

## The Temporal Phases of Leisure Experience: Expectation, Experience and Reflection of Leisure Participation

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### **Abstract:**

While there have been studies whereby the methodology relied on evaluations of pre-, during, and postparticipation experiences, it is far more common that research on leisure does not consider the temporal phases of a leisure experience. Further, many of the studies that have attempted to encompass the multiple temporal phases of experiential leisure involvement have not focused on participants who had established significant leisure careers or long histories of recreation participation in a singular activity. The purpose of this study was to explore the temporal phases of a leisure experience in the context of individuals' in situ attendance at a niche music performance. These phases consisted of participants' expectations before the event, the actual experience during the event, and the memory of that experience after its completion. Because participants wanted to feel in control of their lives, personal reassessments and the prioritization of positive events sought to emphasize the value of their agency. Researchers found that the reconstruction of memory drives desire for future participation as well as the associative expectations of what is to come.

**Keywords:** expectations | leisure | memory | multiphase experiences | music

### **Article:**

*You don't get to the Dixie Mattress Festival (DMF) by accident. Most fans of the band Jerry Joseph & the Jackmormons (for whom the "festival" is named) might not get there in their first year of fandom. Though to be fair, it takes time to find the Jackmormons. They aren't on the music charts, they aren't on the radio, and they don't get booked at major festivals like Austin City Limits or Coachella. Their music isn't used in commercials, they rarely open for larger national acts; in some ways it takes a little luck to find them, in other ways it takes the personal refining of your music tastes. Usually it takes a little of both.*

*For those who do eventually find the band, and find them to their liking, they stick around. All of the participants of this study found the band, and thus the DMF, through close association with another more widely known band, Widespread Panic (WP). Fans often cut their teeth on WP's tours dotting the United States while they were in their 20s.*

*Eventually, most stumbled onto the Jackmormons at a dingy bar or club after a WP show. And as the story goes, the rest is history. Literally. After a number of years of involvement (in most cases a decade or more) of loyal allegiance to the Jackmormons, fans of the band have accrued a vast surplus of musical and social experiences through their participation, giving them much to reflect on. But how do those past experiences affect their connection to the music and fellow fans in the present, and how do they affect their future decisions to participate? — Excerpt from first author Justin Harmon's journal*

## **Introduction**

In Daniel Kahneman's (March 2010) TED Talk, "The riddle of experience vs. memory," he spoke at length about the "confusion between experience and memory." To make his point, he used the example of a man who had been listening to a symphony for some 20 minutes when, at the close of the recording, there was a loud screeching sound that "ruined" the whole experience for him. In Kahneman's recitation of the event, he interjected to say that no, it had only ruined the memory of the experience. The 20 minutes leading up to that sound, the majority of the actual experience, was still satisfying. Kahneman should have perhaps insisted that it was only the memory of the last moments that was ruined, not the memory of the whole experience; after all, by continuing to listen, the audiophile implied that it was a worthwhile experience up to the point of its supposed ruination.

Based on their research into such phenomena, Kahneman, Fredrickson, Schreiber, and Redelmeier (1993) developed a concept called the "peak/end rule," which states that experiences are evaluated based on the memories of a representative moment, often associated with either the final moment or an average of the most intense and final moments combined. To the extent that recreation providers are concerned with fostering positive recollections of recreational experiences, the peak/end rule phenomenon has obvious and far-reaching implications for the design and facilitation of recreation experiences (Dustin, Zajchowski, & Schwab, in press). Yet the peak/end rule belies an important temporal component of most recreation experiences, namely expectation. To that end, we explored the manner in which expectations affect the memory and representation of an experience. Just as a symphony listener's recollection would have been shaped by his/her previous listening experiences, so too are individuals' recollections of their recreation and leisure experiences shaped by their previous experiences and expectations.

Kahneman's (2010) symphony example is quite fitting to the present study as the phenomenon of interest also involved music. The focus here was on participants' involvement in a small, annual, fan-community initiated and orchestrated concert series in rural Oregon focusing on a little-known rock band called Jerry Joseph & the Jackmormons. The event was named the Dixie Mattress Festival (DMF) after one of the band's songs (Dixie Mattress) and took place over three nights the last weekend of every June. It was not a festival in the traditional sense in that its focal point was explicitly on the music of the Jackmormons. A handful of other bands played as well, but they were peripheral and even more unknown than the headliners and were not included in order to draw additional audience members. In some ways this event could be viewed as a closed-community event. While not private, it was publicly advertised and had the feel of a private event due to the small size and long-established relationships of those who attended. It could be accurately stated that there were no casual fans in attendance. Due to the remoteness of the location and the simple fact that Jerry Joseph & the Jackmormons were the

sole draw, those who made the effort and incurred the expenses were fans who placed their involvement in the music scene as an utmost priority in their lives. Additionally, it was commonly stated by fans that if you did not know everyone at DMF upon arrival, you would by the end of the weekend.

This study set out to explore the temporal phases of a leisure experience in the context of individuals' attendance at the music festival: the expectations held by participants prior to the event, the actual experience itself during the event, and the memory of that experience after a set amount of time had passed. The specific objectives were as follows: first, we were interested in finding out how participants plan for and anticipate upcoming participation in a desirable activity. This included reflection based on past experiences in similar leisure involvement, but more directly we were interested in how expectations may influence the upcoming participation. Second, we wanted to know how participation during the event did or did not live up to expectations. Third, we wanted to know how people remembered their involvement in the activity and the manner in which, if at all, those memories were affected by their specific expectations prior to the event. Finally, we wanted to explore how knowledge of people's feelings at the each part of an experience might be helpful in making future leisure choices for the participants.

