



Nostalgia as a Resource for Psychological Health and Well-Being

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Abstract

Historically, nostalgia has been viewed as a disease of the brain or the mind. However, in recent years, nostalgia has received a conceptual rehabilitation due to a revival of scholarly interest accompanied by the use of contemporary empirical methods. Drawing upon this recent work, we propose that nostalgia is an important resource for psychological health and well-being. We begin by detailing the characteristics of the nostalgic experience and then discuss a wide range of studies demonstrating that psychological threat triggers nostalgia, nostalgia enhances psychological health and well-being, and nostalgia promotes adaptive psychological functioning among individuals at risk for poor mental health. We also highlight the need for future research on nostalgia's relation to psychological health.

From the 17th century to the latter part of the 20th century, being labeled as nostalgic meant to be considered ill. In the late 17th century, a Swiss physician named Johannes Hofer coined the term nostalgia to describe what he believed to be a “cerebral disease” afflicting Swiss mercenaries who were fighting wars far from home. This disease, Hofer proposed, was caused by “the quite continuous vibrations of animal spirits through those fibers of the middle brain in which impressed traces of ideas of the Fatherland still cling” (McCann, 1941, p. 387). Individuals suffering from the disease manifested symptoms such as homesickness, anxiety, weeping episodes, irregular heartbeat, insomnia, and disordered eating (McCann, 1941). Other physicians of that era also viewed nostalgia as essentially a neurological disorder but offered alternative, yet equally questionable, explanations of its etiology. For example, because nostalgia appeared to be an epidemic among Swiss mercenaries who traveled from their Alpine homes to wage war on the lower plains of Europe, the German–Swiss physician J. J. Scheuchzer proposed that the condition might be caused by changes in atmospheric pressure that could drive blood from the heart to the brain and, in turn, trigger the symptom of sentiment (Davis, 1979). Other physicians instead believed that the true culprit was the unremitting clanging of cowbells in the Alps causing damage to the eardrum and brain (Davis, 1979). In the 19th century, nostalgia began to be perceived less as a neurological disease burdening vulnerable populations (e.g., mercenaries, seafarers) and more as a psychopathology similar to depression and experienced by a wide range of individuals separated from and longing for home (Davis, 1979). Though speculations about the causes of nostalgia varied, they had one common feature; they all ultimately viewed nostalgia as abnormal and problematic (for reviews, see: Sedikides, Wildschut, Arndt, & Routledge, 2008; Sedikides, Wildschut, & Baden, 2004).

In the current article, we present a different view of nostalgia. We argue that nostalgia, far from being an illness, is an important resource for maintaining and promoting psychological health. To this end, we first demarcate the experience of nostalgia by reviewing research on the content of nostalgic memories. That is, to understand what nostalgia is, we must first

consider what typifies the experience. We also describe research highlighting that nostalgia is experienced by people of all ages around the globe. We then turn our attention more directly to the proposal that nostalgia is a psychological resource by reviewing findings on the triggers and functions of this emotion. Specifically, we discuss a wide range of evidence that nostalgia is incited by psychological threat and serves to bolster or to restore well-being. Subsequently, we consider nostalgia's potential as an intervention to promote adaptive psychological functioning among individuals at risk for poor psychological health. As part of this discussion, we highlight the need for future research by identifying unanswered questions concerning the relation between nostalgia and psychological health or well-being.

