

Self and Affect: The Case of Nostalgia

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Imagine you are walking through your neighbourhood on a breezy spring afternoon and you see a child running excitedly after a ball tossed from a friend. You begin to think about your own childhood and perhaps bask in the glow of the bygone days of frivolous play and exuberance. What are the cognitive abilities that enable, and the psychological functions served by, such nostalgic reflection? More broadly, what is the social psychological significance of this emotion? In entertaining such questions, one may be surprised to learn that contemporary social psychological discourse currently offers few answers as the emotion has largely been neglected by mainstream empirical circles. The purpose of the present chapter is to provide a framework through which such questions may be addressed and present a social psychological analysis of nostalgia.

We suggest that at the core of understanding nostalgia is the interplay between self and affect. As such, we will begin by covering three manifestations of this interplay. The self – and more specifically the ability to reflect back on the self – is of critical importance for nostalgic reflection and thus we will first review literature on the relation between mood states and self-focused attention. Moreover, we conceptualize nostalgia as a primarily positive emotional experience, though often with some bittersweet elements, that helps to foster a positive self-conception. Thus, second, we will discuss the relation between mood states and the valence of self-views. Third, because nostalgia may be informatively considered as a type of self-conscious emotion, we will briefly couch the link between self and affect in terms of self-conscious emotions and note those that have been the primary subject of empirical scrutiny: shame, guilt, and embarrassment. Finally and most importantly, we

will propose a new self-conscious emotion, nostalgia. In particular, we will review the extant literature on nostalgia, offer a new conceptualization of the construct, present recent research findings, and explicate the similarities and differences between nostalgia and other self-conscious emotions.

The Interplay between Self and Affect: Mood and Self-Focused Attention,
Mood and Self-Description, Self-Conscious Emotion

Mood States and Self-Focused Attention

A persistent focus of the literature on self and affect has been the interplay between mood states and self-focused attention. One of the initial observations of this connection emerged from classic work on self-awareness theory (Duval & Wicklund, 1972). According to theory and research from this perspective, increased self-focused instigates regulatory processes, often heightening awareness of discrepancies between self and evaluative standards, and thus engendering feelings of negative affect (e.g., Scheier & Carver, 1977; see Fejfar & Hoyle, 2000 for a review). A considerable literature has also been guided by the reciprocal question; that is: “What mood states lead to which kind of attentional focus?” (Sedikides & Green, 2000). The mood states of sadness and happiness attracted the bulk of empirical efforts. Further, attentional focus was conceptualized as falling on a bipolar continuum: directed either internally (i.e., to the self) or externally (e.g., to other persons).

In line with appraisal theories of emotion (Smith, this volume; Smith & Ellsworth, 1985), sadness was hypothesized to induce self-focused attention. Sadness is elicited by a personal setback or loss, is accompanied by the perception that the unfortunate event is rather uncontrollable and inevitable, and is associated with or leads to inaction, resignation, passivity and withdrawal. Sadness instigates an

avoidance orientation toward the outside world and an inclination to turn inward and clarify the implications of the unfortunate event for one's goals and behavioral options. On the other hand, happiness is characterized by an expansive, exploratory, and affiliative orientation. Happiness is linked with stimulation seeking and the facilitation of adaptive or approach behaviors. As such, happiness was hypothesized to induce other-focused attention.

The empirical findings were consistent with these hypotheses. Compared to neutral mood, sadness induces self-focused attention (Sedikides, 1992a), whereas happiness induces external-focused attention (Green, Sedikides, Saltzberg, Wood, & Forzano, 2003). Moreover, the causal relation between sadness and self-focused attention is not reciprocal: Sadness directly elicits self-focused attention, but the reverse pattern does not hold. Instead, the effects of self-focused attention on sadness are moderated by self-concept valence. Self-focused attention induces sadness only among individuals with chronically negative self-views (Sedikides, 1992b).

More recently, however, the literature moved beyond sadness and happiness by taking into account another, orthogonal, affective dimension: orientation. In particular, (negative or positive) mood states can be either reflective or social. Examples of reflective mood states are sadness and contentment, whereas examples of social mood states are anger and happiness. Reflective states should elicit stronger self-focused attention than social states, a hypothesis that was empirically validated (Green & Sedikides, 1999). As we will discuss, one of the possibly unique features of nostalgia is that it is both a reflective and social emotion.

Mood States and Self-Concept Valence

Sad and happy mood states also have distinct consequences for self-concept

valence. An early review (Sedikides, 1992c) captured these consequences with the mood-congruency principle: Sad mood increases the negativity of self-conceptions, whereas happy mood increases the positivity of self-conceptions. A comprehensive model on the relation between mood and social cognition, however, the Affect Infusion Model (AIM: Forgas, 1995, 2002, this volume) offered theoretical insights that qualified the mood congruency principle.

