

## Chapter 13

# Nostalgia

## *Conceptual Issues and Existential Functions*

CONSTANTINE SEDIKIDES

TIM WILDSCHUT

DENISE BADEN

SAMMLER: I see you have these recollections.

WALLACE: Well, I need them. Everybody needs his memories. They keep  
the wolf of insignificance from the door.

—SAUL BELLOW, *Mr. Sammler's Planet* (1970, p. 190)

Approximately 2,800 years ago, a blind poet wandered from city to city in Greece telling a tall tale—that of a nobleman, war hero, and daring adventurer who did not catch sight of his homeland for 20 long years. The poet was Homer and the larger-than-life character was Odysseus. Homer sang the epic adventures of cunning Odysseus who fought the Trojan War for 10 years and labored for another 10 on a die-hard mission to return to his homeland, the island of Ithaca, and reunite with his loyal wife, Penelope, and their son, Telemachus. Three of the 10 return years were spent on sea, facing the wrath of Gods, monsters, and assorted evil-doers. The other 7 were spent on the island of Ogygia, in the seducing arms of a nymph, the beautiful and possessive Calypso. Yet, despite this *dolce vita*, Odysseus never took his mind off Ithaca, refusing Calypso's offer to make him immortal. On the edge of ungratefulness, he confided to his mistress, "Full well I acknowledge Prudent Penelope cannot compare with your stature or beauty, for she is only a mortal, and you are immortal and ageless. Nevertheless it is she whom I daily desire and pine for. Therefore I long for my home and to see the day of returning" (Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. 1921, Book V, pp. 78–79).<sup>1</sup>

Return was continually on Odysseus' mind, and the Greek word for it is *nostos*. His burning wish for *nostos* afflicted unbearable suffering on Odysseus, and the Greek word for it is *algos*. Nostalgia, then, is the psychological suffering caused by unrelenting yearning to

return to one's homeland. The term "nostalgia" was actually coined by the Swiss physician Johannes Hofer (1688/1934), although references to its meaning can be found in Hippocrates, Caesar, and the Bible.

## HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF NOSTALGIA

In its 300 years of scholarly treatment, nostalgia has journeyed from the conceptual lows of brain disease and despair to the conceptual highs of positive emotionality and happiness. We briefly review these perspectives next.

### Historical Conceptions

#### *Nostalgia as Medical Disease*

Initially, nostalgia was conceptualized as a *medical or neurological disease*. Hofer (1688/1934) studied the behavioral symptoms of Swiss mercenaries fighting on behalf of various European rulers in far-away lands. Characteristic symptoms included emotional lability ranging from despondency to bouts of weeping, anorexia, and suicide attempts. Searching for physiological and neuroanatomical explanations, Hofer (1688/1934) suggested that the mercenaries suffered from nostalgia (or homesickness), "a cerebral disease of essentially demonic cause" (p. 387). The cause of the disease was "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). It did not get much better for a while. In 1732, the German-Swiss physician J. J. Scheuchzer argued 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; see also Zwingmann, 1959). It was widely believed at that time that nostalgia was a disease confined to the Swiss. In a race to offer the most bizarre explanation of them all (and our personal favorite), military physicians speculated that the cause of the disease was the unremitting clanging of cowbells in the Alps, which inflicted damage to the eardrum and brain cells (Davis, 1979).

The definition of nostalgia as a medical disease persisted in the 18th and 19th centuries, although the condition was no longer considered specific to the Swiss. Other populations, most notably soldiers fighting in the French armies and the American Civil War, were loosely studied and occasionally treated by physicians (Rosen, 1975).

#### *Nostalgia as Psychiatric Disorder*

By the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, the definition of nostalgia had shifted from brain to *psychiatric or psychosomatic disorder* (Batcho, 1998). The symptoms now included anxiety and sadness, weakness and loss of appetite, insomnia and fever (Havlena & Holak, 1991). Nostalgia was regarded as a form of melancholia (McCann, 1941).

