successful, and the participants in the strong social tie condition felt significantly closer to the other consumer ( $M = 6.00$ ,  $SD = 1.00$ ) than those in the weak social tie condition ( $M = 4.15$ ,  $SD = 1.62$ ,  $F(1, 672) = 322.60$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.32$ ).

### 4.3.2 | Anticipated Happiness

Results from a two-way ANOVA revealed a significant main effect of tie strength ( $F(1, 668) = 14.65$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.02$ ), but not of payment distribution on anticipated happiness across the 3 payment distribution conditions ( $F(2, 668) = 1.99$ ,  $p = 0.138$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.01$ ). As such, participants anticipated being significantly happier in the shared consumption experience with a strong social tie ( $M = 6.64$ ,  $SD = 1.72$ ) than a weak social tie ( $M = 6.11$ ,  $SD = 1.91$ ), but not significantly more or less happy from any payment distribution. However, there was a significant interaction effect between payment distribution and social tie ( $F(2, 668) = 4.24$ ,  $p = 0.013$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.01$ ).

Post-hoc analyses revealed that participants anticipated being significantly happier paying the full amount when with a strong social tie ( $M = 6.99$ ,  $SD = 1.61$ ) than 50:50 ( $M = 6.31$ ,  $SD = 1.76$ ,  $t(668) = 2.86$ ,  $p = 0.050$ ,  $d = 0.41$  [0.14; 0.67]), but there was no significance when the other person paid ( $M = 6.62$ ,  $SD = 1.75$ ,  $t(668) = 1.26$ ,  $p = 0.800$ ). However, there was no significant difference in anticipated happiness across payment distribution conditions for weak social ties ( $t(668)s \leq 2.03$ ,  $ps \geq 0.325$ ). Means and standard deviations for all conditions can be seen in Table 2.

## 4.4 | Discussion

In Study 1, we found support for H1 which suggests that consumers anticipate being significantly happier when they pay the full fee in a shared consumption experience with a strong social tie. However, we found that consumers anticipate being equally as happy when the other consumer pays. Taken together, this provides an interesting insight into how social ties and payment distribution interact in shared consumption experiences. We conduct additional studies to test the robustness of this effect as well as the hypothesized mediators for the differences between paying the full amount vs. 50:50.

## 5 | Study 2

In Study 1, we found evidence to suggest that consumers anticipate more happiness when they pay the full amount (vs. 50:50) in shared consumption experiences with a strong (vs. weak) social tie. In Study 2, we further investigated the generalizability of this finding and tested the hypothesized mediating effect of expectations of reciprocity (H2). This study is preregistered at: <https://osf.io/xwcbz>

### 5.1 | Participants and Procedure

We invited 1,202 unique US individuals<sup>4</sup> from Prolific to participate in a 2 [social tie: strong vs. weak] x 2 [payment distribution: full amount vs. 50:50] between-subjects experiment. Participants completed the same procedure as in Study 1 by entering the name of either their best friend (strong social tie) or a casual acquaintance (weak social tie). Participants read the same scenario about going to the cinema with that person.

**TABLE 2** | Means and standard deviations across all conditions in all studies.

| Measurement                      | Payment     | Social tie  |             |
|----------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
|                                  |             | Strong      | Weak        |
| Study 1                          |             |             |             |
| Anticipated happiness            | No payment  | 6.62 (1.75) | 6.36 (1.90) |
|                                  | 50:50       | 6.31 (1.76) | 6.06 (1.77) |
|                                  | Full amount | 6.99 (1.61) | 5.88 (2.04) |
| Study 2                          |             |             |             |
| Anticipated happiness            | 50:50       | 6.53 (1.72) | 6.23 (1.87) |
|                                  | Full amount | 7.20 (1.65) | 6.48 (1.93) |
| Expectations of reciprocity      | 50:50       | 2.26 (1.34) | 2.19 (1.47) |
|                                  | Full amount | 3.27 (1.48) | 3.73 (1.56) |
| Study 3                          |             |             |             |
| Anticipated happiness            | 50:50       | 6.33 (1.90) | 5.99 (1.80) |
|                                  | Full amount | 7.02 (1.62) | 6.07 (2.03) |
| Expectations of reciprocity      | 50:50       | 2.02 (1.35) | 2.08 (1.51) |
|                                  | Full amount | 3.16 (1.48) | 3.57 (1.51) |
| Anticipated conversation quality | 50:50       | 4.90 (1.29) | 4.58 (1.14) |
|                                  | Full amount | 5.13 (0.99) | 4.59 (1.12) |
| Relational investment            | 50:50       | 4.15 (1.94) | 3.99 (1.72) |
|                                  | Full amount | 4.59 (1.81) | 4.52 (1.69) |
| Anticipated awkwardness          | 50:50       | 1.60 (1.06) | 2.07 (1.35) |
|                                  | Full amount | 1.51 (0.90) | 1.95 (1.22) |
| Positive meta-perceptions        | 50:50       | 4.76 (1.55) | 4.24 (1.38) |
|                                  | Full amount | 5.74 (1.12) | 5.55 (1.13) |

In Study 2, we removed the condition about the other named consumer paying the entire fee, and participants read that either: they paid the entire fee (full amount), or that they both paid their own admission (50:50). After reading the scenario, participants then responded to a series of measures related to the shared consumption experience.