According to the AIM, affect is infused differentially into information processing strategies. In some strategies, such as the direct-access strategy (when processing is based on the cognitive retrieval of knowledge structures) and the motivated-processing strategy (when processing is goal-driven), affect infusion is low. In other strategies, such as heuristic processing (requiring an on-line judgment) or substantive processing (requiring an open information search and the transformation or creation of cognitive structures), affect infusion is high. The postulates of the AIM have clear implications for the influence of mood states on the self-concept. Affect will infuse the self-system and change the self-views in a mood-congruent manner only when these self-views are relatively uncertain or loosely formed. However, affect will have no influence on self-views that are crystallized and well-formed. The former (i.e., peripheral self-conceptions) are computed via an on-line judgment, whereas the latter (i.e., central self-conceptions) require the retrieval of a stored judgment. Thus, heuristic processing is involved in judgments of peripheral self-views, whereas direct access processing is involved in judgments of central self-views.

The empirical evidence was consistent with these hypotheses. The mood-congruency effect was obtained for judgments pertaining to peripheral but not central self-conceptions (Sedikides, 1995). Notably, support for the AIM model has been

obtained in regards to other domains, such as individual differences (Sedikides & Green, 2001). For example, mood-congruency effects on self-conceptions are present for low, but not high, self-esteem persons. This is attributed to the fact that the self-views of low self-esteem persons are held with less certainty compared to the self-views of high self-esteem persons (Campbell et al., 1996).

The mood-congruency effect is also qualified by the temporal dimension: Initial mood-congruent influences on self-views are reversed by subsequent mood-incongruent influences. In particular, although immediately following sad mood induction self-descriptions become more negative, over time this pattern is spontaneously reversed, with self-descriptions becoming increasingly positive (Forgas & Ciarrochi, 2002, Experiment 3; Sedikides, 1994). These results indicate the activation of mood management or mood repair processes (Bless & Fiedler, this volume; Erber, this volume; Forgas, in press).

Self-Conscious Emotions

The relation between self and affect becomes more intricate when self-conscious emotions are taken into considerations. The self-conscious emotions that have received the lion's share in the literature are shame, guilt, and embarrassment (Keltner & Beer, 2005; Tangney, 2002).

Self-conscious emotions are instigated by self-evaluation or self-reflection. Individuals feel shameful when they perceive the failure to meet an important internal standard (i.e., goal or rule) as indicative of a deep and all-encompassing personality defect or character flaw. Individuals feel guilty when they also violate an important internal standard, but the focus is on the specific transgression and its consequences for self and other. Finally, individuals feel embarrassed when they engage in relatively

minor infractions of social conventions in a public setting.

Shame, guilt, and embarrassment differ in terms of how painful they are, how they are regulated, and how they are expressed. Shame is more painful than guilt, which is more painful than embarrassment (Tangney, 2003). Furthermore, shame is linked with anger and aggression (which are attempts to protect the self) and may be more strongly tied to situations that focus attention internally (Arndt & Goldenberg, 2004), whereas guilt is linked with empathy. Both guilt and embarrassment, however, are linked with reparative action (e.g., apology). Moreover, shame and embarrassment have distinct nonverbal displays, whereas guilt does not. In particular, shame is expressed with coordinated gaze and downward head movement, whereas embarrassment is expressed through gaze aversion, smile control, a non-Duchenne smile, downward head movement, and, on some occasions, face-touching (Keltner, 1995).

The Interplay between Self and Affect: Nostalgia

The literature on self-conscious emotions, while generating important insights, has yet to consider the emotional consequences of peoples' concurrent capacity to reflect on the past. In particular, the capacity for self-focus and also the capacity for temporal thought (that is, the ability to project oneself into the past, present, and future), may enable people to reflect on their past and draw from it the emotion of nostalgia. In this light we will next make the case for nostalgia, an emotion that has for the most part evaded empirical attention but that we believe is a vital resource in peoples' coping repertoire. We will begin with a historical synopsis and proceed with a discussion of the various facets of the nostalgic experience, highlighting the psychological landscape and functional significance of the emotion. Our discussion

will be informed by the scarce literature on nostalgia and our own preliminary findings.

A Historical Overview of Nostalgia

The term “nostalgia” was coined by the Swiss physician Johannes Hofer (1688/1934), although references to its meaning date back to Hippocrates, Caesar, and the Bible. Nostalgia is a compound term, deriving from the Greek words *nostos* (*return*) and *algos* (*pain*). Thus, nostalgia connotes the psychological suffering induced by the yearning to return to one’s place of origin.

In its conceptual and empirical trajectory, the term did not always carry the same meaning. Hofer (1688/1934) focused on Swiss mercenaries fighting away from home on behalf of European rulers and described the mercenaries as suffering from despondency, weeping, anorexia, and suicidal ideation. Hofer characterized nostalgia (or homesickness) “a cerebral disease of essentially demonic cause” (p. 387) which was caused by “the quite continuous vibration of animal spirits through those fibers of the middle brain in which impressed traces of ideas of the Fatherland still cling” (p. 384).

