

Reminiscence and wellbeing – reflecting on past festival experiences during Covid lockdowns

Reminiscence
and wellbeing

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Abstract

Purpose – To explore the value in reminiscing about past festivals as a potential way of improving wellbeing in socially isolated times.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper uses previous research on reminiscence, nostalgia and wellbeing to underpin the analysis of self-recorded memory narratives. These were gathered from 13 pairs of festivalgoers during Covid-19 restrictions and included gathering their individual memories and their reminiscences together. The participant pairs were a mix of friends, family and couples who had visited festivals in the UK, Finland and Denmark.

Findings – Four key areas that emerged through the analysis were the emotions of nostalgia and anticipation, and the processes of reliving emotions and bonding through memories.

Research limitations/implications – Future studies could take a longitudinal approach to see how memory sharing evolves and the impact of this on wellbeing. The authors also recommend undertaking similar studies in other cultural settings.

Practical implications – This study findings have implications for both post-festival marketing and for the further development of reminiscence therapy interventions.

Originality/value – The method provides a window into memory sharing that has been little used in previous studies. The narratives confirm the value in sharing memories and the positive impact this has on wellbeing. They also illustrate that this happens through positive forms of nostalgia that centre on gratitude and lead to hope and optimism. Anticipation, not emphasised in other studies, was also found to be important in wellbeing and was triggered through looking back at happier times.

Keywords Music festivals, Covid-19, Sharing memories, Wellbeing, Nostalgia

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

Covid-19 saw many countries move to lockdowns, limited social gatherings and the cancellation of events and festivals (Davies, 2021). There has been much ensuing research on the effect of the resulting limited social contact and isolation on wellbeing and loneliness (Hwang *et al.*, 2020). Our study uses conversations held during lockdowns that focus on memories of festivals attended during “normal” times. These allow us to gain insights into the value of reminiscence as a tool to improve wellbeing. Although there is already a substantial body of literature on reminiscence and wellbeing, this focuses largely on older adults with



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little that considers this from the viewpoint of younger people or in times of enforced isolation (Bryant *et al.*, 2005).

The joy, freedom and escape that music festivals can bring was undoubtedly keenly missed during the many lockdowns faced by most countries in 2020 and 2021 (Green and Bennett, 2020; Kinnunen and Honkanen, 2021). Feeling deprived or missing out exacerbates the negative effects on wellbeing of more general social isolation (Kaczynski *et al.*, 2022). The desire to feel better during such times of crisis is therefore more likely to lead to reminiscence about social experiences and nostalgia for better times (Zhou *et al.*, 2022).

Within the large body of research that evidences the negative effects of Covid lockdowns on wellbeing (psychological, emotional, social and physical) (Marchetti *et al.*, 2022), there is also a growing evidence base for the factors which protect against adverse effects on wellbeing during such crises (Mead *et al.*, 2021). For example, a recent longitudinal study found that those with the psychological resources of hope, gratitude and optimism suffered lesser negative effects on wellbeing (Pellerin and Raufaste, 2020). This suggests the need to find ways to build such resources outside of challenging times to be better prepared for them. Reminiscence may be one tool that helps to develop these resources and one that can be drawn upon specifically during such times.

The period of covid lockdowns and cancelled festivals provided us with an ideal context in which to explore our research question: How does reminiscing about past festival attendance improve wellbeing during periods of limited social contact?

2. Literature

We have chosen to view wellbeing from Ryff's (1989) psychological wellbeing perspective as this encompasses aspects of emotion, sociality and purpose and has a stronger theoretical basis than subjective wellbeing (Christopher, 1999). There is also a useful existing body of research that explores memory from a psychological wellbeing perspective. The literature drawn upon here considers the psychological and health perspectives relating to reminiscence. In considering these we also focus on the emotion of nostalgia which is one of the more common feelings associated with reminiscence. We discuss the importance of remembering other "better" times during times of difficulty, stress or challenge and how these remembered moments tend to be those that have emotional intensity.

Festivals are memorable moments for many as they entail sociality, escape from routine, novelty, and emotional highs and lows (Wu *et al.*, 2020). Remembering such times during Covid-19 therefore is likely to be more meaningful than other more mundane memories (Kaczynski *et al.*, 2022). The intensity of festival experience has the potential to create melancholy, joy and all emotions in between, both at the time and in reminiscing afterwards (Rodríguez-Campo *et al.*, 2022; Wood and Kenyon, 2018). Previous research on festival memories has highlighted how these often revolve around others, the social interactions within a liminal time and place (Wood and Kinnunen, 2020). This is where the stories to be shared and retold later are formed. Remembering these together is also, therefore, likely to elicit a greater emotional response and has the potential to improve wellbeing. Here we seek to better understand what effect, if any, such memories have on psychological wellbeing during Covid-19.