## **Literature review**

### Leisure experience

Experience is a much investigated topic in the leisure literature (e.g., Hemingway, 1995; Kivel, 2000; Neville, 2014; Parry & Johnson, 2007). Attempting to understand what it means for individuals, leisure providers, and society is an important and complex arena for investigation (Harper, 1981; Kleiber, 1999; Schreyer & Lime, 1984). Stewart (1998) stressed the embodied element of the leisure experience: that our accumulation of experiences affects our being going forward. Kelly (1987) stated explicitly that leisure is experience. Our decisions of how to spend our time, whom to spend it with, how we might grow through leisure, and what priority to give it in our lives are all questions that come from our life outside of leisure which directly affects our decision making in regards to leisure. Experiences, then, are the holistic manifestation of historical precedent, subjective interests and preferences, and the resultant outcomes derived from agentic actions. How these experiences affect our being requires us to dissect the temporal aspects of an experience in order to understand the evolutionary and residual properties of their growth, development, and meaning.

### Temporality of experience

Following Mead (1929), Maines, Sugrue, and Katovich (1983) said that the "present" implies both a past and a future, but that reality only exists in the present moment. We would add that reality is only experienced in the present moment as well. All experiences comprise a stream of moments in linear fashion as the individual and their involvement unfold. However, due to their rapid succession, each of these instances is understood in the present for its immediate value and then reassessed upon reflection. It is these "representative moments" of a peak experience, final experience, or an averaging of the collective experience which Kahneman et al. (1993) discussed that are of value to this discussion. We aim to better understand how those moments help drive

expectations for what is yet to come and how that affects the recollection of the experience. In the expectant stages of participation in a given event, we may construct a perceived or hoped-for “reality” for our upcoming experiences; however, once the actual event takes place, it is unavoidable that there will be some reconstruction of those prior assumptions based on what actually took place or how it has affected the participant. For Maines et al. (1983), the reconstruction of historical participation involves “redefining the meaning of past events in such a way that they have meaning in and utility for the present” (p. 163). To synthesize this line of thinking with Kahneman et al.’s (1993) peak/end rule, Kahneman and colleagues indicate that the remembering self and the experiencing self often involve differing accounts of what is transpiring in the moment versus what is remembered as having transpired upon reflection. Therefore, the reconstructed memory has more influence on future action than the in situ experience (Wirtz, Kruger, Scollon, & Diener, 2003). Dustin et al. (in press) theorized that leisure researchers need to understand both the experiencing self and the remembering self, and were quick to point out that what happens at the end of an experience may trump the events that transpired before, whether positive or negative, based on the fragility and rationalization of memory, thus giving further credence to the peak/end rule in a leisure context. Dustin and associates suggest that the way we study leisure may be incomplete, and we concur—expectations of experience are critical to what is yet to come.

While the final moments of an experience may color the initial memory, the lasting memory may draw more from the expectations we put on an event. Kemp, Burt, and Furneaux (2008) found that we are unable to recall many details of our past experiences leading to a reconstruction of memory after the fact, which often draws from the goals we set for ourselves before becoming involved. From this vantage point it would follow that we construct idealized peaks based on our expectations and those then become our anchor points for memory reconstruction in the future.

### Multiphase leisure experiences

Clawson and Knetsch (1966) first treated recreational experiences as being multiphase, comprising five parts: expectation, travel to event, onsite experience, travel from event, and recollection of participation. It was the authors’ assertion that these phases, while able to be examined individually, could only be fully understood when viewed as a whole. Each temporal component was fluid and therefore inextricably linked, thus giving credence to the biographical nature of leisure involvement (Stewart, 1998). Evidence from the recent literature on events and festivals suggests the need for further exploration into the temporal components of a leisure experience (Birenboim, 2016; Cutler, Carmichael, & Doherty, 2014; Kim & Fesenmaier, 2015; Packer & Ballantyne, 2011). Cutler et al. (2014), for instance, stressed the importance of mobility in understanding the lived experience, showing in their study how the experience of a journey merges with the experience of the destination. Packer and Ballantyne (2011) highlighted how the experience of attending a festival starts months before it occurs and that anticipation for the next festival starts immediately after the current rendition has ended. They did not, however, explore how those accrued memories affected the expectations of fans for future participation.

Methodologically speaking, while numerous studies have relied on analyses of pre, during, and post-participation in leisure activities (Hammit, 1980; Mitchell, Thompson, Peterson, & Cronk, 1997; Wirtz et al., 2003), it is much more common for scholars to rely on pretest and posttest evaluation (Chen, Chang, & Fan, 2012; Dickson & Hall, 2006; Gilbert &

Abdullah, 2002) or an onsite experience and postexperience evaluation (Manfredo, 1984; Mannell & Iso-Ahola, 1987; Stewart & Hull, 1992; Walker, Hull, & Roggenbuck, 1998), thus not paying heed to Clawson and Knetsch's (1966) early claims about the need for understanding not just the differences of the multiphase aspects of an experience but also how each affects the other. Indeed, the general pre-post approach to studying a phenomenon tends to de-emphasize the interrelatedness of the different temporal phases of experience.