This latter conception of nostalgia was carried into the mid-20th century by the psychodynamic tradition (Sohn, 1983). Nostalgia was branded an "immigrant psychosis" (Frost, 1938, p. 801), a "monomaniacal obsessive mental state causing intense unhappi-

ness” (Fodor, 1950, p. 25), arising from a subconscious yearning to return to one’s fetal state, and a “mentally repressive compulsive disorder” (Fodor, 1950, p. 25). These perceptions drifted into the late part of the century. Kaplan (1987) considered nostalgia a variant of depression, and Castelnuovo-Tedesco (1980) labeled it “a regressive manifestation closely related to the issue of loss, grief, incomplete mourning, and, finally, depression” (p. 110). It is worth noting that this perspective equated nostalgia with homesickness and bounded it to four populations: soldiers, seamen, immigrants, and first-year boarding or university students (Cox, 1988; Jackson, 1986).

### Contemporary Conceptions

#### *Nostalgia as Distinct from Homesickness*

In the latter part of the 20th century, nostalgia acquired a distinct conceptual status among both laypeople and researchers. The majority of college students regard nostalgia as different from homesickness. For example, they associate the words “warm, old times, childhood, and yearning” more frequently with the term “nostalgia” than with the term “homesickness” (Davis, 1979). Likewise, researchers make a clear distinction between the two terms. Along with Davis, Werman (1977) argued in favor of separate empirical traditions. Indeed, the two literatures have now diverged, with homesickness focusing mostly on the psychological difficulties accompanying the transition to boarding school or university, at home or abroad (Brewin, Furnham, & Howes, 1989; Fisher, 1989; Van Tilburg, Vingerhoets, & van Heck, 1996). This divergeness would perhaps disappoint Odysseus, as, for him, nostalgia and homesickness were one and the same.

With all due respect to history’s most famous émigré, we also conceptualize nostalgia as distinct from homesickness. Nostalgia is yearning for aspects of one’s past, a yearning that may include but is not limited to one’s homeland. This yearning may pertain, for example, to events, persons, or sights. Furthermore, we maintain that nostalgia is an experience that transcends a rather small, if not marginalized, set of groups (e.g., soldiers, seamen, immigrants, and students on the move). In addition, we maintain that nostalgia transcends age, as findings contradict the notion that nostalgia is limited to well-functioning adults or a specific age group such as elderly (Batcho, 1995, 1998; Mills & Coleman, 1994). Nostalgia is a universal experience, present and prevalent across the lifespan.

#### *Nostalgia as a Positive Emotion*

The *New Oxford Dictionary of English* defines nostalgia as “a sentimental longing or wistful affection for the past, typically for a period or place with happy personal associations” (1998, p. 1266). The nostalgic experience, then, involves positivity and even happiness. Researchers’ definitions of nostalgia follow suit, although they are substantially more differentiated (Batcho, 1998; Davis, 1979; Jackson, 1986).

We are also inclined to regard nostalgia a positive experience. Specifically, we consider nostalgia an emotion—a predominantly positive, self-relevant emotion. As such, nostalgia has an affective structure and fulfills crucial functions.

#### *The Existential Function of Nostalgia*

We propose that nostalgia serves existential functions. Nostalgia is an existential exercise in search for identity and meaning, a weapon in internal confrontations with existential dilem-

mas, and a mechanism for reconnecting with important others. Nostalgia keeps “the wolf of insignificance from the door” (Bellow, 1970, p. 190).

## THE EMOTION OF NOSTALGIA: STRUCTURE AND FUNCTIONS

We proceed by considering the affective structure and psychological functions of nostalgia.

### Affective Structure of Nostalgia

#### *Is Nostalgia an Emotion?*

Emotion theorists are unanimous in labeling nostalgia an emotion, and we concur. When it comes, however, to more nuanced classifications, there is disagreement.

Authors who endorse the distinction between basic and nonbasic emotions argue that nostalgia belongs to the latter category. For example, Kemper (1987) regarded nostalgia as a secondary, culturally influenced, emotion, whereas Frijda (1986) argued that nostalgia lacks specificity of modes of physiological activation, action readiness, and expression. Theorists, however, who reject or are skeptical of the basic–nonbasic emotion dichotomy provide a more textured script, in our opinion. Ortony, Clore, and Collins (1988) cast nostalgia in the group of well-being emotions. They argue that these emotions represent valenced reactions to outcomes rather than guiding goals or action. In particular, nostalgia is part of the negative subgroup of well-being emotions, and more specifically it belongs either to the distress emotions or loss emotions. In either case, nostalgia involves sadness or mourning about the past. Along similar lines, Johnson-Laird and Oatley (1989) highlight the dual nature of nostalgia, a positive experience with tones of loss. They cast nostalgia in the complex emotion category. Such emotions differ from basic emotions in that they reflect high-level cognitive appraisal and have propositional content. Nostalgia, they argue, is a happiness-related emotion. However, induction of nostalgia brings about mild discontent and sadness, due to the contrast between a desirable past and an undesirable present.