The notion that nostalgia was a neurological disease was firmly ingrained in the medical establishment of the time. The only disagreement pertained to the causes of the disease. The German-Swiss physician J. J. Scheuchzer maintained in 1732 that nostalgia was due to “a sharp differential in atmospheric pressure causing excessive body pressurization, which in turn drove blood from the heart to the brain, thereby producing the observed affliction of sentiment” (cited in Davis, 1979, p. 2). To make matters worse, it was believed that nostalgia was restricted to the Swiss. It was in this context that military physicians offered the unremitting clanging of cowbells in the

Alps as the cause of nostalgia. The noise, it was said, inflicted damage to the eardrum and brain, hence the emotional lability and behavioral symptoms (Davis, 1979). In the 18th and 19th centuries, however, it became clear that nostalgia was not just a Swiss curiosity, as soldiers fighting in the French armies and the American Civil War manifested similar symptoms (Rosen, 1975). Nevertheless, the definition of nostalgia as a neurological disease persisted.

A major shift in the definition of nostalgia occurred at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. Nostalgia was now regarded as a psychiatric disorder (Batcho, 1998; McCann, 1941). Symptoms included anxiety, sadness, fatigue, loss of appetite, and insomnia (Havlena & Holak, 1991). Indeed, nostalgia was consigned to the realm of disorders until the middle of the 20th century, its lowly status due in no small measure to the psychodynamic tradition (Sohn, 1983). Nostalgia was labeled as arising from a subconscious yearning to return to one's fetal state, as a "mentally repressive compulsive disorder" (Fodor, 1950, p. 25), as a "monomaniacal obsessive mental state causing intense unhappiness" (Fodor, 1950, p. 25), and as "immigrant psychosis" (Frost, 1938, p. 801). These extreme views of nostalgia gave way to more moderate conceptions. In the late 70s and early 80s, nostalgia was considered as a form of depression, "a regressive manifestation closely related to the issue of loss, grief, incomplete mourning, and, finally, depression" (Castelnuovo-Tedesco, 1980, p. 1000; see also Kaplan, 1987). Furthermore, nostalgia was equated with homesickness and confined to four populations: immigrants, first-year boarding or university students, soldiers, and seamen (Cox, 1988; Jackson, 1986).

More recently, the constructs of nostalgia and homesickness have gone their

separate ways. Homesickness refers to psychological difficulties that accompany life transitions such as to boarding school or university (Brewin, Furnham, & Howes, 1989; Fisher, 1989; Stroebe, van Vliet, Hewstone, & Willis, 2002; Van Tilburg, Vingerhoets, & van Heck, 1996). Nostalgia, on the other hand, is considered an experience with a wider frame of reference. For example, nostalgia is associated more frequently than homesickness with the words “warm, old times, childhood, and yearning” (Davis, 1979). In agreement with this trend, we also regard nostalgia as discrete from homesickness. In particular, we conceptualize nostalgia as yearning for aspects of one’s past (e.g., events, persons, places). We maintain that nostalgia is an emotional experience that is relevant to people of all ages and is present throughout the life course (Sedikides, Wildschut, & Baden, 2004). Below, we further clarify our conceptualization of nostalgia while discussing the available theoretical and empirical work as well as our own preliminary findings.

Structure of Nostalgia

We will consider three structural features of nostalgia: its triggers, its objects, and the role of self.

Triggers of Nostalgia

What triggers the nostalgic experience? Although the experience of nostalgia critically depends on the capacity for self-directed and temporal attention, theorists have speculated that triggers (i.e., stimuli associated with one’s past) can be either social (e.g., friends, family reunions, disco nights) or non-social (e.g., music, scents, possessions) (Havlena & Holak, 1991; Holak & Havlena, 1998; Holbrook, 1993, 1994). Davis (1979) suggested that nostalgia occurs in the context of “present fears, discontents, anxieties, and uncertainties” (p. 34), whereas Cully, LaVoie, and Gfeller

(2001) emphasized dejected mood as a trigger of nostalgia.

We (Wildschut, Sedikides, Arndt, & Routledge, 2005) asked participants to provide detailed descriptions of the circumstances that trigger nostalgia. Contrary to some previous speculation but consistent with Davis (1979) and Cully et al. (2001), we found that the most common nostalgia trigger is negative mood. One participant, for instance, wrote: “I think of nostalgic experiences when I am sad as they often make me feel better. Another participant wrote: “I think people would turn to nostalgia in unhappy, sad or lonely situations to make themselves smile.” Among the negative mood states mentioned, loneliness was by far the most common, as is illustrated by the following quote: “If I ever feel lonely or sad I tend to think of my friends or family who I haven’t seen in a long time.” Thus, in accord with the mood-congruency principles discussed earlier, nostalgia can in certain contexts be seen as a mood management strategy. Consistently with prior speculation, though, other common triggers included sensory inputs and social interactions. Relevant to the idea that sensory inputs can trigger nostalgia, one participant remarked that “the strongest triggers are smells and music” and another referred to “pictures, smells, sounds, even tastes” as triggers of nostalgia. Relevant to the idea that social interaction can trigger nostalgia, many commented on how, in the words of one astute participant, nostalgia can be triggered by “being in the company of the people concerned.”