2.1 Reminiscence and wellbeing

Reminiscence is a free-flowing process of thinking or talking about one's experiences in order to reflect on and recapture significant events of a lifetime. Latha *et al.* (2014), p. 18,

In line with the above definition, we define reminiscence as a "process" of remembering and one that implies a focus on fond or positive memories. The closely related concept of

nostalgia, one of the emotions that can occur whilst reminiscing, is discussed in more depth later in this section.

Many studies have evidenced the benefits of reminiscence (Latha *et al.*, 2014). For example, Salmon (2021) considered evidence-based strategies for improving wellbeing during Covid-19 lockdowns and cites “talking about the past” as an important strategy between parent and child. She concludes that “everyday reminiscing conversations facilitate [children’s] development in myriad ways and are especially important under pandemic circumstances” (Salmon, 2021, p. 571).

Pre-pandemic research with younger adults found that students who reminisced about pleasant experiences from the past had more positive emotional experiences in the present (Bryant, 2003). This finding extends earlier research in older populations (for example, Havighurst and Glasser, 1972) to a younger population and suggests that “positive reminiscence largely serves an adaptive function” (Havighurst and Glasser, 1972, p. 248). Conversely, negative self-reminiscence has a significant negative effect on wellbeing, that is, dwelling on past sadness, failure, shame (O’Rourke *et al.*, 2011). Such studies of reminiscence reinforce the large body of more general research in psychology on the importance of a positive mindset for wellbeing.

What we remember changes over the life course and research has identified what has become known as the “reminiscence bump” (Glück and Bluck, 2007). This bump in memory refers to the fact that we tend to recall more personal events from adolescence and early adulthood than from other lifetime periods. This is partly explained by differential encoding in that events in adolescence and early adulthood are stored better than in other lifetime periods. Other explanations put forward are that more events happen in that period (firsts, major life changes); that we like to remember being younger; that we form identity then; that we experience more novel events then; and that the brain works better when we are younger (Janssen *et al.*, 2008). Although the festival demographic is increasingly broad and many festivals attract a wide age range, it is likely that the first time we go to a festival will be the most memorable and this is likely to happen when we are younger. This may therefore be the experience that we choose to reminisce about and the one that contains the more powerful emotional memories.

As well as the period we reminisce about there are also differences in the effects of how we reminisce. O’Rourke *et al.’s* (2011) longitudinal study of the effect of self-reminiscence (alone) and prosocial reminiscence (with others) found that reminiscing with others enabled positive emotional experiences and had a positive effect on wellbeing leading to positive self-reminiscence. When we reminisce with others we tend to focus on the positive and this enables more positive self-reminiscence which then positively effects wellbeing. Our study explores both self-reminiscence and prosocial by using both individual and shared memories.

As can be concluded from the above discussion the wellbeing benefits of reminiscence are well evidenced and have led to the development of “Reminiscence Therapy”. This is a psychotherapeutic technique which encourages the review of past positive experiences to develop greater self-esteem and personal satisfaction (Mosby, 2009). The therapy is based on the premise that “reminiscence is highly associated with pleasure, security, health, and a feeling of belonging to a place” and that both recalling good and bad aspects of life are “significantly associated with psychological well-being” (Chiang *et al.*, 2010, p. 381).

Bryant *et al.’s* (2005, p. 249) work sheds further light on the value of reminiscence therapy in that “the value of positive reminiscence lies not in its use as a form of escape from present problems, but rather as a constructive tool for providing a sense of perspective in the present”. This links the past to the present in that “consciously attending to the specific aspects of an ongoing positive experience one finds pleasurable [. . .] facilitate active memory-building, a primary means through which people strive to capture the joy of happy moments” (Bryant *et al.*, 2005, p. 252). Knowing that the experiences we have in the present

will form an important part of what we take pleasure from in remembering, and may enable us to be more mindful in the present in order to create more easily accessible and vivid memories to be drawn upon later. Indeed, [Bryant et al.'s \(2005\)](#) study found that cognitive imagery (forming images in the mind) resulted in a stronger positive emotional response to reminiscence than did physical memorabilia.