In the studies that have attempted to encompass the multiple temporal phases of experiential leisure involvement, few, if any, have focused on participants who had established significant leisure careers or had been involved in the activity for extended periods of time. This is problematic due to a lack of knowledge surrounding how those "representative moments" Kahneman et al. (1993) spoke of drive desire for future participation, and thus continuity in leisure behavior and meaning. Wirtz et al. (2003) focused on college students' choices of spring break activities using paid participants who had to complete each installment of the study before they could pick up their paycheck. Hammitt's (1980) study was on a required college botany class field trip and was admittedly not "necessarily recreational" (p. 108) but did adhere to Clawson and Knetsch's (1966) five phases of measurement. However, due to the class size, no students completed more than two of the five phases' questionnaires, thus not addressing each participants' temporal engagement. Mitchell et al.'s (1997) study comprised three investigations, two of which involved college students and their experiences in either an unexceptional instance such as Thanksgiving break or in one of two trips that were not necessarily connected to a history of involvement in a specific leisure activity and were extrinsically motivated.

Each of the aforementioned studies is important in its own right if for no other reason than to advance the methodology of studying multiphase experiences. Where they lack in providing additional benefit to leisure scholarship is that each study was experimental in strategy and relied on paid participants or students earning college credits. In attempting to understand how leisure participants' craft expectations, it follows that documenting episodes of previous involvement would prove valuable to understanding the trajectory of involvement, expectations, and experience. However, when participation is incentivized, expectations may focus on the incentive, rather than the experience per se thereby obscuring the relation between expectation, experience, and memory.

What should also be considered with this study population, or any population that has extensive levels of involvement in a leisure activity, is the potential manifestation of the "halo effect." Nisbett and Wilson (1977) described the halo effect as the tendency for people to ascribe further positive traits to an individual, group or place that has earned initial favorability in the eyes of the subject, whether or not those additional ascriptions are accurate (elsewhere this has been called "the rosy view" in Mitchell et al., 1997, or a "Pollyanna" effect in Hultsman, 1998). As the participants of this study all had lengthy tenures of following the band coupled with numerous significant friendships in the music scene (Harmon & Kyle, 2016), the tendency to idealize the memory of involvement was a concern. Having said this, the goals fans set for participation are often idealized in some regard, so it should not be viewed as a significant limitation to expect a "polished" memory of participation in an activity that has been largely positive in the past.

Literature summation

These theoretical threads come together to support our exploration of the temporal phases of a leisure experience through our attempt to better understand the role of individuals' agency through their participation in the music festival. Drawing on previous studies (Clawson & Knetsch, 1966; Hammitt, 1980; Mitchell et al., 1997; Wirtz et al., 2003), we employed a study design that explicitly addressed the three distinct temporal phases of experience. Thus, while we appreciate the utility of dissecting its temporal dimensions, we also take seriously the fact that for our participants, experience is continuous, unmediated, and inherently biographical (Stewart, 1998). What is perhaps distinctive about this study population is its long tenure of involvement in seeing the band Jerry Joseph & the Jackmormons perform live; those interviewed had been involved in the music scene on average for roughly a decade. While they interacted with friends at the concerts, as individuals they all had rich, personal attachments to the band and its music that occurred outside of, but in tandem with, their fellow fans. Because of these lengthy associations with the music, there were repeated opportunities for involvement, assessment of that involvement and how past participation led to the desire for future interactions, thus embracing the relevance of the "personal stories" stressed by Stewart.

## Methods

*When I first started to treat these fans and the music scene as a study back in December 2012, I didn't know what to expect. I knew how passionate they were about the music, and the tightknit relationships they had formed with one another were also just as obvious. The one thing I was a little worried about was how I would be perceived: would people think I was someone trespassing in their business simply to justify my own agenda? Or would they recognize me as truly one of their own? I had come to this music and my high-level of participation just the way everyone else had— through trial-and-error and a whole lot of time. While there were a few people who were skeptical about my intentions, as time went on those concerns vanished. I was just someone trying to capture the essence of something special. Every participant felt as if they had a story to tell in regards to their involvement in the scene, and most felt they learned something about its meaning to their lives through that telling. – Excerpt from Justin Harmon's journal*

### Study participants, the band, and location

Inquiry into the temporal phases of participation in the music festival took place between May and July 2015, though the first author has studied this music scene and its participants since December 2012. The participants were largely middle-aged (average age at time of interview was 45) and Caucasian, and had been following the band on average for a decade (some much longer). There were four female and six male participants, all of whom resided in either Colorado or Oregon. Fans were professionals in a large number of fields, and most had achieved a degree of financial comfort and stability to participate frequently in the music scene (average of 15 shows attended per year). Their involvement was mostly limited to concerts in and around their hometowns except for annual events like the DMF which gave them the opportunity to travel to remote areas and renew bonds with those they saw only at the "larger" events.

The event in question, the Dixie Mattress Festival, is a music festival centered on the band Jerry Joseph & the Jackmormons, a "jam band" (bands such as Phish, Widespread Panic, and the Grateful Dead are often lumped in this genre) with a cult following. It is not unusual for

there to be as few as 25–30 fans in attendance at a Jackmormons' concert, though the bigger events, like the DMF, might draw as many as 250 fans. The Jackmormons have been performing since 1995, though their singer and lead guitarist, Jerry Joseph, has been performing since the early 1980s. While the band has no notable accolades, they are recognized among music critics (Kayce, 2012) as important figures in American rock n' roll due to their musicianship and song writing abilities.