Objects of Nostalgia

What are the objects of the nostalgic experience? In our research (Wildschut et al., 2005), the most common objects of nostalgia were close others (e.g., friends, family members). Consider, for instance, the mother who wrote of her son’s birth: “I remember exactly how he looked and smelt the first time I held him in my arms.” The

second most common objects of nostalgia were momentous events (e.g., anniversaries, holiday gatherings). Tellingly, momentous events often involved the presence of close others and coders occasionally found it difficult to separate the two categories. For example, one participant with an eye for detail wrote:

“My first date with my first boyfriend is a nostalgic event. He picked me up in his red Seat Ibiza car at about 5.00. I was wearing a black and red rose dress and a suit jacket and he was wearing trousers and a shirt. It was very hot and sunny as it was the 14th of May.”

Other frequently reported objects were places or settings. This is what one participant wrote about moving home:

“Our furniture had already been taken to the new house and just our family was left to say goodbye to the house we’d been living in for 14 years. I remember sitting on the stairs thinking of all the good times and bad times we had in the house, parties, arguments and growing up.”

Role of Self: Nostalgia as a Self-Conscious Emotion

We conceptualized nostalgia as a self-conscious emotion. We considered the self as the protagonist of the nostalgic encounter, although we reasoned that the self operates in social context (Sedikides et al., 2004). This proposal was supported by our empirical findings (Wildschut et al., 2005). In the vast majority of nostalgic accounts, the self figured in an important role alongside close others. The following is an illustrative excerpt from a representative narrative about a soccer game between the English clubs of Chelsea and Aston Villa:

“When I was seven my step-dad, also a Chelsea fan, announced that he had a

spare ticket and upon my persistent begging, he agreed to take me. We caught the train to London, then the tube to Fulham Broadway. I remember how struck I was by the amount of people and the noise. There is a distinctive smell around a football ground, of greasy, frying burgers and stale Tabasco. Whenever I smell it now it reminds me of that first experience of it and I remember how I fell in love with it there and then. Chelsea was playing Aston Villa. We lost 3-0. Tony Daily scored from, as I remember it, near the halfway line, the ball going through our keeper, Dave Beasant's legs. I didn't care, never before or since have I been happy watching Chelsea lose a game of football. The day was important because more than just watching a football match, it showed that me and my step-dad, who I hadn't known that long, had something in common and it gave me a great sense of security which has never left."

Is Nostalgia a Positive Emotion?

Some researchers have classified nostalgia as positive emotion. According to Davis (1979), nostalgia is a "positively toned evocation of a lived past" (p. 18), a view echoed by Kaplan (1987) in his definition of nostalgia as a "warm feeling about the past" (p. 465). Other researchers have also argued that nostalgia is associated with positive affect (e.g., Batcho, 1995, 1998; Chaplin, 2000; Gabriel, 1993; Holak & Havlena, 1998). An alternative camp of researchers, however, has classified nostalgia as a negative emotion. According to Ortony, Clore, and Collins (1988), nostalgia is a loss or distress emotion, as it involves sadness or mourning for one's past. The view of nostalgia as a loss emotion is shared by Best and Nelson (1985), Hertz (1990), Holbrook (1993, 1994), and Peters (1985). Finally, a third camp of researchers cast

nostalgia as an ambivalent emotion. Werman (1977) defined nostalgia as “a joy tinged with sadness” (p. 393), whereas both Fodor (1950) and Socarides (1977) proposed that nostalgia entails some degree of psychological pain. Finally, Johnson-Laird and Oatley (1989) emphasized the ambivalent nature of nostalgia, arguing that it involve both happiness and mild discontent. The ambivalence is the outcome of a contrast between a satisfying past and a grim present.

In our view, nostalgia is a predominantly positive emotion, albeit not without bittersweet elements (Sedikides et al., 2004). A study by Holak and Havlena (1998) provided preliminary support for this view. Participants’ nostalgic accounts (as judged by coders) were characterized more by positive (e.g., warmth, joy, gratitude) than negative (e.g., sadness, irritation, fear) emotions. More to the point, our own research (Wildschut et al., 2005) has obtained evidence that nostalgia is principally a positive emotion. Participants’ nostalgic accounts (as judged by independent coders) reflect more positive than negative affect, and participants report that nostalgia has more desirable than undesirable features. In addition, participants report that they experience more positive than negative affect following written descriptions of nostalgic events.