Toward a New View of an Old Emotion: The Content and Frequency of Nostalgia

The New Oxford Dictionary of English (1998) defines nostalgia as “a sentimental longing or wistful affection for the past”. But what characterizes the experience of nostalgia? To answer this question, Wildschut, Sedikides, Arndt, and Routledge (2006) content analyzed narratives published in the periodical *Nostalgia*. The periodical invited readers to submit written narratives between 1,000 and 1,500 words in length of their own personal nostalgic stories. Contributors ranged in age from early 20s to late 80s. Wildschut and colleagues selected a sample of issues of the periodical and trained judges to code these narratives on a number of dimensions. This content analysis revealed several characteristics that typify nostalgia. First, the most common objects of nostalgia were people, followed by momentous life events. That is, when individuals engage in nostalgia, they typically think about others (e.g., family, romantic partners, and close friends) or personally treasured life events (e.g., weddings, family gatherings, vacations), which also are highly social in nature. Second, the self was prominently featured in nostalgic narratives. In most such narratives, the self played a major role, but other people were a notable presence. It was rarely the case that the self occupied a minor or observer role or was the sole actor. Third, most of the narratives followed a redemptive sequence in which negative events or feelings gave way to a positive conclusion. Finally, nostalgia narratives expressed more positive affect than negative affect.

In a second content-analysis study, Wildschut et al. (2006) solicited narrative accounts of nostalgic experiences from undergraduate students. Participants were asked to write narratives about an experience of nostalgia and then to detail how the experience made them feel. Results paralleled the effects of the previous study. The most common objects of nostalgia were other people and momentous life events. Nostalgia narratives featured the self in a major role. A redemptive sequence characterized the majority of narratives and expressions of positive affect were significantly more common than expressions of negative affect. In addition, trained coders rated participants' descriptions of how the experience of nostalgia made them feel. According to these ratings, participants experienced significantly more positive than negative affect.

Results from these content-analysis studies seem at odds with the historical portrayal of nostalgia as an illness. But is nostalgia a rarely experienced condition that is restricted to a few marginalized groups, as was thought in centuries past? To begin to answer this question, Wildschut et al. (2006) asked undergraduate students to indicate how frequently they become nostalgic. Specifically, participants checked one of seven options to indicate how frequently they experience nostalgia (i.e., at least once a day, three to four times a week, approximately twice a week, approximately once a week, once or twice a month, once every couple of months, once or twice a year). The modal response (which included 26% of participants) was three to four times a week. In all, 79% of participants reported experiencing nostalgia at least once a week and another 17% indicated that they experienced nostalgia

once or twice a month. Only 4% of them reported experiencing nostalgia less frequently than once a month. Therefore, even among relatively young adults, nostalgia is a common experience. Other studies have similarly evidenced that nostalgia is frequently experienced across different ages and cultural groups (Hepper, Robertson, Wildschut, Sedikides, & Routledge, 2013; Routledge et al., 2011; Zhou, Sedikides, Wildschut, & Gao, 2008).

Taken together, nostalgic memories are highly self-relevant while they almost invariably feature close others. In addition, persons and momentous life events are the most common objects of nostalgia. It is noteworthy that, contrary to past views, the emotional tone of nostalgia is predominantly positive. Most narratives follow a redemptive sequence, and positive emotion words far outnumber negative emotion words. Moreover, nostalgia is not rarely experienced or unique to a few vulnerable groups. Instead, nostalgia is a common experience for most individuals across ages and cultures.

The Case for Nostalgia as a Psychological Resource

The results of these content analyses seem at odds with the historical account of nostalgia as a psychological and physical malady afflicting particular groups of at-risk individuals. Nostalgia is a predominantly positive experience in which many individuals engage quite regularly. How do we reconcile this account of nostalgia with historical treatments? Further, what would make us propose that nostalgia is a resource that promotes psychological health and well-being?

To answer these two questions and set the stage for our new approach to nostalgia, let us return to the general historical account of the construct. Physicians described nostalgia as a sentiment or longing for home, coupled with a range of more problematic symptoms (e.g., weeping, insomnia, anxiety). Stated otherwise, this sentimental longing covaried with physical and psychological distress. There are two distinct ways to reinterpret these historical observations. First, at that time, the concept of nostalgia was not distinguished from the concept of homesickness. Contemporary research, however, has established that homesickness is a specific psychological vulnerability experienced by groups of people separated from close others (e.g., young people leaving the family home, immigrants) and characterized by a desire to return to one's place of origin (Van Tilburg & Vingerhoets, 1997; Van Tilburg, Vingerhoets, & Van Heck, 1996). Nostalgia, on the other hand, is an experience common to wider range of individuals and refers to a broader assortment of objects (e.g., persons, places, events). In addition, as the above-described content analyses suggest, nostalgia, unlike homesickness, is largely a positive emotional experience. Thus, one possibility is that historical treatments of nostalgia failed to differentiate it adequately from homesickness.