Reminiscence, by using the past to make sense of the present and create a focus for future, may help develop the psychological resources of hope, gratitude and optimism as suggested by [Mead et al. \(2021\)](#) and [Pellerin and Raufaste \(2020\)](#). It is also possible that in social reminiscing (where the memories tend to coalesce around the positive) these traits develop yet further.

2.2 Collaborative remembering and wellbeing

Collaborative remembering involves more than one person sharing memories of similar experiences. It is therefore a form of prosocial reminiscence but one where both parties have knowledge of the focus of the memory rather than merely telling another of a memory. [Pasupathi and Wainryb \(2018\)](#), in their review of research on the function of collaborative remembering, note that the more emotionally intense the experience the more it is shared and more rapidly (also see [Rimé et al., 1998](#)).

Although individual remembering of occasions spent together enhances intimacy and functions as relationship maintenance ([Alea and Bluck, 2007](#)), this is achieved more effectively through collaborative discussion. Furthermore, sharing memories can enhance the quality of the memory in terms of emotional intensity, accuracy, structured narrative and meaning. These higher quality memories provide an important function in terms of building more intimate stronger relationships and group identity formation ([Pasupathi and Wainryb, 2018](#)).

Although perceived accuracy can result from collaborative remembering, [French et al. \(2008\)](#) found that conversations between couples, friends, family are more likely to result in false memory creation. This is likely due to the desire to create a consensus and therefore a shared reality. This often manifests in emotional synchrony and an agreement on what was felt at the time ([Páez et al., 2015](#); [Wood, 2020](#); [Wood and Kenyon, 2018](#)).

2.3 Nostalgia

One of the emotions often felt when reminiscing either alone or with others is that of nostalgia. Nostalgia arises often as a result of an unhappiness in the present, a feeling of not belonging or anxiety ([May, 2017](#)). Covid-19 restrictions therefore create an ideal environment in which nostalgia might flourish.

Although often associated with yearning, longing and melancholy, nostalgia is also seen as a positive way of thinking about the present based upon possibly idealised versions of the past. "Nostalgia can be either restorative, aiming to bring again what ostensibly was, or reflective creating contentment with the past as the past, even if embellished" ([Gvion, 2009](#), p. 52). It can also be forward-looking and optimistic ([Hartmann and Brunk, 2019](#); [May, 2017](#)). Nostalgia therefore links to the development of the psychological resources of gratitude, hope and optimism needed to weather difficult times ([Pellerin and Raufaste, 2020](#)).

[Hartmann and Brunk \(2019, p. 672\)](#) consider the complexity of nostalgia and view it as having three different modalities: 1) "reluctant" (era-focused melancholy and negative nostalgia mourning past belonging), 2) "progressive" (productive, reflective and anchoring bringing past and present together) and/or 3) "playful", foregrounding the fun, ironic and ludic dimensions of nostalgia. It seems likely that the progressive and playful forms of nostalgia would emerge in collaborative remembering ([O'Rourke et al., 2011](#)) and result in feelings of hope and optimism. Self-reminiscence may tend to "reluctant" nostalgia and take a more melancholic form.

In their study of festival narratives and nostalgia, [Holyfield et al. \(2013, p. 474\)](#) conclude that “nostalgic sentiment can provide an anchoring to community”. They also emphasise the important role that music plays in nostalgia, identity and community. Both identity and community suggest routes to wellbeing.

Nostalgia can therefore be experienced through self- or shared reminiscence, and although nostalgia can include feeling unhappy with the present (longing for an imagined better past), it can lead to plans for the future and a contentment with the past. Both of which have the potential to enhance wellbeing ([Cho, 2020](#)).

[Cho's \(2020\)](#) study of nostalgia in leisure participation evidences the impact of nostalgia on psychological wellbeing and behavioural intention. [Cho \(2020\)](#) also found a significant link between positive nostalgia and a high desire to engage in the activity that is the subject of that nostalgia again. In summary, “leisure nostalgia positively affects life satisfaction, which affects the likelihood of leisure participation” ([Cho, 2020, p. 103](#)). Building on this work, [Roslan and Cho \(2022\)](#) studied nostalgia during the Covid pandemic finding that “nostalgia is an appropriate positive emotion, which has the propensity to enhance the well-being of sport participants regardless of not participating in sport over a prolonged amount of time” ([Roslan and Cho, 2022, p. 10](#)). It is therefore likely that festivalgoers deprived of attending would similarly find nostalgia a positive emotion.