We removed 118 observations from the final analysis because of 44 participants failing the attention check and 74 participants entering bogus or incomplete names. This left a final sample of 1,084 unique participant observations ( $M_{\text{age}} = 40.97$ ,  $SD_{\text{age}} = 14.07$ , 49.91% female, 50.00% male).

## 5.2 | Measures

Participants responded to the same measures for anticipated happiness ( $\alpha = 0.89$ ,  $r = 0.80$ ) and the social tie strength manipulation check ( $\alpha = 0.94$ ) as in Study 1.

### 5.2.1 | Expectations of Reciprocity

In addition, participants were asked to respond to a 3-item measure of the extent to which the interaction would result in

expectations of reciprocity on a 7-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). We asked participants to what extent they agreed: “I would expect [social tie] to pay next time.”, “I would feel discomfort if [social tie] did not pay next time.”, “I would expect [social tie] to pay for me in the near future” (adapted from Miller et al. 2017;  $\alpha = 0.87$ ). As such, a higher score on this measure is a higher indication of expectations of reciprocity.

## 5.3 | Results

### 5.3.1 | Manipulation Check

The manipulation check was successful, and participants felt significantly closer to the other consumer in the strong social tie condition ( $M = 6.15$ ,  $SD = 0.96$ ) than those in the weak social tie condition ( $M = 4.60$ ,  $SD = 1.65$ ,  $F(1, 1082) = 355.30$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.24$ ).

### 5.3.2 | Anticipated Happiness

A two-way ANOVA revealed a significant main effect of tie strength ( $F(1, 1080) = 22.79$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.02$ ), and payment

distribution on anticipated happiness ( $F(1, 1080) = 18.04$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.02$ ). Similarly, participants anticipated being significantly happier in a shared consumption experience when with a strong social tie ( $M = 6.87$ ,  $SD = 1.72$ ) than a weak social tie ( $M = 6.35$ ,  $SD = 1.90$ ). Anticipated happiness was also significantly higher overall when participants paid the full amount ( $M = 6.85$ ,  $SD = 1.83$ ) than when the amount was 50:50 ( $M = 6.37$ ,  $SD = 1.81$ ). Further, there was a marginally significant interaction between payment distribution and social tie ( $F(1, 1080) = 3.64$ ,  $p = 0.057$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.00$ ).

Post-hoc analyses revealed the same pattern as observed in Study 1. As such, participants anticipated being significantly happier paying the full amount when with a strong social tie ( $M = 7.20$ ,  $SD = 1.65$ ) than 50:50 ( $M = 6.53$ ,  $SD = 1.72$ ,  $t(1080) = 4.34$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $d = 0.40$ ,  $[0.23; 0.57]$ ). However, there was no significant difference in anticipated happiness based on payment distribution with weak social ties ( $t(1080) = 1.68$ ,  $p = 0.335$ ).

### 5.3.3 | Mediation Analysis

To test H2, we ran a moderated-mediation model to explore whether the social tie moderated the relationship between the payment distribution (50:50 vs. full amount) and expectations of reciprocity. We used Hayes PROCESS model 7 with 5,000 bootstrap iterations (Preacher et al. 2007). Results showed that the confidence interval for the moderated-mediation model did not contain zero  $[.02$  to  $.17]$  indicating that the index was significant ( $b = 0.09$ ,  $s.e. = 0.04$ ). Thus, we find that when a consumer is with a weak social tie in a shared consumption experience, paying the full amount (vs. 50:50) results in an increase in expectations of reciprocity ( $b = 1.54$ ,  $s.e. = 0.13$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Although this pattern also occurs with strong social ties ( $b = 1.01$ ,  $s.e. = 0.13$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), it is significantly stronger for weak social ties ( $t(1080) = 2.96$ ,  $p = 0.003$ ), which reduces anticipated happiness ( $b = -0.17$ ,  $s.e. = 0.04$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). A visual representation of the pathways is provided in Figure 2.