A second possibility is that individuals were in fact engaging in what we would now call nostalgia and that they were doing so as a means to counter thoughts and emotions that could be described as psychologically threatening (e.g., anxiety, stress). In other words, physicians may have been correct in identifying a relationship between sentimental longing and distress but incorrect as to the direction of this relationship. That is, perhaps nostalgia was not causing distress but instead distress was triggering nostalgia. This particular reinterpretation of past considerations of nostalgia requires experimental examination of the antecedents and consequences of nostalgia.

Does psychological threat trigger nostalgia?

As a first step in the process of identifying triggers of nostalgia, Wildschut et al. (2006) instructed participants to reflect on and describe the situations that they believe typically

make them feel nostalgic. Negative mood was the most commonly reported cause of nostalgia and, within this general category, loneliness was the most frequently listed discrete negative emotion. These initial qualitative reports suggested that individuals turn to nostalgia in response to psychological threat and paved the way for experimental tests. In the first such test, Wildschut and colleagues induced various mood states. Participants in a negative mood condition read a news story about the wide destruction caused by the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. Participants in a positive mood condition read an uplifting story about a recent birth of a polar bear at the London Zoo. Participants in a neutral mood condition read a story about the unmanned probe mission to Titan, Saturn's largest moon. Participants then completed positive and negative affect scales and two nostalgia measures. One measure was the Batcho Nostalgia Inventory, where individuals rate the extent to which they miss various aspects of their past (e.g., their family, friends, holidays, the way things were; Batcho, 1995). The second measure was a face-valid nostalgia scale constructed by the authors and comprising items such as "right now I am feeling nostalgic". Results supported the hypothesis that negative mood triggers nostalgia. First, the mood manipulations triggered effectively the intended mood states (e.g., participants in the tsunami condition evidenced significantly higher negative affect than participants in either the polar bear or Titan probe conditions). Critically, participants who read the tsunami story evidenced significantly more nostalgia (on both measures) than participants in either the polar bear or Titan probe conditions, and these latter two conditions did not significantly differ from one another. In short, only negative mood triggered nostalgia.

In a subsequent study, Wildschut et al. (2006) turned their attention to the notion that loneliness is a potent trigger of nostalgia. They induced loneliness experimentally by giving participants feedback that, relative to their university peers, they had scored high (versus low) on a validated measure of loneliness. Next, participants completed measures of state loneliness and nostalgia. Participants in the high loneliness condition reported greater loneliness than those in the low loneliness condition. Critically, high loneliness participants also reported significantly more nostalgia than their low loneliness counterparts (see also Wildschut, Sedikides, Routledge, Arndt, & Cordaro, 2010). This effect of induced loneliness on state nostalgia was replicated in a sample of Chinese undergraduates (Zhou et al., 2008).

Routledge et al. (2011) examined another type of psychological threat as a potential trigger of nostalgia. They hypothesized that a sense of meaninglessness would increase nostalgia. To test this hypothesis, they induced meaninglessness experimentally by having some participants read a philosophical essay about how humans are, at the larger cosmic level, insignificant specks of dust. Other participants read a neutral essay about the limits of computer technology. All participants then completed a measure of nostalgia. Participants in the meaninglessness condition reported significantly higher levels of nostalgia than those in the neutral condition. Other studies have similarly found that the existential threat of death awareness triggers nostalgia, particularly for those high in trait nostalgia (Juhl, Routledge, Arndt, Sedikides, & Wildschut, 2010).