Our own view resonates partially with that of Johnson-Laird and Oatley (1989). Like them, we think that nostalgia involves a high degree of cognitive appraisal. Also like them, we regard nostalgia as a positive emotion, and we suggest that nostalgia involves a contrast between the present and the past. Unlike them, however, we do not think that this contrast is always direct or explicit, nor do we think that nostalgia always, or even typically, induces sadness. Instead, we suggest that nostalgia is often triggered by intrapersonal, social, or environmental stimuli and that it may sometimes involve minimal or implicit comparison of the past with the present. In addition, we think that nostalgia spawns more positive than negative intrapsychic (e.g., affective) outcomes. Finally, in disagreement with Ortony et al. (1988), we believe that nostalgia can have a bearing on goals and action.

#### *Who Is the Referent of Nostalgia?*

The referent of the nostalgic experience can range from the specific to the general. At the most specific level, nostalgia refers to a direct, individual experience. We call this case personal nostalgia. The experience can also pertain to an organization with which one is affiliated, and seemingly organizational nostalgia is quite prevalent (Gabriel, 1993). Furthermore, the referent may be a generational cohort, the culture independently of cohorts,

or a historical period within a culture (Batcho, 1995; Holbrook, 1993; Lears, 1998; Stern, 1992).

Our focus here is on *personal nostalgia*, the emotion whose “brooding” ground is an important experience that involves directly the self. This experience may include a specific episode, a person, a place, moods, sights, or smells.

### *Is Nostalgia a Self-Relevant Emotion?*

We regard nostalgia as a prima-facie self-relevant emotion. The central and defining character of the nostalgic experience is the self. At the same time, however, we acknowledge and emphasize the social dimension of nostalgia. In the nostalgic experience, the self is surrounded by people, typically close others such as family members, friends, and romantic partners (Holak & Havlena, 1998).

There is another way in which nostalgia is self-relevant while being social. We suggest that nostalgia serves crucial existential functions that range from individual (e.g., clarity and continuity of identity) to social (e.g., connectedness and meaning) ones.

### *Is Nostalgia a Positive, Negative, or Bittersweet Emotion?*

“Nostalgia is memory with the pain removed,” exclaimed the columnist Herb Caen (1975). Similarly, Davis (1979) termed nostalgia “a positively toned evocation of a lived past” (p. 18) and stated that “the nostalgic . . . experience . . . is infused with imputations of past beauty, pleasure, joy, satisfaction, goodness, happiness, love. . . . Nostalgic feeling is almost never infused with those sentiments we commonly think of as negative—for example, unhappiness, frustration, despair, hate, shame, abuse” (p. 14). Paralleling this view, Kaplan (1987) considered nostalgia a “warm feeling about the past, a past that is imbued with happy memories, pleasures, and joy” and maintained that the feeling is “basically one of joyousness, producing an air of infatuation and a feeling of elation” (p. 465). Several other theorists have highlighted the positive side of nostalgia, such as Gabriel (1993) and Holak and Havlena (1998). Chaplin (2000), in particular, argued that nostalgia reflects appreciation, if not reenjoyment, of past experiences.

Other theorists, however, posit that nostalgia is a negative emotion. Along with Johnson-Laird and Oatley (1989), authors such as Best and Nelson (1985), Hertz (1990), and Holbrook (1993, 1994) argued that the experience of nostalgia is immersed in sadness, as the nostalgic individual realizes that the past is irredeemably lost. Peters (1985) gave a more vivid description of the attributed negative content of the nostalgic experience, stating that it varies from “a fleeting sadness and yearning to an overwhelming craving that persists and profoundly interferes with the individual’s attempts to cope with his present circumstances” (p. 135).