Another way to address the issue of whether nostalgia is a positive or negative emotion is to examine its narrative sequence. McAdams and his colleagues (McAdams, Diamond, de St. Aubin, & Mansfield, 1997; McAdams, Reynolds, Lewis, Patten, & Bowman, 2001) distinguished between two narrative sequences of life stories. In the first, *redemption*, the individual progresses from a disadvantaged to a victorious position, with accompanying positive feelings (e.g., contentment, happiness). In the second, *contamination*, the individual progresses from a position of

strength to one of weakness, with accompanying negative feelings (e.g., sadness, depression). In our research (Wildschut et al., 2005), we found that nostalgic accounts more often follow a redemption than a contamination sequence. The high frequency of redemption sequences in nostalgic narratives reinforces our view that nostalgia is a predominantly positive emotion. These findings further support the notion that nostalgia is more likely to be emotionally positive in nature.

Does Nostalgia Involve a Contrast Between Past and Future?

Davis (1979) set forth an interesting hypothesis: Nostalgia is an emotional reaction to discontinuity in one's life. Johnson-Laird and Oatley (1989) echoed the discontinuity hypothesis when they argued that nostalgia involves a contrast between one's past and present. According to Davis, sources of discontinuity include death of a loved one, health deterioration, relationship break-up, and occupational crises (e.g., lay-offs). In addition, discontinuity has emotional consequences, such as "fears, discontents, anxieties, or uncertainties" (Davis, 1979, p. 34).

A more concrete and testable form of the discontinuity hypothesis is that individuals who experience discontinuity in their lives (i.e., deteriorating life circumstances) will report higher degrees of nostalgia (i.e., will rate the past as more favorable) compared to those who experience continuity. Best and Nelson (1985) tested this proposition by analyzing data from four surveys which involved U.S. national samples and were carried out in 1968, 1974, 1976, and 1980. In these surveys, participants responded to statements such as "You are as happy now as you were when you were younger," "People had it better in the old days," "I am as happy as when I was younger," "These are the best years of my life," and "In spite of what some people say, the lot of the average man is getting worse, not better." Responses to

these statements were combined to form an index of nostalgia. Support for the discontinuity hypothesis was equivocal. On the one hand, deteriorating circumstances (e.g., health problems, divorce, death of a love one) were related with increased nostalgia. On the other hand, occupational mobility, geographic mobility, and work interruption were not associated with nostalgia. The equivocal support for the discontinuity hypothesis, however, may be due to conceptual and data-analytic problems with this study. For example, the survey items (Best & Nelson, 1985) were rather poor indicators of nostalgia, and the data were underanalyzed.

Batcho's (1995) research is also relevant to the discontinuity hypothesis. She assessed nostalgia in a two-part survey. In the first part, respondents evaluated (as good or bad) the world at present, 20 years into the future, and in the past. In the second part of the survey, participants completed the *Nostalgia Inventory*, indicating the degree to which they missed each of 20 items (toys, your house, friends, the way society was, not knowing sad or evil things, not having to worry) from their youth. In the first part of the survey, support for the discontinuity hypothesis was weak. On the one hand, evaluations of the world across past, future, and present did not differ by age or gender. On the other hand, the overall nostalgia score, although uncorrelated with judgments of the present or the future, was correlated with judgments of the past. Also, when the upper and lower quartile of the respondents were examined, high (compared to low) nostalgics rated the world when they were younger as better. In general, nostalgia was not linked with substantial dissatisfaction with the present or anxieties about the future, but it was associated with the view that the past was better. In the second part of the survey, the discontinuity hypothesis was discredited. Age main effects were significant for 14 of the 20 items of the Nostalgia Inventory:

friends, family, school, house, music, heroes/heroines, feelings, having someone to depend on, not knowing sad or evil things, holidays, toys, pets, not having to worry, and the way people were. However, on all but two (family, music) of these items, younger adults were more nostalgic than older ones. Because it seems reasonable that older adults would have experienced more discontinuity than younger adults, these results do not seem to follow from the discontinuity hypothesis.

In a recent study, we (Wildschut, Sedikides, Arndt, Routledge, & Hodgson, 2005) tested the discontinuity hypothesis in a sample of thirty-eight adult participants (mean age = 48 years). Discontinuity was measured using a revised version of the Social Readjustment Rating Scale (SRRS; Holmes & Rahe, 1967). This version of the scale asked participants to indicate for each of 14 disrupting life events (e.g., death of a close family member, change in living conditions, change in financial situation, divorce) whether they had experienced it over the past two years. Nostalgia was measured using Batcho's nostalgia inventory. Consistent with the discontinuity hypothesis, results revealed a significant positive correlation between the number of disrupting life events experienced and nostalgia.

In conclusion, there is some support, albeit preliminary, for the discontinuity hypothesis. This support comes from correlational studies. We believe that experimental tests have greater potential to evaluate rigorously the hypothesis. Conceptually, the prior articulations of the hypothesis imply that nostalgia is simply a byproduct of discontinuity. Looked at from a different vantage point, however, one may construe discontinuity as a form of threat that should in turn evoke *more* nostalgia as people try to marshal positive coping resources. Does threat in the form of negative feedback (Sedikides, Reeder, Campbell, & Elliot, 1998) or the awareness of

inevitable mortality (mortality salience; e.g., Arndt, Greenberg, Solomon, Pyszczynski, & Simon, 1997), for example, induce corresponding changes in the level of nostalgia? Given what we believe to be the functional significance of the emotion, there are reasons to think that it might. We are in the process of carrying out such tests.