The DMF takes place in rural Oregon the last weekend of every June. This was the seventh and final rendition and supposed to be the third consecutive time in the same location. Due to circumstances beyond the control of the promoters, the event had to be moved less than a week before it was to transpire. The festival was produced and orchestrated by fans, primarily a husband and wife team who have been following the band for decades. Numerous other fans helped out either monetarily, logistically, or simply through providing much needed physical labor to set up the infrastructure of the grounds, stage, and sound system.

## Interviews

The first phase of interviews occurred in May 2015. Ten participants were selected through purposive sampling (Patton, 1990) based on their high level of participation in the music scene and their plans to attend the DMF. Seven of the 10 participants had participated before in a larger study conducted between December 2012 and August 2014. The other three were active fans during the initial study and had close relationships with the other seven, but were not contacted for interviews solely due to time. All 10 participants had openly expressed the importance of the band and its music to their lives, thus making them fitting choices for an investigation into the temporal phases of their leisure involvement. Pre- and post-interviews were conducted at either the home of the participants or a public space of their choosing. Onsite interviews were conducted at the music festival. Each interview lasted roughly 45 minutes, though some lasted for an hour. Additionally, informal interactions and conversations about the festival occurred throughout the weekend with all participants. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant about their expectations for the upcoming festival which included asking about past attendance at earlier Dixie's. Each interview was recorded with permission of the participant, and notes were taken during the session. All participants have been assigned a pseudonym to provide confidentiality, but based on some of the responses given, if people within the music scene were to read this article, they may be able to surmise the identity of the speaker. The second phase of interviews occurred during the festival, the last weekend in June 2015. The focus of questioning in this phase involved the state of mind in regards to the live experience as it unfolded, as well as determining if expectations were met and if special moments had transpired during the weekend. The third and final phase occurred roughly one month after the festival, in July 2015. The focus of interview questions in the final phase was about what fans remembered from their participation that was particularly meaningful, what they recalled from their expectations prior to attending the festival and whether or not those were met, and what thoughts they had on future involvement.

## Participant observation

During the onsite portion of the data collection, there were numerous opportunities to interact with the participants in an informal capacity and learn about their connections to the

music, the friends they participated with, and the music scene in general. In some ways these social opportunities that occurred in the “downtime” of the weekend served as the “travel to” and “travel from” portion of Clawson and Knetsch’s (1966) five stages in that these periods of time occurred immediately before and after a concert experience had just taken place and allowed for personal meaning making and communal discussions of the importance of what had transpired.

It was common for people to talk about the previous night’s music and their experiences, as well as what they hoped to hear in terms of the music that was yet to be played as well as the tangential activities of the weekend that had not yet taken place. Therefore, field notes were a vital method of data collection to document the interstices between each planned and unplanned activity. These observations of and interactions with the fans speak to Gonzalez’s (2000) assessment that all social engagement associated with a phenomenon is relevant to describing it in the most accurate way. Further, by documenting what transpired during the “downtime” between concerts, it allowed us to pick up on informal references to fans’ personal and collective history in the music scene, especially with regards to past renditions of the DMF. It was common for fans to make passing anecdotal references to specific events that transpired in earlier iterations of the festival, thus allowing them to extend the experiences of past involvement into the latest installment (Scott & Harmon, 2016).

### Data analysis and interpretation

Constructing grounded theory served as the foundation of data analysis (Charmaz, 2006), in that an understanding was reached through an inductive process which spoke only to the experiences of those participating in the research. The analysis process continued through the use of primary and secondary coding techniques that started with a thorough reading and rereading of the interview transcripts and field notes. Information deemed important based on its relevance to the research objectives was highlighted through the use of a multicolor highlighting technique to differentiate the coding of each statement or observation. As part of the initial coding we assigned primary codes using, when possible, in vivo terminology (the language of the participant).

Next, we grouped primary codes into further concentrated categories through focused coding (Tracy, 2013). Data were managed with a physical organization system that included establishing a hierarchy of each quote or observation as it pertained to the category or research question (Saldaña, 2012). This method of data management best suited our manner of interpretation, understanding, and explanation as it allowed us to physically organize all the data in a space where we could see everything at once, making it easier to look for inconsistencies in responses as well as to assess how we would incorporate the data into our writing. These data provided the foundation of our article exploring the temporal phases of participation in this leisure event.

In regards to the role of the authors, the first author has been a fan of the band for nearly 15 years and slowly became more involved in the music scene over the course of the last decade. Due to this level of familiarity and frequent participation, it made it easier to approach fans about their involvement and experiences as well as to conduct observations without being viewed as an outsider or imposing on fans’ personal space and experience. The second author, while familiar with Jerry Joseph and the Jackmormons, was sufficiently distant from the band to be able to interrogate the first author’s relationship to the band and its fans.