Music has a particular role to play in nostalgia in that it can be nostalgic in its own right but also in the memories it evokes. [Gibbs and Egermann's \(2021\)](#) study of music-evoked nostalgia during Covid-19 concludes that nostalgic music creates positive emotions, which influence wellbeing. This happens “through acknowledgment and reflecting on sad difficult times, and a sense of appreciation“ ([Gibbs and Egermann, 2021, p. 15](#)). This appreciation of the past suggests a feeling of gratitude which builds emotional resilience to more difficult times in the present.

Music, as a core component of the music festival experience, may have a distinct role to play in attendee reminiscence. Even if seeing the performer is not at the core of the recalled memory, the music listened to forms a backdrop to the remembered moments. Hearing that music again may therefore conjure up nostalgic feelings and enhance the emotional response to the memory. This has been shown to have psychological benefits ([Jakubowski and Ghosh, 2021](#); [Sedikides et al., 2022](#)). Music has also been combined with reminiscence therapy to positive affect ([Istvandity, 2017](#)).

The literature suggests that memories and wellbeing are interconnected and that there is a potential healing power in actively remembering. Our study therefore seeks to explore the self- and collaborative reminiscences of festivals experienced prior to lockdowns. Undertaking the research during the Covid-19 pandemic provides a context that, for many, had a negative impact on wellbeing, and provided more reflective time to look back at different or better times. Based on the literature review we have chosen to focus on the act of reminiscence, the feelings of nostalgia and the effect of this process and emotional response on wellbeing. This will shed light on the aspects of remembering that are most beneficial and the factors that might encourage such positive reflection.

3. Methodology

For the UK, research ethics approval was acquired from the first author's institution. In Finland, according to the guidelines of the Finnish National Board of Research Integrity, ethical review was not required, because all participants were adults, they gave their consent, and the research was not physically or mentally harmful and did not involve threats to safety ([Kohonen et al., 2019, p. 19](#)).

Research participants were recruited with the help of earlier festival surveys where respondents opted in, supplying their contact details to participate in follow up interviews.

They were contacted by an email describing the purpose of the research and asked if they had visited an overnight music festival with a companion who would be willing to take part in the research as well. It was explained that they would need to make three recordings: both of them were to record individually their own memories of the festival experience and after that, they should make a shared recording of the joint reminiscence. Both of the research participants had to give their written consent. Since the response rate was quite low (1.5%), snowballing was also used in participant recruitment. Upon completion of all the defined tasks, each participant was sent a 20 GBP voucher funded by the first author's institution.

Data collection was done in March–July 2021, that is, in the middle of the Covid-19 restrictions. The use of self-recorded conversations (Kinnunen *et al.*, 2022) was perfectly suited to the exceptional situation. We recruited 13 pairs (couples, friends or family members) who had visited together any overnight music festival (see Table 1). The reminiscence could be of any year of their choice. The only requirement was that they had travelled to another location and stayed there overnight, thus making the festival experience long-lasting and perhaps more memorable.

The pairs were asked to firstly self-record their own, individual memories of the festival in question, and then get together in the most convenient way (either in person or virtually) for recording their shared conversation of the festival experience. Participants were free to choose either audio or video recording, and all of them made audio recordings which they sent to the researchers. The researchers' influence was restricted to the instructions given by email, and participants never met the researchers. The instructions were purposefully very general in order not to direct participants too much. The overall instruction for the individual recording was: "We'd like you to record yourself talking through your memories of a festival you attended. Just your thoughts, memories, feelings with no particular audience in mind." They were asked to talk about the most memorable moments and how it felt to remember them. For the shared recording the participants were simply advised: "The only instruction this time is to talk to each other about the festival. Have a good old reminisce. Fine if this strays into how thinking about the past makes you feel now." When recording their memories, participants soon forgot the existence of the imagined researcher, and both individual and shared memories were vivid, humorous and full of details.

All the recordings were transcribed, including audible reactions like sighs, laughter, etc. The total length of the recordings was 19 h 12 min. Individual recordings lasted on average 22 min and shared ones 50 min.

The reason for making three separate recordings was to make it possible to identify differences in the stories of the same experience, and to see how the festival memories and

Pseudonyms	Relationship	Country	Festival
Sharon and Susie	Friends	UK	Glastonbury 2017, UK
Emily and Beck	Mother and daughter	UK	Beautiful Days Festival 2019, UK
Isla and Sam	Couple	UK	Glastonbury 2016, UK
Kate and Oliver	Couple	Finland	Naamat Rock Festival 2019, Finland
Sari and Albert	Couple	Finland	Pori Jazz Festival 2019, Finland
Ivy and Noah	School mates	Finland	Flow Festival 2017, Finland
Aleksi and Joni	House mates	Finland	Roskilde Festival 2015, Denmark
Lisa and Nicola	Friends	Finland	Roskilde Festival 2016, Denmark
Freya and Harry	Couple	Finland	Flow Festival 2019, Finland
Sara and Karen	Friends	Finland	Download 2011, UK
Jenni and Laura	Friends	Finland	Ruisrock 2019, Finland
Olivia and Milly	Friends	Finland	Flow Festival 2016, Finland
Remi and Amelia	Friends	Finland	Ilosaarirock 2016, Finland