Still a third group of theorists emphasize the bittersweet flavor of the nostalgic experience. Despite labeling nostalgia a positive emotion, Davis (1979) acknowledged the ambivalence involved in yearning for an experience while full well recognizing that it is bygone. Nostalgia involves a “wistful pleasure, a joy tinged with sadness,” Werman (1977, p. 393) asserted. Socarides (1977) added that nostalgia involves psychological pain, a view shared by Fodor (1950).

Our take on nostalgia is a hybrid of the positive and bittersweet views: We regard nostalgia as a disproportionately positive emotion, with bittersweet elements. There is some preliminary support for our conceptualization. In a study by Holak and Havlena (1998),

participants detailed the circumstances and feelings that they experienced during each of three nostalgic episodes, pertaining to persons, events, and objects. Two judges rated the participants' accounts on the basis of several emotions. The accounts were described mostly by positive emotions (e.g., warmth, joy, elation, tenderness, and gratitude), although a link with a few negative emotions (e.g., sadness, irritation, and fear) also emerged.

### *Does Nostalgia Reflect Redemption or Contamination?*

McAdams and colleagues (McAdams, Diamond, de St. Aubin, & Mansfield, 1997; McAdams, Reynolds, Lewis, Patten, & Bowman, 2001) distinguished between two strategies that people use to imbue their life stories with meaning and coherence. These strategies are redemption and contamination. In redemption, the story progresses from a bad or difficult life scene to a good or triumphant one. "The bad is redeemed, salvaged, mitigated, or made better in light of the ensuing good" (McAdams et al., 2001, p. 474). In contamination, the story progresses from a good or uncomplicated life situation to a problematic or bad one. "The good is spoiled, ruined, contaminated, or undermined by what follows it" (McAdams et al., 2001, p. 474).

These strategies have notable emotional implications. In a redemption sequence, the resulting emotion is positive, as the individual feels content, happy, or ecstatic. In a contamination sequence, the resulting emotion is negative, as the individual feels sad, dejected, or depressed. In light of our conceptualization of nostalgia as a predominantly positive emotion, we predict that nostalgic episodes are characterized mostly by redemption rather than by contamination sequences. We are in the process of testing this hypothesis.

### *Is Nostalgia Different from Reminiscence and Autobiographical Memory?*

We think that there is a distinction to be drawn between reminiscence (Havighurst & Glasser, 1972; Reis-Bergan, Gibbons, Gerrard, & Ybema, 2000) and autobiographical memory (Brown & Schopflocher, 1998; Skowronski, Walker, & Betz, 2003), on one hand, and nostalgia, on the other. The former two involve "cold" processing (i.e., cognition), whereas the last involves "hot" processing (i.e., affect) (Castelnuovo-Tedesco, 1980; Cavanaugh, 1989).

Reminiscence and autobiographical memory are acts of remembering specific events in one's life, including the order of their occurrence. These events do not have to be, and typically are not, important or affect-laden. Nostalgia, however, goes well beyond memory veracity or temporal ordering of past events. It is centered around personally relevant events, is dipped in affect, and serves vital existential functions which we specify below.

### *What Triggers Nostalgia?*

Nostalgia can be fortuitous, that is, triggered passively by external stimuli associated with one's recent or distant past. These stimuli can be social (e.g., friends, family members, picnics, birthday parties, reunions, and lost loved ones) or nonsocial (e.g., objects, music, scents, products, and possessions) (Havlena & Holak, 1991; Holak & Havlena, 1998; Holbrook, 1993, 1994). Alternatively, nostalgia may be deliberate, or initiated actively through reflection.

In either case, a direct (i.e., explicit) or indirect (i.e., implicit) comparison is made between past and current experiences (e.g., events, psychological states, and lifestyles) (Davis,

1979). This juxtaposition is a defining feature of the nostalgic experience. We elaborate on this feature when discussing functions of nostalgia, a topic to which we now turn.

### **Psychological Functions of Nostalgia**

We propose that nostalgia fulfills existential functions. We think of nostalgia as a positive emotional and experiential reservoir that people delve into to deal with existential threat. We briefly review relevant literature and link it to our suggested functions of nostalgia.