## 5.4 | Discussion

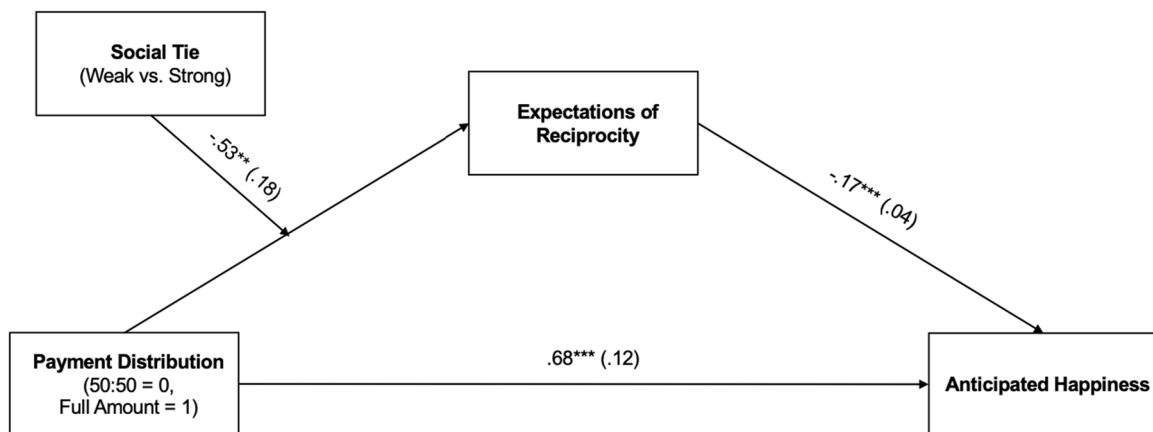
Study 2 provides further evidence in favor of H1. Our results revealed a similar pattern by highlighting that consumers anticipated being happier after paying the full amount in a shared consumption experience (vs. 50:50) when consuming with a strong social tie. We found empirical evidence to support H2, which suggested this effect was partially mediated by increased expectations of reciprocity when paying the full amount with a weak (vs. strong) social tie which reduced anticipated happiness.

## 6 | Study 3

In Study 2, we found further evidence to suggest that consumers anticipate that they will be happier from paying the full amount (vs. 50:50) in a shared consumption experience with a strong (vs. weak) social tie. We also uncovered that this effect is due to an increase in expectations of reciprocity when with weak social ties which ultimately reduces anticipated happiness. In Study 3, we further assessed the strength of this mechanism and sought to test alternative mechanisms that could multiply determine the observed effects in Study 1-2. This study is preregistered at: <https://osf.io/p7tve>.

### 6.1 | Participants and Procedure

We invited 1003 unique US individuals<sup>5</sup> from Prolific to participate in a 2 [social tie: strong vs. weak]  $\times$  2 [payment distribution: full amount vs. 50:50] between-subjects experiment. Participants completed the same procedure as in Study 1-2 by entering the name of either a strong social tie (best friend) or a weak social tie (casual acquaintance). Participants read the same scenario about going to the cinema with that person with the randomized payment distribution condition information. After reading the scenario, participants then responded to a series of measures related to the shared consumption experience.



**FIGURE 2** | Moderated mediation of expectations of reciprocity on anticipated happiness (Study 2). *Note:* Path values represent unstandardized beta coefficients with standard errors in parentheses; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ .



We excluded 121 observations from the final data analysis because 69 participants failed the attention check, and 52 participants entered bogus or incomplete names. This left a final sample of 882 unique participant observations ( $M_{\text{age}} = 41.11$ ,  $SD_{\text{age}} = 14.05$ , 51.13% female, 48.75% male).

## 6.2 | Measures

Participants were asked to respond to the same measures for anticipated happiness ( $\alpha = 0.89$ ,  $r = 0.81$ ), expectations of reciprocity ( $\alpha = 0.86$ ) and the social tie strength manipulation check ( $\alpha = 0.94$ ) as in Study 2. We also asked participants to respond to additional moderators to test if the observed effect in Study 2 was multiply determined. We took measures for: anticipated conversation quality, relational investment, anticipated awkwardness, and positive meta-perceptions.

### 6.2.1 | Anticipated Conversation Quality

We measured anticipated conversation quality through 3 items using a 7-point scale (1 = not at all, 7 = to a great extent). Specifically, we asked participants “To what extent do you think conversations in this experience with [social tie] would be meaningful/trivial (reverse-coded)/substantive” (adapted from Mehl et al. 2010,  $\alpha = 0.52$ ).

### 6.2.2 | Relational Investment

To understand whether payment may be seen as a means of investing in the relationship, we asked participants to respond to 2 items using a 7-point scale (1 = not at all, 7 = to a great extent). We asked participants “To what extent do you see [payment distribution condition] as an investment in your relationship with [social tie]?” and “To what extent do you see [payment distribution condition] as an investment that will strengthen your relationship with [social tie]?” ( $\alpha = 0.93$ ,  $r = 0.87$ ).

### 6.2.3 | Anticipated Awkwardness

Participants were asked to respond to 2-items that described how awkward they would perceive interactions with the named social tie following the payment condition they had been randomized into using a 7-point scale (1 = not at all, 7 = to a great extent). We asked them to “please rate to what extent you agree with the following statements. “After [payment distribution condition x social tie], I would feel awkward around [social tie]/unsure of what to say around [social tie].” (adapted from Moss-Racusin et al. 2024,  $\alpha = 0.95$ ,  $r = 0.90$ ).