## Results and discussion

### Reflection on the weekend

*After the festival I looked at the crude website dedicated to the DMF, perusing “The Vision” statements (the promoters’ annual pre-festival announcement) from each year, the pictures of fans in attendance, and the maps to the venues and the posters that were designed for each installment. I thought to myself that it really was a shame the festival would no longer take place. The music scene is largely supported by fans’ investment and orchestration of special weekends like the DMF, and to dissolve an annual event like this was at the expense of the closeness of the fan community. Many people talked about taking the reins in hosting the festival the following year. I hoped that would be the case.*  
– Excerpt from Justin Harmon’s journal

During the post-festival interviews, one fan said about recalling her expectations that she realized she had set an intention for herself to be more present and more engaged. She felt that by having an intention it affected how her “memory was saved.” In her case it meant that she wanted to “soak it all in” and be aware of the specialness of the weekend for everyone involved. For the participants, their memories of their expectations were largely to be in the moment and embrace the experience as it unfolded. Because of their lengthy tenures they knew from past involvement that one of the key attractions for them was the spontaneity and surprises that came from the music and the evolution of friendships. To “build a box” to fit the upcoming experience into was to negate the most important aspects. The fluidity of participation and novelty of being present were of greater importance than anything that could be scripted.

A recurring theme for the participants, then, was to be in a conscious state of awareness about the weekend. Due to the specialness of the festival, and specifically because of it being the final installment, fans attempted to actively engage with all that was available. In Clawson and Knetsch’s (1966) original conceptualization of multiphase leisure experiences, they stressed that onsite evaluation necessarily required developing an understanding of how recreationists processed their involvement in the moment. For this group of fans, who all had extensive histories with the music scene, their participation in the DMF was both an accumulation of past involvement and a cultivation of that involvement to generate the best outcome from their vantage points. The participants, then, were demonstrating a function of their agency as fans in relation to the memory and narrative creation process that came with their lengthy histories of involvement as it related to their participation in this rendition of the DMF. Put simply, their past experience within the music scene set them up to have positive expectations for future involvement. Any peak moments that transpired, whether positive or negative, and how the weekend wrapped up, were all elements that were considered in the planning and expectation stages preceding the DMF. This is a beneficial insight into future applications of the work of Kahneman (2010) and Kahneman and associates (1993) in that the peak/end rule is heavily influenced by the expectations that occur before the event transpires. Building on Kahneman’s (2010) example, the symphony listener would not have been nearly as disappointed had s/he not expected to enjoy the performance.

During the pre-festival interviews fans spoke at length about their history with the band and its music and how the music scene had come to hold such a valuable place in their lives. Participants recounted their evolution as a fan, including becoming more knowledgeable about

the music, discovering rich friendships, and becoming a part of the fan community. While some fans had examples of negative experiences through their involvement at this rendition of Dixie, these events were typically waved off as trivial due to their decision to prioritize other aspects of their lengthy and frequent involvement. For instance, one fan overindulged on an illicit substance that led to unruly behavior including a fight and the need to be corralled by his friends in order to calm him down. The next morning his spouse came to the camping area and was talking about what transpired, clearly embarrassed by her husband's actions, but comforted by the fact that everyone in attendance were close friends and therefore kept criticism and judgment to a minimum. In her retelling of the event to those who did not witness it directly, she was overly demonstrative to the point where it made it easier for everyone to laugh it off. Their adult children were also in attendance and she said that, "It's kind of weird when your kids ask you what's wrong with their father and you have to tell them that daddy's fucking tripping!" From then on, "daddy's fucking tripping" became a catch phrase for the remainder of the weekend and was invoked in comedic fashion, thus downplaying the severity of the event in the moment of recollection.

Knowing that episodes like this could be waved off in order to emphasize the importance of the music and the camaraderie of the fanbase evidenced that these episodes are rare, ultimately inconsequential, and not representative of the people involved and the shared history of accumulated experiences. Because they held the weekend, and their involvement in the music scene in general, in such high regard, the fans were actively constructing their memory of the event as the event unfolded. By choosing to focus on the positive they were unconsciously scripting their reflection as one that would meet their expectations. In regards to the tumult that surrounded a potential cancellation and last-second relocation of the DMF, Kristin had this to say about the unexpected twists of the weekend:

*Here's the thing: sure it wasn't going to be in Tidewater anymore - and I was looking forward to being so close to the ocean. And sure, it cost us a fair amount of money to cancel our house rental there, but as soon as we started looking at it, we saw that we could do other things like go to Astoria and see the Goonies' house. We're going to be close to Seattle and so we'll go up there and check that out too. It actually opened up the door for us to do different stuff. So the weekend may not have been as initially expected, but that doesn't mean it was any less special.*

For Kristin, the difference between what was expected to take place and what actually happened, was reconsidered and repurposed to suit her chosen narrative for the weekend. Because she expected to have a good time with friends, and because her participation in the music scene was so important to her, it was to her advantage to recall the weekend as one that met her needs if not her original expectations.

One fan, Scotty, may have summed it up best when he said he felt as if he had an epiphany during the weekend. Scotty said that in order to enjoy an experience you cannot measure it against past experiences, but that you should appreciate those past experiences for their importance in providing the ongoing context for the experiences yet to come. He said that the experience is "not a painting on the wall; it's the sands on the beach and that design is constantly changing." He went on to say:

*I was so full of the experience that I almost couldn't handle any more. I'm so filled up and need to process; to make sense of it and create the lasting memory. It's almost like someone dumped out a puzzle and now you have to put it together. I wasn't sad [when it was over]. You've just had this amazing experience in this short period of time; it's intense. Your brain needs some time to sort everything out. Then you go, "wow."*

Chris Rojek (1995) said "we do not decide on the quality of our leisure experience while it is happening," but that it is only at a "future time of reflection that we judge if the activity gave us real pleasure" (p. 117). For the informants of this study, as eloquently stated by Scotty, it was important to be in the moment and enjoy the music and the company of friends, and it was not until the weekend had come to a close that sense could be made of what transpired and how the events of the weekend would affect future involvement. For Clawson and Knetsch (1966), the recollection stage was wholly important, and inseparable, from the stages that preceded it. In many ways, the 2015 DMF did not end with the last note played; the fans extended their involvement through dissections of the festival on the fan discussion sites, reminiscing on memories and pictures, as well as listening to recordings of the concerts that had been made available by tapers and the band (Scott & Harmon, 2016).