Rank (1941) and Becker (1973) articulated the intrapersonal struggles that humans face when confronting their own mortality. Their ideas formed the foundation for an influential theory, terror management theory (TMT; Solomon, Greenberg, & Pyszczynski, 1991; Chapter 2, this volume). According to TMT, the knowledge, inevitability and imminence of death, if pondered consciously and deliberately, can induce paralyzing feelings of terror. In self-preservation, humans deflect death-related thoughts and existential terror by engaging in two symbolic strategies (Greenberg, Pyszczynski, & Solomon, 1997; Pyszczynski, Greenberg, & Solomon, 1999). First, they suppress thoughts of their death or relegate such thoughts to the non-foreseeable future (*proximal strategy*). Second, they implement self-esteem maintenance and elevation tactics or adhere to cultural norms and values (*distal strategy*). Mikulincer, Florian, and Hirschberger (2003, Chapter 18, this volume) added a third symbolic and distal strategy: close relationships. They reported that relationship dissolution induces, whereas relationship involvement shields off, existential terror. Further, death awareness increases one's motivation to affiliate and initiate or strengthen close relationships.

The central thesis of our chapter is that nostalgia is a process that facilitates the implementation of the above-mentioned distal strategies, namely, enhancement of the self, support of the cultural worldview, and bolstering of relational bonds. Nostalgia soothes the self from existential pangs by solidifying and augmenting identity, regenerating and sustaining a sense of meaning, and buttressing and invigorating desired connectedness with the social world. We review theoretical notions next and offer our own as well.

#### *Existential Function 1: Nostalgia Solidifies and Augments Identity*

An important way in which nostalgia “quiet[s] our fears of the abyss” (Davis, 1979, p. 41) is through the solidification of identity. To begin with, nostalgia is a source of identity uncertainty–reduction or identity attainment (Cavanaugh, 1989; Mills & Coleman, 1994). One can derive a stronger sense of selfhood, an increasingly unified self, by putting together pieces of past lives through nostalgia.

Moreover, nostalgia serves to protect identity. Kaplan (1987) thought of nostalgia as a mechanism for coping with loss of self-esteem. He speculated that nostalgia increases one's ability to deal with the present and restores self-worth perhaps by resorting, at least momentarily, to an idealized past (Kleiner, 1977) and “bestowing an endearing luster on past selves that may not have seemed all that lustrous at the time” (Davis, 1979, p. 41). Relatedly and importantly, nostalgia is thought to augment self-worth and identity (Gabriel, 1993). Kaplan, for example, labeled nostalgia “an ego ideal” (p. 471). Indeed, nostalgia likely is an effective self-affirmation tool (Steele, 1988; Tesser & Cornell, 1991).

The redeeming value of nostalgia is also worth emphasizing. Nostalgia enables a person to escape present mediocrity by resorting to a splendid past. Through reflected glory or vicarious fulfillment, the present identity acquires value and veneer and becomes more tolera-

ble (Gabriel, 1993). A has-been becomes somebody again. Schwartz (1987) termed this “ontological function” (p. 328), and Becker (1962) illustrated it with commendable clarity:

Anthony Quinn in his great role in *Requiem for a Heavyweight* earned his inner sense of self-value by constantly reminding himself and others that he was “*fifth*-ranking contender for the heavyweight crown.” (p. 84)

This assertion gave the character some substance, some personal and social standing: It lifted him from nobody to somebody. It infused him with a wave of self-worth (Greenberg et al., 1997; Pyszczynski et al., 1999).

### *Existential Function 2: Nostalgia Regenerates and Sustains a Sense of Meaning*

Another existential function of nostalgia is to regenerate and sustain a sense of meaning, in part through identification with the cultural worldview (Greenberg et al., 1997; Pyszczynski et al., 1999). In instances of felt loneliness, separateness, and alienation, resorting to nostalgic engagement can be therapeutic. Nostalgia alleviates these existential fears by reinforcing the value of cultural traditions and rituals of which one was once a part. This can be achieved by revelling in past Thanksgiving dinners, school fares, parades, and disco nights, or by collecting old baseball cards and movie or war memorabilia. Through such practices, one increases his or her sense of cultural belongingness (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), while restoring direction and the belief that one is living a purposeful life in a meaningful cultural context.

In the process, identity continuity will be facilitated (Chaplin, 2000; Davis, 1979). Continuity of identity across time is fostered through both a more appreciative attitude toward past selves and an improved understanding of how one fits into the cultural jigsaw puzzle, of how culture has shaped one’s personality and value system. An increased sense of mastery and control over one’s life may ensue.