### 6.2.4 | Positive Meta-Perceptions

We asked participants about the consequences of successful impression management by using 3 items to measure anticipated positive meta-perceptions through 3 items using a 7-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). Participants were asked: “To what extent do you believe that after [payment

distribution condition x social tie] would judge you to be a warm/kind/generous person” ( $\alpha = 0.94$ ).

## 6.3 | Results

### 6.3.1 | Manipulation Check

Similar to previous studies, the manipulation check was successful. Participants in the strong social tie condition specified that they felt significantly closer to the other consumer ( $M = 6.10$ ,  $SD = 0.97$ ) than participants in the weak social tie condition ( $M = 4.32$ ,  $SD = 1.64$ ,  $F(1, 880) = 387.20$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.31$ ).

### 6.3.2 | Anticipated Happiness

We ran a two-way ANOVA and found a significant main effect of tie strength ( $F(1, 878) = 29.94$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.03$ ), and payment distribution on anticipated happiness ( $F(1, 878) = 9.35$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.01$ ). Similar to Study 1-2, we found that participants anticipated significantly more happiness with a strong social tie ( $M = 6.71$ ,  $SD = 1.79$ ) than a weak social tie ( $M = 6.03$ ,  $SD = 1.90$ ). Anticipated happiness was significantly higher overall when participants paid the full amount ( $M = 6.59$ ,  $SD = 1.88$ ) than when the amount was 50:50 ( $M = 6.15$ ,  $SD = 1.85$ ). Further, there was a significant interaction effect between payment distributions and social tie ( $F(1, 878) = 6.13$ ,  $p = 0.014$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.01$ ).

Post-hoc analyses revealed the same pattern as in previous studies, and participants anticipated being significantly happier paying the full fee with a strong social tie ( $M = 7.02$ ,  $SD = 1.62$ ) than 50:50 ( $M = 6.33$ ,  $SD = 1.90$ ,  $t(878) = 3.91$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $d = 0.39$ , [0.20; 0.58]). Similarly, there was no significant difference in anticipated happiness across payment distribution conditions with weak social ties ( $t(878) = 0.41$ ,  $p = 0.977$ ).

## 6.4 | Parallel Mediation Analyses

To test H2, we ran a moderated parallel mediation model to explore whether the social tie moderated the relationship between the payment distribution (50:50 vs. full amount) and expectations of reciprocity and the other measured alternative mediators. Similar to Study 2, we used Hayes PROCESS model 7 for the interactions with all 5 mediators with 5000 bootstrap iterations (Preacher et al. 2007). The results can be seen in Table 3, which shows the index of the moderated mediation across all mediators included in the model.

Results showed that the confidence interval for the moderated mediation of expectations of reciprocity touches zero [0.00 to 0.09] suggesting that the index was not significant ( $b = 0.03$ ,  $s.e. = 0.02$ ). We found that the interaction in the a-path was marginally significant ( $t(878) = 1.81$ ,  $p = 0.071$ ) and showed the same pattern as in Study 2. Similarly, results showed that paying the full amount (vs. 50:50) increased expectations of reciprocity which was marginally higher for weak social ties ( $b = 1.49$ ,  $s.e. = 0.14$ ,  $t(878) = 10.93$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) than strong social ties ( $b = 1.14$ ,  $s.e. = 0.14$ ,  $t(878) = 8.37$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) which reduced anticipated happiness ( $b = -0.09$ ,  $s.e. = 0.04$ ,  $p = 0.026$ ).

**TABLE 3** | Index of the indirect effects of tested mediators of payment distributions on anticipated happiness.

| Social tie | Mediator                         | Indirect effect      | Moderated indirect effect |
|------------|----------------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------|
| Study 2    |                                  |                      |                           |
| Weak       | Expectations of reciprocity      | −0.25 [−0.40, −0.13] | 0.09 [0.02, 0.17]         |
| Strong     |                                  | −0.17 [−0.27, −0.08] |                           |
| Study 3    |                                  |                      |                           |
| Weak       | Expectations of reciprocity      | −0.13 [−0.26, −0.02] | 0.03 [0.00, 0.09]         |
| Strong     |                                  | −0.10 [−0.20, −0.01] |                           |
| Weak       | Anticipated conversation quality | 0.00 [−0.07, 0.08]   | 0.07 [−0.03, 0.19]        |
| Strong     |                                  | 0.08 [0.00, 0.17]    |                           |
| Weak       | Relational investment            | 0.20 [0.08, 0.33]    | −0.03 [−0.22, 0.15]       |
| Strong     |                                  | 0.17 [0.03, 0.32]    |                           |
| Weak       | Anticipated awkwardness          | 0.01 [−0.02, 0.03]   | 0.00 [−0.02; 0.03]        |
| Strong     |                                  | 0.00 [−0.01, 0.03]   |                           |
| Weak       | Positive meta-perceptions        | 0.36 [0.23, 0.51]    | −0.09 [−0.20, 0.01]       |
| Strong     |                                  | 0.27 [0.16, 0.41]    |                           |

Note: 0 = 50:50, 1 = full amount, all estimates relate to the Beta estimate with 95% confidence intervals in square parenthesis.