Table 1.
Research participants
(*N* = 13 pairs)

Source(s): Authors' own work

emotions attached to them developed in the process of first reminiscing alone and then collectively. The recordings were so rich in context and emotions that they were analysed for various research purposes. One of them was to evaluate the new data collection method, self-recorded conversations, in the middle of meeting restrictions caused by Covid-19 pandemic (for results, see [Kinnunen et al., 2022](#)). The second aim was to see how the memory negotiation process proceeded and why, and this analysis was published in [Wood et al. \(2023\)](#). An ongoing analysis evaluates the festival narratives presented in the recordings. For the purposes of the present study, participants were asked to describe, how it felt to reminisce about the past festival experience. These parts of the data were used for this analysis.

As the reminiscence process involved first individual memories and then the shared conversation, it meant that the participants were “forced” to do extensive memory work that they would not usually do. This process made them remember more, particularly in the course of conversation and, most importantly for the aims of this study, the prolonged reminiscence process also revealed more emotions than an individual memory work would have done.

Thematic analysis ([Braun and Clarke, 2006](#)) was used to analyse the data. Themes emerged as the analysis was undertaken within a broad framework considering the emotions related to the act of reminiscing. The resulting narratives were often poignant as memories of social festival experience took on greater meaning at a time when social gatherings were heavily restricted.

First, the excerpts that described the feelings that reminiscence generated were drawn out. The transcripts were gone through looking for indications of emotions that were caused by the reminiscence process. These were re-read various times, looking for patterns that defined outcomes of the reminiscence process: feelings, emotions, motives, future intentions, etc. Even though the transcripts included the most clear non-verbal reactions, the audio recordings were included in the analysis process for a more complete understanding of the emotions and feelings involved. Similar patterns were grouped together as potential themes that were then reviewed, defined and named ([Braun and Clarke, 2006](#)) with the aim to describe the various dimensions of both self- and collaborative reminiscence.

4. Findings and discussion

The participants chose festivals from a wide range of years, the oldest being ten years ago and the newest from the year before the pandemic (see [Table 1](#)). The oldest memories included episodes that were probably discussed various times before, but not necessarily in as much depth as this kind of reminiscence process evoked. The most recent memories, in turn, were generally more rich in details.

Much was learned from the way things were said and the emotional responses heard rather than just the spoken words. We have tried to capture some of this through the discussion and quotations below. The discussion is structured under the four key themes that emerged through the analysis. These are the emotions of nostalgia and anticipation, and the processes of reliving emotions and bonding through memories.

In the shared recordings, the conversations always led to amusing or poignant memories, shared laughter and sometimes tears. Emotional connection, wellbeing and a longing for those experiences again emerged through this sharing of memories. Even unpleasant experiences had this effect when shared.

4.1 Nostalgia

Three major types of nostalgia were identified: longing for the times before the pandemic; nostalgia related to one’s youth, and music as a trigger for memories. Since the shared memories were recorded in the middle of Covid-19 restrictions, participants described how

they felt nostalgic when talking about pre-corona festival experiences (Gvion, 2009; Roslan and Cho, 2022). Sharing memories of previous festivals gave them feelings of comfort. It was enjoyable to reminisce about festival experiences when festivals of the previous summer had been cancelled and it was likely that the same would happen for the next summer (2021).

It was just such a good experience. I'll definitely never forget going, just, it's amazing. I'm so disappointed that it's not happening again this year. (Sharon, individual)

This reminiscence cheers you up since at the moment it's not possible to do anything else but reminisce, because of the Covid-19 situation. (Sara, individual)

The reminiscence of the past created positive feelings in the middle of the health crisis and helped in coping with the situation (as found by Bryant *et al.*, 2005). In Sharon and Susie's case, as the conversation continued, they became nostalgic and started to plan their return to festivals.

Sharon: It is a bit disappointing now that it's been cancelled for two years.

Susie: I know, but do you think anything will hit the highs of that first year that you went.

Sharon: No I don't. So, yeah, really, I'd pay double to go, yeah.