### *Existential Function 3: Nostalgia Buttresses and Invigorates Social Connectedness*

The third major existential function of nostalgia is the bolstering of relational bonds. In nostalgic reverie, “the mind is ‘peopled’ ” (Hertz, 1990, p. 195). One reestablishes a symbolic connection with significant others (Batcho, 1998; Castano, Yzerbyt, & Paladino, Chapter 19, this volume; Cavanaugh, 1989; Kaplan, 1987; Mills & Coleman, 1994). Figures of the past are brought to life and become part of one’s present.

This reignition of meaningful relational bonds satisfies one’s need for interpersonal belongingness, thus benefiting self-esteem and identity (Leary & Baumeister, 2000). It also affords the individual a sense of safety and secure attachment (Mikulincer et al., 2003, Chapter 18, this volume). Finally, it allows for a symbolic celebration of life—both past and present.

### *Summary*

We suggested that the core existential functions of nostalgia are (1) enhancement of the self, through identity solidification and augmentation; (2) support of the cultural worldview, through meaning regeneration and sustenance; and (3) bolstering of relational bonds through invigoration of interpersonal connectedness. Although no direct, systematic program of re-



search has scrutinized these notions so far, there is indeed a relevant, albeit scant, literature to which we now turn.

### The Discontinuity Hypothesis

Davis's (1979) discontinuity hypothesis is consistent with our argument that nostalgia is an effective resource for coping with existential threat. The hypothesis states that nostalgia is an emotional reaction to discontinuity in people's lives. Stated alternatively, people who experience disruption in their lives will rate the past more favorably than those who experience continuity.

What are the sources of discontinuity? We would speculate that they include death of a loved one, health deterioration, relationship breakup or divorce, occupational crises (e.g., layoffs), and drops in standards of living. What are the emotional or existential consequences of discontinuity? Davis (1979) named "fears, discontents, anxieties, or uncertainties" (p. 34). We would add loneliness, alienation, and fear of death to the list. Nostalgia, then, is a coping mechanism for dealing with these highly uncomfortable psychological states.

Three studies have tested the discontinuity hypothesis. Best and Nelson (1985) analyzed data from four national sample surveys. Each survey contained one or two statements that the authors operationalized as indicators of nostalgia. In the National Senior Citizens Survey (conducted in 1968;  $N = 4,000$  adults ages 64 or over), participants responded with a *yes* or *no* to two statements: "You are as happy now as you were when you were younger" and "People had it better in the old days." In the National Council on Aging study (conducted in 1974;  $N = 1,500$  adults ages 18 or over), participants expressed their agreement or disagreement with each of two statements: "I am as happy as when I was younger" and "These are the best years of my life." In the Americans View Their Mental Health survey (conducted in 1976;  $N = 2,000$  adults ages 21 or over), participants responded to a single question: "What do you think of as the happiest time in your life?" Participants were classified as nostalgic if they selected a period in their past rather than the present. Finally, in the General Social Survey (conducted in 1980;  $N = 1,500$  adults ages 18 or over), participants responded with *agree* or *disagree* to the statement: "In spite of what some people say, the lot of the average man is getting worse, not better."

The results offered weak support for the discontinuity hypothesis. Consistent with the hypothesis, deteriorating circumstances (e.g., death of a child or sibling, personal health problems, divorce) were associated with increased nostalgia. Also, African Americans (who were deemed to have experienced more discontinuity in the changing times of the Civil Rights movement) were more nostalgic than whites. Other predictions, however, were not supported. One such prediction was that men would be more nostalgic than women. As Davis (1979) put it, "traditionally, women's status passages occur in the familiar and re-assuring context of home, family, and kin, whereas those of men are more likely to involve abrupt shifts of locale, reference group, life style, and interpersonal atmospheres" (p. 56). Although this prediction is rather controversial, given that the Feminist Movement was well under way at the time the surveys were carried out, the results did not support the prediction anyway: Women were more nostalgic than men on four statements, whereas women and men did not differ on the remaining two statements. More pointedly, working women were equally or more nostalgic than women who stayed at home. The discontinuity hypothesis was not supported on three more grounds: Neither occupational nor geographic

mobility predicted nostalgia, and no relation was found between work interruption and nostalgia.