### Experience in the moment

*On the second day of the weekend (a Saturday) around noon, I walked over to the camping area of a group of nine. They had their cars and tents all fashioned in an enclosed area to give their space the feeling of a temporary home. I was greeted warmly and immediately plopped down in a vacant camping chair. Before I could say anything a piled-high plate of food was handed to me and I changed my designs from talking to eating. Arlo popped open a beer and threw one to me and one to Jack who was getting ready to take a "shower." The limited natural shade was provided by an aging tree, and affixed to the tree was a portable camping shower, and under it another camping chair. Jack stripped down to his bathing suit and sat under the shower, washing himself and drinking his beer. Everyone laughed and took pictures; it wasn't in the least bit odd. It was just further evidence of the comfort of everyone in the music scene had with one another, and the shared happiness to be together once again. – Excerpt from Justin Harmon's field journal*

Aside from the music, the most important element of the festival are the friendships that had been crafted over years of involvement. All of the fans see the band perform in and near their hometowns, but it is only special occasions like the DMF where the most dedicated make the effort to be in attendance. Because of the expense, and often difficulty of getting to Dixie, there is an understanding of how much the music and fellow fans mean to one another upon arrival. For many this is their only vacation for the year. As one fan said, "I always know what I'm doing the last weekend of June.

*That's the whole idea of Dixie Mattress. To snowball this community and camaraderie and reinforce these relationships that are worthwhile existing based on common threads of appreciation, and community and interests ... not only getting yourself what you need but turning other people onto that and helping them realize time well-spent ... it really*

*wasn't until I found the Jackmormons' community — which is at its best at Dixie — that I really found a home. I found something really special.* – Dave, participant

For the 2015 installment, due to it being the last rendition in tandem with the turmoil in the week leading up to the event, many fans said they were making sure to take in every aspect of the weekend. Some took special interest in setting up the campsite to be more accommodating and inclusive of others. Some made sure they took the effort to meet everyone they did not know, or lend a hand wherever needed. One fan even made up special gifts to commemorate the weekend. She felt that it would encourage her to be more social and it would provide a totem for people to keep and reflect on down the line.

It was also common for fans to show up a day before the festival to help set up the campground, the stage, and the other infrastructure, as well as pitch in throughout the weekend where needed, such as working the door to sell tickets or hand out passes, working the merchandise table, and generally cleaning up the grounds in order to leave it the way it was found. Because of the last minute change in location, fans had to be reflexive in their adaptation to the changes. While speaking with Kent on the second day of the festival, I asked him what effect, if any, the last minute switch had on his expectation or involvement. He replied, “It was just a minor speedbump.” I then asked him what his feelings were upon arrival, and he had this to say:

*We came out Thursday morning (the day before the festival started) to help set up and we let Mike and Wendy (the venue owners) know that we were the kind of people they could come to if they needed anything. We wanted to set the tone that it wasn't going to be a complain-fest. That everybody was here for two things: the music and the community.*

It was continuously stated that people were mindful in their actions and intentions for the weekend. Not simply because this was potentially the last Dixie, but because that is how the community was formed, organically, and with respect for those who shared the same passion and did so because they were genuinely concerned for everyone involved, as intimated in the comment from Dave. Just as the relationships were cultivated organically over time, this ethos applied to the weekend as well. Because the majority of participants were “old pros,” their shared history of positive interactions set the mood for what was to come at a meaningful weekend like Dixie, and this collective ideology served as the subconscious guide for enacting those twin pillars of community, shared meaning and mutual appreciation, fluidly throughout the weekend.

Whereas Ellis and Rossman (2008) and other proponents of the experience industry model call for recreation providers to impose a strong design in order to shape the subsequent narrative, the DMF demonstrates the capacity of participants to orchestrate their own experiences in the absence of such a guiding hand. Since memories of experiences are malleable and subject to reconstruction, predetermined or prescriptive orchestration can limit the recreationist's agency and attraction to the activity (Kemp et al., 2008). The ability for these fans to maintain a fluidity over the course of the weekend and not adhere to an imposed agenda or schedule of events allowed participants to respond to their subjective needs and wants in the moment, thus leading to what was overwhelmingly described as a successful and rewarding experience. Those experiences then became the basis for the construction of participants' memories associated with the DMF and served as points of orientation in making future plans for involvement. The future

was important in a general sense for the participants—simply that they would have opportunities to come together around the music and in a specific sense as well—that this ever-important weekend, the DMF, would remain an annual gathering to provide opportunity in revelry and continuity of individual and collective involvement.