Susie: Yeah. Me too. We'll go again, won't we?

Sharon: Yeah.

Susie: [laughs] I want to go now after all the talking about it.

The perception of better times before the pandemic made people feel grateful for those times and nurtured hope and optimism for the Covid-free future illustrated further in the section "Anticipation". These feelings of gratitude, hope and optimism have been found to build resilience, and the ability to cope better with future challenging situations. These are therefore building blocks of wellbeing (Cho, 2020; Pellerin and Raufaste, 2020).

A further type of nostalgia was related to youth. Some of the participants were quite young during the festival they talked about. As they reminisced about their first festival experience now, they emphasised how young they were at the time, how many things had happened since then, and how the experience would not be the same at the current age. But still, "that was life!"

Good memories, like real good memories. It's been so long. I can't believe how young we were. Like halfway through high school. (Remi, shared)

The memories of an important experience of one's youth, the first festival, were a fond memory formed during the "reminiscence bump". This is the period of time in late adolescence/early adulthood that tends to provide the most memories (Glück and Bluck, 2007; Janssen *et al.*, 2008). The first festival was one of the rites of passage towards adulthood, probably occurring around the same time as moving from home and starting independent student life (Green and Bennett, 2020).

I'm surprised how touched I've been from this reminiscence. Things have changed a lot since then. I've moved to live on my own, started to study, found a new relationship and lots of new people in my life, and a new working place. (Jenni, individual)

The third type of nostalgia was related to mementos of the festival experience, particularly if hearing accidentally (or purposefully) the music that was performed at the time (Istvandity, 2017). Music reminded them of the atmosphere and happenings, and recreated feelings of the time. This also strengthened the wellbeing effects of the reminiscence (Jakubowski and Ghosh (2021), Sedikides *et al.*, 2022).

I've thought and reminisced that gig many times, particularly if I hear a Toto's song in the radio [...] You'll get into a good mood when reminiscing how we listened to those songs and danced a bit and sang. It was such a nice, shared, intimate time. You'll always get a warm, good feeling of it. (Albert, individual)

4.2 Anticipation

Interestingly, although not signposted in our review of the literature, we found that one of the emotions often expressed was anticipation and this manifested in a number of different ways. One of these was the connection between the past and the future (Hartmann and Brunk, 2019; May, 2017). This encapsulates the optimistic elements of nostalgia that are so important for wellbeing (Pellerin and Raufaste, 2020).

Sharing memories about the past festivals brought the summer closer, and participants stressed how it produced warm feelings in the middle of cold and dark winter. They started to look forward to the next summer and festivals.

You miss it. 'Cause you've experienced such a good feeling at the festival, you want to experience it again. (Laura, individual)

It brings back warm memories, like summer and a kind of carefree vibe. (Kate, shared)

At the same time, participants said that they anticipated the return of festivals even more intensely due to the cancelled festival summer of 2020. This anticipation, caused by the pandemic, extended to other live music events and social gatherings. A felt deprivation therefore triggered a stronger longing and the optimistic feeling of "looking forward to". This again illustrated the coping strategies employed as participants missed the perceived worry-free times before the health crisis.

Sara: ... what we've reminisced about ... it makes you smile and such a good feeling, warm feeling and then, please please ... If you had to pray for something, I would pray that we'll get back to the normal. That we could see live music without any of these restrictions and festivals would start again, this is what you have to wish.

Karen: Yea, there's no other way but you just have to try to stay healthy and wait. Hope that all this would somehow start again and calm down but ...

The anticipation of the new festival summer produced hope and, finally, optimism despite the situation at the time of reminiscence (Mead *et al.*, 2021; Pellerin and Raufaste, 2020). Sari and Albert wanted to recreate their festival experience even though the festival was not arranged. They travelled to the festival town and, as they illustrate in their shared memory conversation, arranged their own, private festival, celebrating their former experience and making it even more valued and memorable.

Sari: And last year, when there was no Pori Jazz Festival, we went to Pori anyway, like the concert was there, and we listened to this headliner on YouTube when we drove to Pori, in July 2020. And then we went to the spa hotel ...

Albert: ... and we danced on the beach and played the music.

Sari: Yes. We danced on the beach, though we are almost 50, and it was wonderful. We are so looking forward to it. Even if there is no festival, we said we would go anyway. Even if it's just the two of us. And so it was, the whole beach was totally empty, and there we were, having our own fringe festival.