What are the Functions of Nostalgia?

We propose that nostalgia serves four important psychological functions. First, nostalgia serves as a repository of positive affect. Second, nostalgia maintains and enhances self-positivity. Third, nostalgia fosters affiliation. Finally, nostalgia carries existential meaning, serving as an experiential reservoir that is helpful for coping with existential threat. We will review these functions in more detail, complementing them with our preliminary findings, and also highlight future directions for empirical study. In our research (Wildschut et al., 2005), participants brought to mind and wrote about a nostalgic experience or, in the control condition, an ordinary event that occurred in the past week. Subsequently, they completed a battery of scales assessing affect, aspects of the self-concept, and feelings of affiliation.

The Positive Affectivity Function of Nostalgia

We proposed and found (Wildschut et al., 2005) that nostalgia predominantly gives rise to positive affect. Kaplan (1987) speculated that the joy that nostalgia induces gives rise to “an expansive state of mind” (p. 465). In a similar vein, Fredrickson (2001) argued that positive emotions increase resourcefulness, as they broaden thought-action repertoires. Indeed, positive emotions offset the impact of not only negative emotions (Fredrickson, Tugade, Waugh, & Larkin, 2003) but also negative feedback about the self (Aspinwall, 1998; Trope & Pomerantz, 1998; Trope,

Igou, & Burke, this volume). We obtained direct evidence for the notion that nostalgia has a positive affectivity function (Wildschut et al., 2005): Participants who brought to mind or wrote about a nostalgic experience reported more positive affect than participants in the control condition, who brought to mind or wrote about an ordinary experience. Similarly, in a recent study we found that perceiving the past as positive is associated with increased nostalgia proneness (Routledge, Arndt, Sedikides, & Wildschut, 2005). Given that nostalgia is associated with positive affect and positive affect can assist people in dealing with negative emotions and stressors such as negative feedback, future research should further examine the potential for nostalgia to be employed to combat negative affect.

The Self-Positivity Function of Nostalgia

Individuals are motivated to protect, maintain, and enhance the positivity of the self-concept (Sedikides & Strube, 1997; Sedikides & Gregg, 2003). Self-protection and self-enhancement mechanisms are typically activated when feedback is perceived as self-threatening (Baumeister, 1998; Sedikides, Green, & Pinter, 2004). We propose that nostalgia constitutes an important mechanism through which individuals ward off threat and restore the positivity of the self-concept (Sedikides et al., 2004) or self-esteem (Gabriel, 1993; Kaplan, 1987). The effectiveness of nostalgia as a self-protection mechanism may be due to its potential to affirm the self (Steele, 1988) by rendering accessible other desirable aspects of one's personality. That is, one may learn that he failed a test or a project at work, but, by resorting through nostalgia to an idealized past, one may affirm himself as a friend, family member, member of other important groups (e.g., choir, environmentalists, activists (Kleiner, 1977)). The proposition that nostalgia serves a self-positivity function received empirical support

(Wildschut et al., 2005): Participants who brought to mind or wrote about a nostalgic experience reported higher self-esteem than participants in the control condition. This finding provides the foundation for future research to explore the possibility that nostalgia can be utilized as a resource for responding to self-related threats in a manner that does not adversely affect others (e.g., derogation of outgroups, Fein & Spencer, 1997). Nostalgia may therefore be both personally and socially advantageous if it provides an outlet for socially positive self-affirmation.

The Affiliation Function of Nostalgia

Another important function of nostalgia is the strengthening of social connectedness and belongingness. Davis (1979) regarded nostalgia as a deeply social emotion, whereas Hertz (1990) noted that, in the nostalgic experience, "...the mind is 'peopled'" (p. 195). Symbolic connections with close others are re-established (Batcho, 1998; Cavanaugh, 1989; Kaplan, 1987; Mills & Coleman, 1994), and these close others come to be momentarily part of one's present. Such meaningful connections are particularly relevant during life transitions (e.g., graduation, relocation, new employment), when individuals are likely to feel socially isolated. Nostalgia, then, contributes to a sense of safety and secure attachment (Mikulincer, Florian, & Hirschberger, 2003). The proposal that nostalgia serves a social connectedness function received empirical support (Wildschut et al., 2005): Participants who brought to mind and wrote about a nostalgic experience subsequently evidenced a more secure adult attachment style than participants in the control condition. Future research should further explore the potential for nostalgia to help people cope with situations that foster feelings of isolation or disconnection from close others. Indeed, for deployed soldiers separated from family, some of the most

desired luxuries are objects that remind them of friends and family at home (armytimes.com).