Taken together, these recent studies converge in demonstrating that psychological threat generates nostalgia. Thus far, negative mood, loneliness, and meaninglessness have specifically been implicated as nostalgia triggers. This raises the question of nostalgia's functionality: Once elicited, what does nostalgia do for individuals?

Does nostalgia improve psychological health and well-being?

The relevant burgeoning literature comprises experimental studies testing the functionality of nostalgia. Drawing upon evidence from the content analyses of nostalgia narratives,

Wildschut et al. (2006) proposed that nostalgia serves at least three key functions. First, given that nostalgic narratives were redemptive and primarily positively toned, nostalgia would heighten positive mood. Second, given that the self typically occupied a central role in nostalgic narratives, nostalgia would increase positive self-regard. Third, given that nostalgic narratives typically featured close others, nostalgia would bolster a sense of social connectedness. To examine these functions, Wildschut and colleagues conducted a series of experiments in which they induced nostalgia. Participants in the nostalgia condition were asked to spend a few minutes writing about a “nostalgic event” from their lives and reflect on how this event makes them feel. Participants in a control condition were given parallel instructions, although they wrote about an “ordinary event” from their lives. Subsequently, participants completed measures of affect (e.g., the Positive and Negative Affect Schedules; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988), self-esteem (e.g., the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale; Rosenberg, 1965), and social connectedness (e.g., the Initiation, Disclosure, and Emotional Support subscales from the Interpersonal Competence Questionnaire; Buhrmeister, Furman, Wittenberg, & Reis, 1988). Recalling a nostalgic (compared to ordinary) event increased positive affect (while having no effect on negative affect), elevated positive self-regard, and heightened social connectedness and interpersonal competence (see also Hepper, Ritchie, Sedikides, & Wildschut, 2012).

Researchers have additionally considered a fourth function of nostalgia: existential meaning. Nostalgic memories concern cherished life experiences shared with close others. Thus, Routledge et al. (2011; see also Routledge & Arndt, 2005; Routledge, Sedikides, Wildschut, & Juhl, 2013) hypothesized that nostalgia, by bringing to mind treasured life experiences, bolsters perceptions of meaning in life. In an initial correlational study, Routledge and colleagues indeed found that participants who scored high (compared to low) on a measure of nostalgia proneness reported higher levels of meaning in life (Steger, Frazier, Oishi, & Kaler, 2006) and purpose in life (McGregor & Little, 1998). In a subsequent experiment, participants who wrote about a nostalgic experience, relative to those who wrote about an ordinary past experience, reported increased perceptions of meaning. In yet another experiment, Routledge and colleagues used song lyrics to induce nostalgia. In a preliminary session, participants listed the titles and artists of three songs that made them feel nostalgic. Prior to the experimental session, participants were randomly assigned to the nostalgia or control condition. For participants in the nostalgia condition, the lyrics of a song that they had listed as personally nostalgic were retrieved. Participants in the control condition were yoked to a participant in the nostalgia condition and were designated to receive the same lyrics as this person (after it was ascertained that the relevant song was not one that the control participant had also previously identified as nostalgic). One week after the preliminary session, participants were brought back to the laboratory for the experimental session and given the assigned song lyrics to read. Then, they completed a manipulation check to ensure that the lyrics appropriately induced nostalgia. Finally, they completed a measure of meaning in life (Steger et al., 2006). As hypothesized, participants who read their own (compared to another participant's) nostalgic lyrics were more nostalgic (as measured by the manipulation check) and, critically, perceived life as more meaningful. Further studies by Routledge, Wildschut, Sedikides, Juhl, and Arndt (2012) demonstrated that nostalgia produced stronger perceptions of meaning than did thinking about a recent positive experience or a desired future experience. Nostalgic memories are a potent source of meaning.