Further, we found a marginally significant moderation of social ties on positive meta-perceptions ( $b = 1.14$ ,  $s.e. = 0.14$ ,  $t(878) = 8.37$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Specifically, results revealed that positive meta perceptions were marginally stronger when paying the full amount with a weak social tie ( $b = 1.30$ ,  $s.e. = 0.12$ ,  $t(878) = 10.45$ ,  $p < 0.0001$ ) than a strong social tie ( $b = 0.99$ ,  $s.e. = 0.12$ ,  $t(878) = 7.92$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). All other mediating effects and interactions were below marginal significance, and the confidence intervals for the index of the moderated indirect effects overlapped zero, which suggests that the expectation of reciprocity is likely the mechanism playing a role beyond the others.

## 6.5 | Discussion

In Study 3, we find marginal and full support for H2 and H1 respectively, consistent with the pattern shown in previous studies. Consumers anticipated being happier when paying the full amount (vs. 50:50) when they were with a strong social tie in a shared consumption experience, which is due to having lower expectations of reciprocity than with weak social ties. We rule out various competing explanations, such as its effect on conservation quality, relational investment, and anticipated awkwardness.

## 7 | General Discussion

Although most everyday consumers face increasing financial pressure from the current cost of living, they continue to spend on experiential consumption in pursuit of wellbeing benefits associated with it. While prior research highlights the positive emotional and relational outcomes of shared consumption experiences, it has largely overlooked how the structure of payment in these experiences, that is, who pays.

Across three experimental studies, we consistently found that consumers anticipated that they would be happier if they were

to pay the full admission fee for both themselves and the other consumer rather than splitting it 50:50 when with a strong social tie. There was not any difference between payment conditions in the weak social conditions. We found that this effect was mediated by an increase in expectations of reciprocity when the consumer paid the full fee, which reduced anticipated happiness. Expectations of reciprocity were present in shared consumption experiences with strong social ties, but it was significantly higher when consumers were in a shared consumption experience with a weak social tie. In the following sections, we discuss the implications of these results for theory and practice.

## 7.1 | Theoretical Implications

The current research contributes to an emerging body of research examining affective outcomes in dyadic experiential consumption (e.g., Garcia-Rada et al. 2019; Garcia-Rada, Norton, and Ratner 2024; Wu et al. 2021). We provide a novel exploration into the role of payment distribution among the consumers participating in the shared consumption experience. Although there is existing research that has focused on the intersection between social ties and money (e.g., Mead et al. 2011; Vohs et al. 2008), to our knowledge, we are the first to formally test and decipher how these variables interact in a recent, applied, and contextually relevant setting. Our focus on dyadic consumption offers a tightly controlled lens into interpersonal dynamics; however, the relational and normative complexities of group-based experiences remain an open avenue for further exploration.

While there are a few studies that consider the role of payment distribution in experiential consumption, they typically focus on contexts like dining out, where the material component of the experience—such as the food consumed—often becomes the primary focus of analysis (e.g., Gneezy et al. 2004; Shani 2017). These studies frequently examine how who pays the bill

influences consumption quantity and choice, rather than emotional outcomes. Our research centers on the affective consequences of payment distributions within highly experiential settings where the primary value is derived from the shared social and emotional aspects of the experience, rather than material components of consumption. By doing so, we move beyond economic implications and contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how payment distributions influence anticipated happiness.

In addition, we add further nuance to understanding the experiential advantage (Van Boven and Gilovich 2003; Weingarten and Goodman 2021). While prior work has primarily focused on what is consumed (experiences vs. material goods), our research extends this literature by examining how experiences are structured—specifically, the role of payment distribution within dyadic shared consumption experiences. In doing so, we demonstrate that anticipated happiness is not only influenced by experiential qualities, but also by interpersonal factors such as who the consumer shares the experience with and how admission payment is divided. By focusing on a context that is inherently high in experiential value (i.e., the cinema; Weingarten et al. 2023), we show that social and payment distributions embedded within the experience can either enhance or undermine its affective payoff.

## 7.2 | Practical Implications

The current research provides practical insights for consumers. Payment might be difficult to navigate in social settings, especially with strong social ties such as friends and family (Clark and Aragón 2013). Our findings provide evidence to suggest that treating a close other by paying their admission fees may lead to greater anticipated happiness. In our research design, we purposefully used a scenario that was likely accessible to most consumers to ensure ecological validity. However, the results that we observe may change for experiential consumption that is priced based on the volume of consumption (i.e., you pay for what you consume), such as restaurants or bars. Further, these findings may be limited to inexpensive experiences and consumers may not anticipate the same level of happiness from paying for a \$500 rock concert ticket, for example. We acknowledge this as a limitation and highlight that the results in our study may not be generalizable beyond admission payment and inexpensive experiences.