Because of this, the fate of the DMF was a common theme throughout the weekend. Many began to think about how they could keep the experience going in the future. The desire to “capture the spirit of Dixie” and “not let it die” was embraced by all, and this involved a reflection not only on the current weekend as it transpired but also on their past participation at previous Dixie’s. While speaking with Becky and Kent (a married couple) during the festival, I asked them if they had done anything differently because this was the last rendition of DMF. Kent responded:

*No. It may not be the last one. We don’t have to kill it; we can let it live. Just because Kirk and Kelly are through hosting it does not mean that someone else can’t step in to do so. We’ve got a whole community interested in keeping this going. Someone will take the reins. I’ll do it if need be.*

Later that day Kevin, Matt and Scotty were hanging out on the short road between the campground and the venue. I said “what’s up?” and dropped in on their conversation. Matt responded, “We’re just talking about the land Kevin’s buying in Colorado. It would be the perfect place for Dixie. It would leave Oregon, but we’ve got the whole Colorado crew that can pitch in. It’ll be easier for logistics with more people involved.” I asked, “Will it still be Dixie?” Kevin replied, “Yea. The spirit is in us, not the location. As long as we set aside the weekend and make it about the Jackmormons and the fans, it will be Dixie. Build it and they will come!”

The desire to somehow keep the DMF tradition alive for the following year invoked the history and memory components of the perceived success of past participation at the festival; the fans did not want this significant annual reunion to end. Memory for the participants involved two components: a recollection of the experiences of their involvement at the DMF and a subjective interpretation which allowed the individuals to derive meanings and make decisions about future participation. Individuals reconstructed what happened by processing the events that transpired. In some instances, this involved a prioritization of moments as it fit the individuals’ personal narrative. This included the editing of experiences and the downplaying of negative events that discolored the way individuals wanted to remember their involvement. Because people’s recollections are often significantly impacted by their goals (Kemp et al., 2008), it follows that the goals of having fun, enjoying the music, and the friends would trump negative moments in terms of memory prioritization. Additionally, people rely on the memories that most easily come to mind (Morewedge, Gilbert, & Wilson, 2005). Therefore, unless directly involved in or affected by a negative episode, it is likely that participants will tend to remember the positive moments, thus invoking the halo effect (Nisbett & Wilson, 1977). As the participants of this study all had lengthy histories of involvement with deep personal attachment to the music and fellow fans, there was an obvious, if not conscious, tendency to emphasize the most positive aspects of the weekend, especially in regards to the role they played as individuals (i.e., their agency) in the outcome.

The fans’ cumulative experiences of the DMF were as much composed of their recollection as they were of the desire to have these experiences together in the future. Because the participants had a large social network established through the music, and most through past

DMFs specifically, the communal experience of past interactions extended into the future through the individual relationships that were built and maintained through participation together. While speaking with Bella during the festival about the promoters' "Vision" statement they put out each year, she had this to say:

*Yea, you can see his vision being enacted. Not just from my small part of being here, but from everyone's involvement. I think each [Dixie] is different, in terms of physical locations and venues, but the spirit is there at every one I've been to. It's all really great. It's just a time I look forward to because of the friends, the music and the specialness of the weekend. You don't find these types of interactions with these types of people whom I hold so dearly in too many places. At least I don't.*

### Expectations for the weekend

*I had my first conversations about the 2015 DMF at the band's annual New Year's (2014–2015) run in Portland, Oregon. The New Year's celebration was extra special that year because one couple got married before the first night of the four-day run and another couple got engaged on stage just before the New Year's countdown. As the celebratory weekend wound down, both couples were looking forward to their next opportunity to come together with their friends around the music: the 2015 DMF. For these fans, they had already started to craft their expectations for a fun and meaningful weekend six months in advance, largely drawing from their shared, extensive history with the band and its music, as well as their desire to enact their identity as fans in the future.*  
– Excerpt from Justin Harmon's journal

During the pre-festival interviews, participants were for the most part adamant about not putting any specific expectations on the weekend. When I asked Becky and Kent if there was any potential for expectations not to be met, Kent said, "Only if there is an earthquake. Last year there was a torrential downpour and we brought in awnings to deflect the rain and hay to dispel the mud." Becky responded, "Crises become lessened in this environment. We put things in perspective because we're here to see our friends and hear the music." Dave responded to a similar question by saying:

*Expectations can be a bad thing. My brother is totally miserable every time he goes on the golf course because he thinks he should always be at par. I'm a romantic by nature, not very competitive. I'm a sailor on leave so by that virtue I'm there to have fun. Let the only goal for the weekend be to have fun.*

Aside from seeing the friends and hearing music they love, which did clearly involve some expectation, the majority of participants refrained from attempting to script what the weekend would need to look like in order for it to be a success. Brett put it succinctly when he said that, "I've had a blast at all the Dixie's I've been to, so I'm just going to try to not change much!" As the majority of participants had been to a DMF before, they did, however, reflect on past experiences when they framed what they expected would transpire over the weekend. In thinking about past participation at Dixie, the informants reminisced on the elements that shaped

their memory of previous involvement. While speaking with Matt about his first DMF experience, he had this to say:

*I got dropped off for the Pendarvis Farms (location of the festival in 2011/2012) Dixie in a taxi at 9pm the night before it started. He dropped me off like half a mile away from the venue and I'm following the directions on my phone and I'm walking through a cow farm and come through a valley into the woods where everyone was camping. I walked in and the sound guy [and a few others] are standing there. I was like, "Is this the DMF?" Everyone started laughing! They were like, "Yea man, you're in the right place!" I made it. Everyone knows (my friend) Adrian and I was like, "Do you guys know who Adrian is?" They laugh again and say, "Walk up the hill, you'll find him." I found him and proceeded to have a lot of fun that weekend. It really set the bar for my deeper immersion in the scene.*

As evidenced by Matt and others, the experience of participation in the DMF goes beyond the music; the fellow fans are really what makes the weekend complete. The ability to socialize in an atmosphere that is built for those dedicated to the music and scene, as well as to grow those relationships, allows the DMF to set itself apart from the large scale concerts and gatherings which are not designed with the intention of building community. The intimacy of the DMF breeds fellowship resulting in most expectations to be grounded solely in renewing the bonds of friendship.