In all, counter to the assertions made in previous decades and centuries, research has obtained no evidence that nostalgia is psychologically problematic. Nostalgia does not increase negative mood or undermine well-being (e.g., self-esteem, social connectedness, meaning in life). Instead, nostalgia positively affects psychological health by improving positive mood, increasing social connectedness, enhancing positive self-regard, and contributing to perceptions of

meaning in life. Therefore, nostalgia is a psychological resource – not a liability. This raises the prospect that nostalgia could serve a protective function for those at risk of poor psychological health and a restorative function for those already suffering from psychopathology.

The Interventional Potential of Nostalgia

As discussed above, psychological threat triggers nostalgia and, in turn, nostalgia improves well-being across several dimensions of psychological health (i.e., affective, social, self, and existential). It follows that nostalgia has interventional potential and recent findings are consistent with this proposition. Below, we review relevant research and discuss the need for empirical efforts to clarify further the relationship between nostalgia and psychological health.

Nostalgia and loneliness

Social connections are central to psychological health. Social exclusion leads to decreased perceptions of meaning in life (Stillman et al., 2009) and poor self-regulation (Baumeister, DeWall, Ciarocco, & Twenge, 2005; Twenge, Catanese, & Baumeister, 2002). Being ostracized undercuts psychological health (Williams & Nida, 2011), and loneliness constitutes a risk factor for depression (Leary, 1990), disordered eating (Pritchard & Yalch, 2009), and suicide (Joiner, Van Orden, Witte, & Rudd, 2009). The evidence, then, indicates that the quality of people's social lives exerts a substantial impact on their mental health. Considering that loneliness triggers nostalgia (Wildschut et al., 2006), we submit that nostalgia serves to counteract the effects of loneliness and to restore the sense of connectedness to others that is critical for optimal psychological functioning. As previously discussed, when individuals engage in nostalgia, they typically conjure up experiences that are highly social. Therefore, when individuals experience exclusion or loneliness, they may bring online nostalgic memories to meet belongingness needs, reassuring themselves that they are socially competent and that there are people in their lives who value them. In this way, nostalgia may serve to protect individuals from the threat that loneliness poses to psychological health.

A series of studies supports this idea. Zhou et al. (2008) measured loneliness (Russell, 1996), nostalgia proneness (Routledge, Arndt, Sedikides, & Wildschut, 2008), and perceptions of social support (Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet, & Farley, 1988) in two distinct samples: migrant Chinese children and adult Chinese factory workers. As expected, high loneliness was associated with low levels of perceived social support. Lonely people did not feel socially supported. However, loneliness was positively associated with nostalgia and, in turn, nostalgia was positively associated with perceived social support. In other words, lonely people were nostalgic and nostalgic people felt socially supported. Critically, the negative relationship between loneliness and perceived social support became significantly more negative when nostalgia was controlled for in the analyses. That is, although loneliness leads to decreased perceptions of social support, it also triggers nostalgia. Nostalgia, in turn, serves to counter the deleterious effect of loneliness. These findings suggest that, when individuals are lonely, they recruit nostalgic memories and doing so softens the blow of feeling alone.

Additional research is needed to explore the benefits of employing nostalgia when suffering from loneliness. Are individuals who turn to nostalgia when lonely at lower risk of illnesses associated with unmet social needs (e.g., depression, disordered eating) than people who do not engage in nostalgia? Stated alternatively, is nostalgia a successful coping mechanism for feeling alone? Would introducing regular nostalgia exercises lower the risk of developing a mental illness associated with loneliness? For those already suffering from pathologies tied to

thwarted belongingness, could nostalgia be utilized as part of a treatment plan? These are all pressing questions for work aimed at elucidating the interventional potential of nostalgia.

Nostalgia and meaninglessness

Perceptions of meaning in life promote psychological health and well-being (King & Napa, 1998; Park, 2010; Zika & Chamberlain, 1992). Additionally, a sense of meaning in life is related positively to successful coping with trauma and stress (Debats, Drost, & Hansen, 1995; Janoff-Bulman, 1992; Updegraff, Silver, & Holman, 2008). Perceptions of meaning also contribute to the effectiveness of mental health treatment. For example, Debats (1996) found that a strong sense of meaning in life predicted improvement during psychotherapy. Considering the benefits of perceiving life as meaningful, it is not surprising that a lack of meaning is associated with psychopathology. For example, individuals who experience low levels of meaning are at greater risk of suffering from depression (Wong, 1998). Moreover, lack of meaning is associated with problematic behaviors, such as excessive drinking (Harlowe, Newcomb, & Bentler, 1986; Waisberg & Porter, 1994) and drug abuse (Padelford, 1974).