Further, our research acknowledges the role and importance that relational norms and reciprocity have in navigating interpersonal dynamics in shared consumption experiences. As expected, we found that stronger expectations of repayment were present among weak social ties, which reduced the consumer's anticipated happiness. This provides interesting insight for consumers that might be on the side with weak social ties (i.e., they might be the consumer i.e. being paid for). Although we do not empirically test this in our research, our findings suggest that to reduce this, it may be beneficial to ensure repayment or reciprocity with weak social ties. Future research could endeavor to test this as a potential boundary condition.

Although previous research suggests that engaging in shared experiences with strong vs. weak social ties influences experiential outcomes (e.g., Garcia-Rada, Norton, and Ratner 2024), this is often largely observed with strong social ties (e.g., Garcia-Rada et al. 2019; Wu et al. 2021), which neglects the role of weak social ties in these contexts (Granovetter 1973). The acceleration of brand communities, internet penetration rates, and increasing loneliness trends suggest that strong social ties might no longer be the only relevant condition (Fitzpatrick 2024; Murthy 2023). For example, Taylor Swift fans caught global attention, bringing to light the role that weak social ties played in forming the benefits associated with the experience of her 2023-2024 Era's Tour (Collins 2023; Fitzpatrick 2024).

## 8 | Conclusion

In conclusion, our research highlights important implications for the role of payment distribution in shared dyadic consumption experiences on anticipated happiness. We provide valuable insights into the effect of the consumer paying the full amount or 50:50 on anticipated happiness. We show how the effects vary based on the strength of the social tie with the other consumer in the shared consumption experience. Our findings offer a novel agenda aimed at inspiring further research into payment and how its effect can bolster consumer wellbeing amidst a cost-of-living crisis.

### Acknowledgments

Initial data collection in this study was funded by the UTS Behavioral Lab. Open access publishing facilitated by The University of Queensland, as part of the Wiley - The University of Queensland agreement via the Council of Australian University Librarians.

### Ethics Statement

This project received ethics approval from the Human Research Ethics Committee at the University of Queensland (Ref: 2025/HE000602).

### Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

### Data Availability Statement

The data, analysis code and materials used in this study are available at: [https://osf.io/kw5ac/?view\\_only=ee62139137744d7faa4617a69c004849](https://osf.io/kw5ac/?view_only=ee62139137744d7faa4617a69c004849).

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>The experiential advantage refers to the established heightened benefits that consumers experience relative to material consumption (Van Boven and Gilovich 2003; Weingarten and Goodman 2021).

<sup>2</sup>There are obviously free experiences that consumers can engage in (e.g., a walk in the park).

Admission fees may not be relevant also where the experience is priced based on the of volume consumption (e.g., restaurants).

<sup>3</sup>In line with the preregistration, we requested 750 participants from Prolific, but 752 participants returned the survey.

<sup>4</sup>Similar to Study 1, we requested 1,200 participants from Prolific, in line with the preregistration, 1,202 participants returned the survey.

<sup>5</sup>Similar to Study 1 & 2, we requested 1,000 participants from Prolific, in line with the preregistration, 1,003 participants returned the survey.