When asked to speak about how they expected their memory of the event would be affected by their upcoming experience, many predicted the reflection period would be largely positive because they were certain they would have strengthened relationships to not only other fans, but also to the music itself. As this was the last installment of Dixie, many fans expected there to be a tinge of sorrow for not having the festival to look forward to the following year, but they also felt happiness for having been able to participate in the final installment. Unfortunately, less than a week before the festival was set to take place, the owner of the venue was notified that he could no longer hold any events on his property. The immediate response from the promoters was to cancel the event.

After speaking with the band members, however, the promoters were able to find an alternate venue that met most of the needs of the festival. Within less than 24 hours the festival went from being cancelled to back on, just in a new location. When speaking with the participants about how this affected their expectations, many went from feeling as if they had been "punched in the gut" to feeling as if they were "playing on house money." For some, it made them realize just how important this event was to their quality of life, something they had not necessarily recognized in the initial pre-festival interview.

*I had been camping and without access to a phone or email when the fan listserv and Facebook page lit up with the news of the cancellation. Upon my return I saw a number of missed calls and text messages of fans distraught about the last-minute surprise. My initial reaction was, "Oh, crap. There goes my study!" That immediately turned into the realization that an awesome weekend of music was now gone, too. As I read through the text messages I saw that the tone began to change; the weekend had been salvaged by some late-game heroics on the part of the band and promoters. The study, and the music, was back on. I then acknowledged the importance of this festival on a number of levels*

*causing me to approach the weekend with a feeling of gratitude.* – Excerpt from Justin Harmon's preevent field notes

When recreationists enter into an activity with a preconstructed notion of what to expect, it may guide their experience and serve as the default for memory reconstruction, leading to greater desire for future involvement. While the DMF was viewed by all who participated as important, that sensation was reinforced by the cancellation announcement. Because of this, participants took stock in not only the importance of the weekend to their lives but also their total involvement in general. Much as Stewart (1998) stressed the biographical importance of experience, fans further embodied this ideal when they thought they had lost this significant annual event in their lives. As indicated by Maines et al. (1983), the value and meaning of participants' past involvement was never clearer than when the ability to participate in the present was threatened by the potential cancellation.

*This show is being put on by people like you for people like you ... It is our desire to provide a place where the Jackmormons ARE the festival ... A place where we will gather, enjoy the music with our longtime friends as well as friends we have not yet met, our extended family ... A place to be among friends and people who are there for the same reasons as you; to enjoy the music that holds a special place in all our hearts. — From the last edition of the promoters annual prefestival announcement entitled "The Vision."*

## **Conclusion**

*"Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards."* – Soren Kierkegaard

As suggested by this study, the reconstruction of memory affects expectations for leisure participation. Though we separated the temporal dimensions for analysis, it cannot be stressed enough that life is experienced as a succession of moments that blend together and are viewed as a series of accumulating events, often understood as a whole (Clawson & Knetsch, 1966). While this might cause leisure providers to want to facilitate experiences in a certain way to yield the best experience (Ellis & Rossman, 2008), and therefore the best memory of the experience, it might serve providers to focus instead on how the memory is reconstructed. If a narrative can be promoted about a leisure experience before consumers take part, it may prompt participants to use that established narrative as a framework to construct their memory of participation for the better. This was emphasized through the study's participants' drawing off their shared, past experiences together; they had created their own narrative to follow. An implication of this is that providers of experiences may benefit from getting participants to somehow invest themselves, so that they are able to psychically become a part of the experience offered, rather than simply doing everything for the participant. Providers need to facilitate participants' agency so that they feel as if they have a sense ownership over their involvement and the outcome of their experience. Using the interactivity of the web 2.0, leisure providers may enable their participants to enact their agency through the use of different media to co-construct narratives that in turn results in a vested buy-in to the product, service, or organization. By aiding/allowing recreationists to create goals for participation beforehand, it gives providers insights and points of emphasis to focus on to create the ultimate takeaway during the experience. Additionally,



while peak moments are important for the recollection of an experience (Kahneman et al., 1993), often it is what transpires closest to the end that drives the earliest stages of memory reconstruction. And while there may have been peak moments that were negative during the DMF, such as the potential cancellation announcement, the loss of deposits on lodging, and travel headaches, the residual positive peak moments that followed overshadowed those tribulations thus giving credence to the idea that “remembered/overall happiness” is better predicted by happiness at the end than the peaks or valleys that precede it (Kemp et al., 2008).

If negative events transpire during the overall experience, it follows that orchestrated events, such as those sought by the experience industry, should as much as possible have a predetermined positive “closing event” to offset any undesirable moments that may have occurred (Dustin et al., in press). Even if it is a minor gesture, if the final component of the experience is positive, the immediate recollection may serve as the focal point to stimulate a connection to the other positive moments that occurred throughout participation, thus deemphasizing the less desirable aspects leading to a greater desire for future involvement.

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