In light of nostalgia's capacity to bolster perceptions of meaning in life, could it serve to counter the effects of low meaning and restore psychological health? Recent studies are consistent with this possibility. Routledge et al. (2011) tested whether nostalgia could counter the harmful effects of low levels of meaning on psychological health. They measured participants' current levels of perceived meaning and then induced nostalgia (Wildschut et al., 2006). Subsequently, they measured state vitality as an indicator of psychological well-being (Ryan & Frederick, 1997). Vitality is considered an expression of eudaemonic well-being (i.e., feeling alive and energized) and correlates with other measures of well-being (e.g., satisfaction with life; Ryan & Frederick, 1997). Results supported the proposal that nostalgia has interventional potential by mitigating the detrimental psychological consequences of low levels of meaning. Low (compared to high) levels of meaning were associated with diminished vitality, but nostalgia moderated this association. In the absence of nostalgia, low (compared to high) meaning was associated with low vitality. However, low meaning did not predict low vitality for participants instructed to engage in nostalgia. Nostalgia disrupted the link between low levels of meaning and poor psychological well-being. Looked at differently, for those who lacked a sense of meaning in life, nostalgia (compared to the control condition) increased vitality. Nostalgia elevates well-being among those suffering from feelings of meaninglessness.

Next, Routledge et al. (2011) conducted a similar interventional study to determine if nostalgia mitigates the effects of stress experienced by individuals with meaning deficits. They measured perceptions of meaning, manipulated nostalgia, and then implemented the Trier Social Stress Test, an established laboratory stress paradigm in which participants engage in a mock job interview and perform challenging mental arithmetic in front of an interview panel (Kudielka, Hellhammer, & Kirschbaum, 2007). The researchers measured subjective stress at varying time points during the study. Meaning was a significant predictor of subjective stress measured just after the stressor task. Individuals with meaning deficits reported higher levels of stress after the stressor task than those without meaning deficits. However, nostalgia mitigated this effect. Nostalgia significantly attenuated the stress experienced by people with meaning deficits. Nostalgia thus improves well-being and assists in coping with stressful experiences among vulnerable individuals (i.e., those low in meaning in life).

Additional research is needed to elucidate the benefits of using nostalgia as a means to counter meaninglessness. Are individuals who turn to nostalgia when life feels purposeless

at lower risk of illnesses (e.g., depression, anxiety) and maladaptive behaviors (drug abuse, suicide)? Would introducing regular nostalgia exercises lower the risk of developing a mental illness as a consequence of meaninglessness? For those already suffering from meaning-relevant pathologies, might nostalgia be utilized as part of a treatment plan?

In addition, life is full of experiences that threaten meaning by reminding people of their own and loved ones' physical fragility and mortality (e.g., disease diagnosis, natural disasters, armed conflicts). Might nostalgia help insulate people from the existential anxiety associated with these threats? Initial research concerning this question provided evidence for the palliative function of nostalgia. Routledge et al. (2008) and Juhl et al. (2010) proposed the people who engage regularly in nostalgia would be less vulnerable to the psychological consequences associated with the awareness of mortality. Across several studies, these researchers measured nostalgia proneness, experimentally induced death-related cognition, and assessed indicators of existential anxiety (e.g., meaninglessness, death-thought accessibility, death-anxiety). Thinking about one's mortality led to increased existential anxiety but only among individuals low in nostalgia proneness. Those who regularly engage in nostalgic reflection were relatively unaffected by contemplating their mortal finitude. However, in all of these studies, participants were young adults (university students), and the mortality reminder was abstract and not reflective of an actual mortal threat (e.g., disease diagnosis). Therefore, additional research is needed to determine if nostalgia would produce similar beneficial effects among those for whom existential concerns about mortality are more salient (e.g., the elderly, people diagnosed with terminal illness) or in contexts in which the threat of mortality is more potent (e.g., during a natural disaster, in an armed conflict).