## References

- Aknin, L. B., E. W. Dunn, J. Proulx, I. Lok, and M. I. Norton. 2020. "Does Spending Money on Others Promote Happiness?: A Registered Replication Report." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 119, no. 2: e15–e26. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pspa0000191>.
- Aknin, L. B., G. M. Sandstrom, E. W. Dunn, and M. I. Norton. 2011. "It's the Recipient That Counts: Spending Money on Strong Social Ties Leads to Greater Happiness Than Spending on Weak Social Ties." *PLoS One* 6, no. 2: e17018. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0017018>.
- Bastos, W., and M. Brucks. 2017. "How and Why Conversational Value Leads to Happiness for Experiential and Material Purchases." *Journal of Consumer Research* 44, no. 3: 598–612. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jcr/ucx054>.
- Bhattacharjee, A., and C. Mogilner. 2014. "Happiness From Ordinary and Extraordinary Experiences." *Journal of Consumer Research* 41, no. 1: 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1086/674724>.
- Bluvstein Netter, S., and P. Raghubir. 2021. "Tip to Show Off: Impression Management Motivations Increase Consumers' Generosity." *Journal of the Association for Consumer Research* 6, no. 1: 120–129. <https://doi.org/10.1086/710239>.
- Van Boven, L., and T. Gilovich. 2003. "To Do or to Have? That Is the Question." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 85, no. 6: 1193–1202. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.85.6.1193>.
- Caprariello, P. A., and H. T. Reis. 2013. "To Do, to Have, or to Share? Valuing Experiences Over Material Possessions Depends on the Involvement of Others." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 104, no. 2: 199–215. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0030953>.
- Chan, C., and C. Mogilner. 2017. "Experiential Gifts Foster Stronger Social Relationships Than Material Gifts." *Journal of Consumer Research* 43, no. 6: 913–931. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jcr/ucw067>.
- Clark, M. S., and Aragón. 2013. "Communal (and Other) Relationships: History, Theory Development, Recent Findings, and Future Directions." In *The Oxford Handbook of Close Relationships*, 255–280. Oxford University Press. <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2012-32735-012>.
- Clark, M. S., and J. Mills. 1993. "The Difference Between Communal and Exchange Relationships: What It Is and Is Not." *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 19, no. 6: 684–691. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167293196003>.
- Collins, M. 2023, October 23. *What the Taylor Swift Effect Teaches Us About Influence*. Forbes. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/marcuscollins/2023/10/02/what-the-taylor-swift-effect-teaches-us-about-influence/>.
- Dunn, E. W., L. B. Aknin, and M. I. Norton. 2008. "Spending Money on Others Promotes Happiness." *Science* 319, no. 5870: 1687–1688. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1150952>.
- Dunn, E. W., L. B. Aknin, and M. I. Norton. 2014. "Prosocial Spending and Happiness: Using Money to Benefit Others Pays Off." *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 23, no. 1: 41–47. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0963721413512503>.
- Fehr, E., and S. Gächter. 2000. "Fairness and Retaliation: The Economics of Reciprocity." *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 14, no. 3: 159–182. <https://doi.org/10.1257/jep.14.3.159>.
- Fergusson, R. 2022, June 8. *Cost of Living Crisis: What's the Mental Health Impact?* Money and Mental Health Policy Institute. <https://www.moneyandmentalhealth.org/cost-of-living-crisis-and-mental-health/>.
- Fitzpatrick, E. 2024, February 15. *So, Make the Friendship Bracelets – Swifties & the Value of "Weak" Ties*. Victoria University. <https://www.vu.edu.au/about-vu/news-events/news/so-make-the-friendship-bracelets-swifties-the-value-of-weak-ties>.
- Garcia-Rada, X., L. Anik, and D. Ariely. 2019. "Consuming Together (Versus Separately) Makes the Heart Grow Fonder." *Marketing Letters* 30, no. 1: 27–43. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11002-019-09479-7>.
- Garcia-Rada, X., T. Kim, and P. J. Liu. 2024. "Consumption Sacrifice." *Journal of Consumer Psychology* 35, no. 1: 61–80. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jcpy.1404>.
- Garcia-Rada, X., M. I. Norton, and R. K. Ratner. 2024. "A Desire to Create Shared Memories Increases Consumers' Willingness to Sacrifice Experience Quality for Togetherness." *Journal of Consumer Psychology* 34, no. 2: 247–263. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jcpy.1352>.
- Gneezy, U., E. Haruvy, and H. Yafe. 2004. "The Inefficiency of Splitting the Bill." *The Economic Journal* 114, no. 495: 265–280. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0297.2004.00209.x>.
- Granovetter, M. S. 1973. "The Strength of Weak Ties." *American Journal of Sociology* 78, no. 6: 1360–1380. <https://doi.org/10.1086/225469>.
- Howell, R. T., and G. Hill. 2009. "The Mediators of Experiential Purchases: Determining the Impact of Psychological Needs Satisfaction and Social Comparison." *Journal of Positive Psychology* 4, no. 6: 511–522. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760903270993>.
- IBISWorld. 2025. *Total Recreation Expenditure*. <https://www.ibisworld.com/us/bed/total-recreation-expenditure/88211/>.
- Johnson, J. W., and P. E. Grimm. 2010. "Communal and Exchange Relationship Perceptions as Separate Constructs and Their Role in Motivations to Donate." *Journal of Consumer Psychology* 20, no. 3: 282–294. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcps.2010.06.018>.
- Kelly, J. 2025, April 16. *The Buy Now, Pay Later Boom at Coachella, Signs Of Stretched Wallets*. Forbes. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/jackkelly/2025/04/16/the-buy-now-pay-later-boom-at-coachella-signs-of-stretched-wallets/>.
- Kilfoyle, M. 2023, May 4. *How Is the Cost of Living Crisis Affecting Public Health?* Economics Observatory. <https://www.economicsobservatory.com/how-is-the-cost-of-living-crisis-affecting-public-health>.
- Leary, M. R., and R. M. Kowalski. 1990. "Impression Management: A Literature Review and Two-Component Model." *Psychological Bulletin* 107, no. 1: 34–47. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.107.1.34>.
- Lee, J. K., and A. Kronrod. 2020. "The Strength of Weak-Tie Consensus Language." *Journal of Marketing Research* 57, no. 2: 353–374. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022243720904957>.
- Liu, P. J., and K. E. Min. 2020. "Where Do You Want to Go for Dinner? A Preference Expression Asymmetry in Joint Consumption." *Journal of Marketing Research* 57, no. 6: 1037–1054. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022243720949497>.
- Mead, N. L., R. F. Baumeister, T. F. Stillman, C. D. Rawn, and K. D. Vohs. 2011. "Social Exclusion Causes People to Spend and Consume Strategically in the Service of Affiliation." *Journal of Consumer Research* 37, no. 5: 902–919. <https://doi.org/10.1086/656667>.
- Mehl, M. R., S. Vazire, S. E. Holleran, and C. S. Clark. 2010. "Eavesdropping on Happiness: Well-Being Is Related to Having Less Small Talk and More Substantive Conversations." *Psychological Science* 21, no. 4: 539–541. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797610362675>.
- Miller, J. G., H. Akiyama, and S. Kapadia. 2017. "Cultural Variation in Communal Versus Exchange Norms: Implications for Social Support." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 113, no. 1: 81–94. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pspi0000091>.
- Mogilner, C. 2010. "The Pursuit of Happiness: Time, Money, and Social Connection." *Psychological Science* 21, no. 9: 1348–1354. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797610380696>.
- Moss-Racusin, C. A., J. Van Der Toorn, G. Beneke, and K. R. Olson. 2024. "Mothers of Transgender Youth Experience Stigma-By-Association." *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 54, no. 4: 209–220. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jasp.13024>.