The Existential Function of Nostalgia

From an existential perspective, one of the primary challenges that people face is carving out a meaningful and valued existence within the precariousness of reality. We are all too frequently confronted with the transient nature of life and this fragility represents a major hurdle that people must cross in order to function with relative psychological equanimity. According to terror management theory (Solomon, Greenberg, & Pyszczynski, 1991; Pyszczynski, Greenberg, Solomon, Arndt, & Schimel, 2004), such anxieties stem, in part, from our awareness of inevitable mortality and are mitigated by maintaining a two part anxiety buffer that consists of faith in a cultural worldview (shared beliefs about the nature of reality that imbue life with meaning) and self-esteem (the sense that one is personally fulfilling the standards of one's worldview). Recently, Mikulincer and colleagues (2003) have argued that secure attachment to others represents another fundamental means of buffering existential anxiety.

How then does nostalgia fit in this picture? As may be gleaned from our prior discussion, we argue that nostalgia can bolster each of the psychological mechanisms by which people manage existential anxiety. First, as we have previously reviewed, nostalgia may serve to enhance the positivity of the self-concept and thus provide vital feelings of self-esteem. Second, given the social nature of nostalgic reflection, the emotion may enhance connectedness to others, weaving the self into a meaningful social fabric. Third, nostalgia can be positioned to contribute an overall sense of enduring meaning to one's life. The passing of time can be threatening, for as time

passes the certainty of one's inevitable demise draws closer (Routledge & Arndt, in press). Nostalgia, however, provides an emotional mechanism by which the passing of time can be perceived as meaningful as one builds a positive warehouse of memories of bygone days. Moreover, nostalgia has the additional effect of soothing existential fears by reinforcing the value of cultural traditions. This is achieved by revelling in past celebrations of cultural rituals, such as Thanksgiving dinners, school fares, or parades, or by collecting movie, sports, or war memorabilia. Through such practices, one restores the belief of living a purposeful life in a meaningful cultural context (Simon, Arndt, Greenberg, Pyszczynski, & Solomon, 1998).

Research that we have recently conducted provides support for the existential function of nostalgia (Routledge et al., 2005). Previous terror management research demonstrates that the existential threat of being reminded of one's mortality increases investment in and defence of the cultural worldviews that imbue the world with meaning (Greenberg, Pyszczynski, & Solomon, 1997). We thus examined how nostalgia moderates the effects of mortality salience. For example, in one study we (Routledge et al., 2005) found that after being reminded of one's mortality (relative to an aversive control topic), the more one tends to perceive the past as positive, the more he or she perceives life as meaningful. In another study, we further found that after being reminded of mortality (relative to an aversive control topic), people who are more prone to nostalgia actually show less activation of death-related cognition. Both studies thus converge to suggest that nostalgia can provide an important resource for buffering existential threat.

In short, there is encouraging evidence that nostalgia may serve as an important resource for managing existential anxieties. It is possible that self-

affirmation mediates the effect of nostalgia on existential anxiety. That is, nostalgic engagement may affirm the self, and, indeed, research has demonstrated that self-affirmation (e.g., writing about one's important values) reduces existential angst (Schmeichel & Martens, 2005). Regardless, here also is one example of the broader relevance nostalgia research may have to social functioning. Given that the majority of terror management research has revealed the often unfortunate consequences that people's efforts to maintain a sense of meaning can have on those who are different (e.g., fostering intolerance, prejudice, aggression; Greenberg et al., 1997), an important trajectory of future research is to uncover more benevolent means of maintaining such views and nostalgia is emerging as a prime candidate to this end.

Additional Issues Surrounding Nostalgia

We have argued that nostalgia is a universal emotion that spans the life course. Furthermore, nostalgia is a predominantly positive and self-conscious emotion that involves reliving momentous events or bygone relationships with significant others. Nostalgia is typically triggered by negative mood but also sensory inputs and social interactions. Importantly, nostalgia fulfils four psychological functions: positive affectivity, self-positivity, affiliation, and buffering against existential terror.

Many interesting issues await empirical investigation. In the first section of this chapter, we briefly covered the interplay between self and affect. We noted, for example, the connection between mood and self-focused attention, and the role of mood congruency and affect infusion in self-views. How does nostalgia interface with these ideas? Nostalgia offers an exciting opportunity to examine the complexities of these relationships. It is self-reflective, yet social. Thus, how might nostalgia affect or be affected by an internal focus of attention? It is positive yet at times tinged with

bittersweet elements. Thus, what are the congruent or infused moods elicited?

Further, one might examine whether nostalgia proneness is associated with psychological well-being. In support of this notion, Bryant, Smart, and King (in press) found that reminiscing about positive memories increases the amount of time that experimental (compared to control) participants report as having felt happy over a period of a week. As a predominantly positive emotion, nostalgia may also contribute to a broader thought-action repertoire (Fredrickson et al., 2003), fostering creative thinking and being associated with markers of well-being such as ability to grow, plan, and achieve (Huppert, this volume; Taylor, Lerner, Sherman, Sage, & McDowell, 2003a).