While reminiscing, you could also relive the feelings of excitement, by gradually rebuilding the anticipation and awe at the time as Sam's self-reminiscence demonstrated:

You wake up really excited about it. It's not like an ordinary festival, . . . on the drive down the signage kind of builds up a bit of the anticipation, builds up the excitement because you know, incrementally, you're getting closer and closer (Sam, individual).

In remembering the anticipation in the run up to the event Sam relives and draws pleasure from feelings of anticipation and excitement.

4.3 *Reliving emotions*

As participants talked about their festival memories, they were creating a new enjoyable experience and having fun. As some of them said (see Sara and Karen's shared conversation in the previous section), the reminiscence made them smile, produced warm feelings and enabled them to feel gratitude for what they had experienced (Pellerin and Raufaste, 2020). Sari intentionally went back to the happy, summer memories. Talking aloud about the festival memories made her relive the emotions very vividly, even years after the event.

During the dark winter, when there's snow and it's freezing cold, I've often returned to these memories, music and atmosphere. [. . .] When you close your eyes, you can go back two years. If I had a time machine, I would go back there, even just for five minutes. (Sari, individual)

These memories of summer helped our participants to get through dark and eventless winters almost regardless of the Covid lockdowns. Through the memories they recreated joy and happiness as Lisa illustrates:

That one Roskilde trip, how long it lasts into those dark winter days, that's so incredible. Like that gives you something to remember, something that gives you joy even after a long time. (Lisa, shared)

In the following quote, wellbeing is produced in reliving an intense emotional moment that is shared with the imagined researcher. From her emotional tone, saying the memory out loud seems to make her feel better, and, from the joint recording, is not something Isla would necessarily share with her partner or brother. The recording, therefore, provided a safe place to share it and therefore brought it to the forefront of memory enhancing wellbeing (akin to reminiscence therapy) (Mosby, 2009).

I just felt really happy standing next to my brother watching this great artist, and just having a really, like, heartfelt moment with my brother. (Isla, individual)

Susie expresses the emotional benefit of her individual reminiscence. The act of reminiscence brings enjoyment,

I've quite enjoyed this, having the opportunity to rant on about Glastonbury [laughs]. (Susie, individual)

We also found examples of how remembering good times led clearly to feelings of gratitude or feeling lucky for past experiences. As Mead *et al.* (2021) state, this is likely to have a significant impact on wellbeing,

I love them all, but there is something just really special about Glastonbury, and I hope I get to go again but if I don't then, I've been four times. I've been very lucky to be able to go those four times. (Sharon, individual)

4.4 *Bonding through shared memories*

In particular the shared conversations rebonded our participants as they enjoyed their memories together. Laura emphasised how the collective reminiscence made her remember more of what they had experienced together.

I thought about what I'd say before [I started recording]. Maybe that's why it ended up shorter than I'd thought. Somehow it was more difficult. Now when we talked together, I noticed I got vibes from you all the time. All the time more and more things coming to mind. (Laura, shared)

When people were talking about whom they shared the memories with, they said that mostly it happened with their festival companion. This sharing took place just after the festival, but also at the time of Covid-19 restrictions. However, it was clear that no one had done such extensive memory work that was required in this study. It was enjoyable to remember together, and it brought them closer (Alea and Bluck, 2007; Holyfield *et al.*, 2013):

Sari: And it's also been so nice remembering it like this.

Albert: Yea.

Sari: Somehow this brings us closer.

Everyone agreed that talking about the shared memories made them feel good and connected, creating positive emotions (O'Rourke *et al.*, 2011). Making the recording together made participants remember more of their shared time, and things that they had forgotten were brought back to life.

Lisa: But maybe this is good, just sitting down and really taking the time to remember it for the first time.

Nicola: And I'm so sure that this recording will start a kind of flow, like you start remembering even more.

Lisa: Yea.

Nicola: Like everything you've missed.

Sara and Karen even imagined how they would tell their festival memories to their children as they grow older and start attending festivals. A further example of the pleasure is anticipation and the long-lasting value of memories (Wood *et al.*, 2023). This way they would produce a further sense of belonging with others who were not there at the time, but who may build similar kinds of memories on their own in the future.

And just think when little Ava is of the age, you'll tell her and show pictures, 'see, here we are with granny Sara when we went (laugh) to this festival. When granny Sara and mum were young' (laugh). (Sara, shared)

The collaborative remembering strengthened the bonds between the participants. It was not just bonding and spending quality time together at the festival, but the reminiscence process made them closer as well (Rimé *et al.*, 1998; Pasupathi and Wainryb, 2018). The collaborative remembering in the prosocial form of paired conversations demonstrated how memories were not only retold but also reconstructed together (Wood, 2020; Wood *et al.*, 2023; Wood and Kenyon, 2018).