Murthy, V. H. 2023, April 30. *Surgeon General: We Have Become a Lonely Nation. It's Time to Fix That*. New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/04/30/opinion/loneliness-epidemic-america.html>.

Park, A. B., C. Cryder, and R. Gershon. 2025. "Fighting Fiscal Awkwardness: How Relationship Strength Changes Individuals' Communication Approach When Resolving Interpersonal Debt." *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General* 154, no. 1: 152–170. <https://doi.org/10.1037/xge0001689>.

Preacher, K. J., D. D. Rucker, and A. F. Hayes. 2007. "Addressing Moderated Mediation Hypotheses: Theory, Methods, and Prescriptions." *Multivariate Behavioral Research* 42, no. 1: 185–227. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00273170701341316>.

Prelec, D., and G. Loewenstein. 1998. "The Red and the Black: Mental Accounting of Savings and Debt." *Marketing Science* 17, no. 1: 4–28. <https://doi.org/10.1287/mksc.17.1.4>.

Ragunathan, R., and K. Corfman. 2006. "Is Happiness Shared Doubled and Sadness Shared Halved? Social Influence on Enjoyment of Hedonic Experiences." *Journal of Marketing Research* 43, no. 3: 386–394. <https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkr.43.3.386>.

Ratner, R. K., and R. W. Hamilton. 2015. "Inhibited From Bowling Alone." *Journal of Consumer Research* 42, no. 2: 266–283. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jcr/ucv012>.

Reshadi, F., and M. P. Fitzgerald. 2023. "The Pain of Payment: A Review and Research Agenda." *Psychology & Marketing* 40, no. 8: 1672–1688. <https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.21825>.

Rudd, M., J. Aaker, and M. I. Norton. 2014. "Getting the Most out of Giving: Concretely Framing a Prosocial Goal Maximizes Happiness." *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 54: 11–24. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2014.04.002>.

Shah, A. M., N. Eisenkraft, J. R. Bettman, and T. L. Chartrand. 2016. "Paper or Plastic?": How We Pay Influences Post-Transaction Connection." *Journal of Consumer Research* 42, no. 5: 688–708. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jcr/ucv056>.

Shani, Y. 2017. "When Sharing Is Not Caring: Does (Un)Certainty About Bill Payment Method Lead Diners to Consume More and Spend More Money?" *Journal of Behavioral Decision Making* 30, no. 2: 453–461. <https://doi.org/10.1002/bdm.1963>.

Vohs, K. D. 2015. "Money Priming Can Change People's Thoughts, Feelings, Motivations, and Behaviors: An Update on 10 Years of Experiments." *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General* 144, no. 4: e86–e93. <https://doi.org/10.1037/xge0000091>.

Vohs, K. D., N. L. Mead, and M. R. Goode. 2008. "Merely Activating the Concept of Money Changes Personal and Interpersonal Behavior." *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 17, no. 3: 208–212. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8721.2008.00576.x>.

Weingarten, E., K. Duke, W. Liu, et al. 2023. "What Makes People Happy? Decoupling the Experiential-Material Continuum." *Journal of Consumer Psychology* 33, no. 1: 97–106. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jcpsy.1291>.

Weingarten, E., and J. K. Goodman. 2021. "Re-Examining the Experiential Advantage in Consumption: A Meta-Analysis and Review." *Journal of Consumer Research* 47, no. 6: 855–877. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jcr/ucaa047>.

Wu, Y., R. W. Hamilton, N. Y. J. Kim, and R. K. Ratner. 2021. "Navigating Shared Consumption Experiences: Clarity About a Partner's Interests Increases Enjoyment." *Journal of Marketing Research* 58, no. 3: 439–455. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00222437211002818>.

Xu, Q., Y. Zhou, M. Ye, and X. Zhou. 2015. "Perceived Social Support Reduces the Pain of Spending Money." *Journal of Consumer Psychology* 25, no. 2: 219–230. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcps.2014.11.004>.

## Supporting Information

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section.