In addition, nostalgia may be associated with physical well-being. Three informative studies provide some impetus for such a hypothesis. In one study (Danner, Snowdon, & Friesen, 2001) the handwritten diaries of elderly Catholic nuns were coded for emotional content. The nuns had written these diaries in early adulthood. Early positive emotionality predicted survival rates approximately 60 years later. In another study (Emmons & McCullough, 2003) positive emotions (e.g., counting one's blessings, gratitude,) predicted physical well-being. Finally, self-positivity—a crucial function of nostalgia—was found to be associated with healthy biological profiles (Taylor, Lerner, Sherman, Sage, & McDowell, 2003b).

We (Routledge et al., 2005; Wildschut et al., 2005) obtained empirical support for the four functions of nostalgia (positive affectivity, self-positivity, affiliation, existential) and are continuing to investigate these functions. Our discussion of functions was not meant to be exhaustive. Indeed, theorists have speculated about additional functions of nostalgia. For example, Davis (1979; see also Rosen, 1975)

has discussed the functions of continuity and accuracy. He proposed that, in nostalgic reverie, the individual constructs identity continuity via such processes as “an appreciative stance toward former selves; excluding unpleasant memories; reinterpreting marginal, fugitive, and eccentric facets of earlier selves in a positive light; and establishing benchmarks in one’s biography” (Davis, 1979, pp. 35-46). Brown and Humphreys (2002) and Milligan (2003) have also offered speculations on the continuity function of nostalgia. In addition, Davis (1979) proposed that nostalgia serves an accuracy function, as it is an authentic experience. In particular, “nostalgia purports to represent the true places, events, and moods of our past, even if our powers of historical reflection may cause us to question whether “it was indeed that way” (p. 47). We call for empirical verification of the continuity and accuracy functions of nostalgia.

What kind of persons are more prone to nostalgia and susceptible to its consequences? Neuroticism is a variable that has begun to receive increasing attention in our research program. Are neurotics more prone to nostalgic engagement when in negative than in positive mood? Recent research, showing that high (compared to low) neurotics were faster in making evaluative judgments when in negative than in positive mood (Tamir & Robinson, 2004) would be consistent with this reasoning. Also, are high, compared to low, neurotics more likely to benefit from nostalgic reverie in terms of positive affectivity, self-positivity, affiliation, or existential soothing? Recent research, showing that high neurotics are more vulnerable to stress in situations construed as threatening (Schneider, 2004) would seem to be in line with this reasoning. That is, nostalgic reverie may have more “emotional room” to operate among high than low neurotics. Alternatively, to the extent that neuroticism is marked

by affective instability (Larsen & Ketelaar, 1991; Spangler & Palrecha, 2004) and belies a more ambivalent investment in systems of meaning (Arndt & Solomon, 2003), high neurotics may not be able to marshal mainly positive memories in the nostalgic reverie, and this may undermine the palliative effects of the emotion.

Clearly, then, there is much to be learned through further research.

Another individual difference variable that is worth empirical attention is narcissism. High (compared to low) narcissists are self-centered, interpersonally manipulative, and unforgiving, while scoring low on agreeableness, empathy, and affiliation (Juola Exline, Baumeister, Bushman, Campbell, & Finkel, 2004; Sedikides, Rudich, Gregg, Kumashiro, & Rusbult, 2004). Given that nostalgia is a deeply social emotion, we would expect nostalgia proneness to be lower among narcissists than non-narcissists. Furthermore, we would expect that nostalgia would be more likely to serve a self-positivity than affiliation function for high narcissists, but serve an affiliation than self-positivity function for low narcissists.

Concluding Remarks

We began by reviewing several literatures that have a bearing on the interplay between self and affect. These literatures concerned the relation between mood and self-focused attention, the relation between mood and self-concept valence, and the cluster of self-conscious emotions. For the most part, though, we concentrated on a neglected self-conscious emotion, nostalgia. We reviewed the literature, introduced a re-conceptualization of the construct, and presented new findings from our laboratories.

Nostalgia shares important similarities with shame, guilt, and embarrassment. It implicates strongly the self, it has a motivational component (e.g., goal

clarification), and likely has behavioral consequences as well (e.g., phoning a friend or family member after feeling nostalgic about them). Also, like guilt and embarrassment (but unlike shame), nostalgia is focused on a particular social episode and is relevant to a specific facet of one's self rather than the person as a whole.

At the same time, nostalgia differs from shame, guilt and embarrassment, in important ways. Nostalgia does not necessarily involve a moral element, although internal standards may be indirectly activated by bringing to mind a close other. Nostalgia is not a painful emotion; to the contrary, it is a positive emotion. Nostalgia instigates affiliative, not reparative action. Finally, unlike shame and embarrassment (but like guilt) nostalgia may not be associated with a distinct nonverbal display.

In conclusion, the emotion of nostalgia has long been neglected in the psychological literature. This is unfortunate: Nostalgia is universal, prevalent, and serves a host of critical psychological functions. We hope that future research will redress this empirical imbalance and give this fundamental human experience its proper place in the pantheon of emotions.

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