5. Conclusion

As our participants drew new emotional experiences from their reminiscences and described how they felt reminiscing about the festival experience, it became clear that this process positively affected wellbeing (Bryant *et al.*, 2005; Cho, 2020). This is in line with much of the existing work in positive psychology but also emphasises the importance of social experiences remembered and of remembering these with others (French *et al.*, 2008; Pasupathi and Wainryb, 2018).

Our findings thus build upon recent work within tourism and events that evidences the importance of post-event memory sharing for attitude formation and behavioural intentions (Cho, 2020; Wood and Kinnunen, 2020). Here we see these effects but focus on wellbeing,

concluding that sharing memories of a social experience with likeminded others leads to feelings of gratitude, optimism and hope (see [Mead et al., 2021](#)).

We also provide evidence of the importance of, not only reflecting back on a more positive era during challenging times, but on also looking forward positively to the future. The emotion of anticipation arose from nostalgia many times in the narratives. This anticipation of better times further illustrates hope and optimism as an outcome of memory sharing and also underpins behavioural intentions. Although our research was conducted during Covid lockdowns, and that this may have led to heightened emotions of nostalgia, we are confident that the wellbeing effects of memory sharing would apply more generally.

5.1 Practical implications

Our findings have implications for both post-festival marketing and for the further development of reminiscence therapy interventions. Remembering past festival experiences made people long for, and in some cases actively plan for, their next festival trip. This is important for post-event marketing, where tools such as social media could be utilised to encourage previous festivalgoers to share their memories. This would influence their own decisions to reattend or to attend other similar events and also illustrate the memory value to others.

Past positive experiences help those in reminiscence therapy to gain better self-esteem and personal satisfaction ([Mosby, 2009](#)). The use of different facilitators, like music, photos and videos, were proven to be useful in our study (see also Future research). Furthermore, active reminiscence of positive experiences in the past was shown to create positive emotions in the time of crisis, in our case, Covid lockdowns.

5.2 Theoretical implications

The study adopted a new data collection method, self-recorded conversations, that was highly suitable for times of restricted social contacts but also shows promise more generally. The method provided good quality data that demonstrated various wellbeing impacts. The depth of data undoubtedly resulted from the participants soon forgetting that they were reminiscing for research purposes, particularly during the collaborative remembering. This level of intimacy would not have been possible with the presence of researcher.

The method provides a window into memory sharing that has been little used in previous studies. The narratives confirm the value in sharing memories and the positive impact this has on wellbeing. They also illustrate that this happens through positive forms of nostalgia that centre on gratitude and lead to hope and optimism. Anticipation, not emphasised in other studies, was also found to be important in wellbeing and was triggered through looking back at happier times.

5.3 Future research

We feel we have scratched the surface of festival reminiscence research here and in doing so have uncovered several avenues for further research. One of the main aspects that shows promise is the often-overlooked emotion of nostalgia-induced anticipation. Understanding better how this is triggered in sharing memories would be useful for relationship marketing, repeat attendance and word of mouth. It would also add to the conceptual understanding of both anticipatory nostalgia (missing the present before its gone) and anticipated nostalgia (looking forward to feeling nostalgic). Both are gaining greater interest within the psychology of emotions and tourism fields ([Bergs et al., 2020](#); [Cheung et al., 2020](#)).

A further area to explore is how to trigger memories that positively effect wellbeing. Some participants mentioned that positive memories were initiated by accidentally hearing a song that was played at the festival. Others purposefully watched videos of the festival or browsed

through old photos. Previous research has either championed the use of such stimuli (Holyfield *et al.*, 2013) or shown that this can distract from the formation of more powerful mental imagery (Bryant *et al.*, 2005). Investigating the wellbeing effects of memorabilia vs cognitive imagery in shared memory conversations would shed greater light on this and inform the adaptation of reminiscence therapy interventions.

5.4 Limitations

As well as these areas for further research we also recognise the limitations of our study. We have a relatively small sample that considers memory sharing between pairs of intimates. Memory sharing in other types and sizes of social groups also needs to be investigated. Furthermore, this needs to be extended beyond European participants as much of the emotional response and resulting wellbeing may be culturally bound (Mesquita *et al.*, 1997). Finally, our study captured memories shared at one point in time. To fully understand the wellbeing effects, a longitudinal approach is needed which considers how the memories shared and the emotional response change with the frequency of sharing and distance from the event.

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