Nostalgia and successful aging

As people age, they face challenges that have the potential to undercut psychological health. Getting older involves facing major life transitions that can threaten one's sense of identity (e.g., retirement). Older age is also associated with cognitive and physical decline as well as diminishing social connections and activities. Yet, older adults are typically psychologically healthy (Carstensen, Pasupathi, Mayr, & Nesselroade, 2000; Charles, Reynolds, & Gatz, 2001), and psychological well-being may even improve in older age (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999; Mroczek & Kolarz, 1998). We propose that nostalgia is partially responsible for healthy psychological functioning, as individuals navigate the many life challenges associated with aging. Preliminary evidence supports this assertion. Specifically, Hepper et al. (2013) conducted a study in the United Kingdom, in which they examined the relationships between trait nostalgia, age, and psychological well-being. The age range in this study was 18–91 years. Trait nostalgia moderated the relationship between age and well-being, such that age was positively associated with indicators of well-being (i.e., positive affect, positive relationships, environmental mastery) but only for individuals high in trait nostalgia. These findings are consistent with the possibility that frequent engagement in nostalgia is a catalyst for successful aging.

With this preliminary work in mind, there are several promising directions for future research. Could clinicians and caregivers utilize nostalgia to help elderly people who are facing stressors that could threaten psychological adjustment (e.g., physical disability, bereavement)? What about the unique stressors associated with the transition from adolescence to adulthood (e.g., moving out of the family home, seeking a mate, settling on a career)? Might nostalgia be a psychological resource that helps young people successfully make this transition into adulthood? Future research is needed to answer these and other pertinent questions regarding nostalgia as a resource for successful aging.

Conclusion

We proposed that nostalgia promotes psychological health and well-being. We considered evidence indicating that, contrary to historical treatments, nostalgia is a common experience and one that is predominantly positive. Further, we reviewed a growing body of research demonstrating that psychological threat triggers nostalgia, and nostalgia improves psychological health and well-being. We also discussed findings suggesting that nostalgia has interventional potential for those vulnerable to poor psychological health, and we considered questions for future research on this topic. Nostalgia has come a long way from an Alpine malady triggered by cowbells to a resource that individuals can activate and use in times of stress and ill health. We hope our treatment of nostalgia contributes to the rehabilitation of the construct and opens up useful empirical and interventional avenues.

Short Biographies

Clay Routledge is a social psychologist and associate professor of Psychology at North Dakota State University. He received his PhD from the University of Missouri in 2005. His research explores how existential questions and anxieties impact mental and physical health, close relationships, and people's ability to respect and peacefully coexist with those who subscribe to different meaning-providing belief systems. He regularly publishes in the top social psychology journals, recently co-edited a book on the psychology of meaning, and is currently writing a book about nostalgia.

Tim Wildschut is associate professor of psychology at the University of Southampton. He received his PhD from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. His main research interest is in self-conscious emotions, in particular nostalgia. He currently serves as associate editor for *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*.

Constantine Sedikides' research is on self and identity and their interplay with emotion and motivation, close relationships, and group processes. Before coming to the University of Southampton, where he presently teaches, Constantine taught at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He holds a BA from the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece, and a PhD from the Ohio State University.

Jacob Juhl received his PhD from North Dakota State University in 2013. He is currently a Research Fellow in the Centre for Research on Self and Identity at the University of Southampton. His interests include the self, existential motivation, meaning in life, emotions, nostalgia, and well-being, and he has recently published research demonstrating the capacity for nostalgic reflection to meet the need for meaning in life and quell existential concerns.

Endnote

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