Another test of the discontinuity hypothesis was reported by Batcho (1995). She assessed nostalgia in a two-part survey which included 684 participants ages 4–80 (median age = 20 years). In the first part of the survey, evaluated the world as it is now (1 = pretty bad, 5 = pretty great), as it will be 20 years from now (1 = a lot worse, 5 = a lot better), and as it was when they were younger (1 = a lot worse, 5 = a lot better). In the second part of the survey, participants completed the Nostalgia Inventory. They indicated (1 = not at all, 5 = very much) how much they missed each of 20 items from when they were younger. Items ranged from concrete (toys, your house, friends) to abstract (the way society was, not knowing sad or evil things, not having to worry).

The first part of the survey yielded no significant results: Evaluations of the world across the three periods did not differ by age or gender. However, when the upper and lower quartiles of the Nostalgia Inventory were examined, high nostalgics rated the world when they were younger as better than did low nostalgics. Also, 87% of the high nostalgics rated the future as less favorable than the past, whereas 63% of the low nostalgics rated the future as more favorable than the past. Furthermore, the overall nostalgia score, although uncorrelated with judgments of the present or the future, was correlated with judgments of the past. In general, nostalgia was associated with the view that the past was better and not necessarily with substantial dissatisfaction with the present or anxieties concerning the future. Regardless, support for the discontinuity hypothesis was weak.

The second part of the survey did not yield gender differences either. Age main effects, however, 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. Rather surprisingly, on all but two (family, music) of these items, younger adults were more nostalgic than older ones. The age main effect was not significant for the following six items: places, someone you loved, things you did, church/religion, the way society was, and TV shows/movies. The results were inconsistent with the discontinuity hypothesis.

In a follow-up investigation, Batcho (1998) ventured another two-study test of the discontinuity hypothesis. The first study used the same procedure as that of Batcho (1995). In addition, participants completed self-descriptiveness ratings of the items: happy, risk or thrill seeking, emotional, good memory, and preferring activities with people rather than alone. High and low nostalgics did not differ on happiness, leading Batcho (1998) to infer that unhappiness does not qualify as an etiology of nostalgia. Also, high and low nostalgics did not differ on risk or thrill seeking, leading Batcho to disqualify dread for the future as an etiology of nostalgia. However, high (compared to low) nostalgics described themselves as more emotional, having stronger memory, and more likely to prefer activities with people rather than alone. Based on these findings, Batcho speculated that susceptibility to nostalgia is related to greater capacity for emotionality, to proneness to continuity with the past, and to greater need for involving others in one's activities.

In the second study, Batcho (1998) tested recall of high and low nostalgics based on a list of eight negative, eight neutral, and eight positive nouns. Participants also completed scales of optimism, hopelessness, emotionality, and affect intensity. The two groups did not differ in memory for words. However, the memories of high nostalgics were more people-directed than those of low nostalgics. The individual-difference scales yielded null results.

Although we acknowledge the pioneering character and usefulness of the above-mentioned studies, we cannot conceal a few points of criticism. Best and Nelson's (1985) six statements were not ideal indicators of nostalgia, and their data were underanalyzed. Furthermore, Batcho's (1995, 1998) findings were preliminary. These researchers were not concerned exclusively with personal nostalgia, and their approach was survey-based rather than experimental.

As matters stand, then, support for the discontinuity hypothesis is weak. We hope that future empirical tests will evaluate the hypothesis in a controlled, laboratory setting. For example, existential threat (e.g., a mortality salience manipulation; Solomon et al., 1991, Chapter 2, this volume) would need to be introduced, and corresponding changes in the level of nostalgia would need to be observed. The prediction is that awareness of one's own death will induce nostalgic engagement, which in turn will augment self-esteem, reaffirm the meaningfulness of the cultural worldview, and reestablish connection with close others. We are in the process of preparing such experimental procedures.

### NOSTALGIA IN CONTEXT: FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Our view of nostalgia can be summarized as follows. Nostalgia is a universal experience: It concerns all persons, regardless of age, gender, social class, ethnicity, or other social groupings. Nostalgia is a self-relevant emotion that involves reliving one's past, and in particular events involving one's important but bygone relationships. Its bittersweet content notwithstanding, nostalgia is predominantly positive. Furthermore, nostalgia is typically triggered by a threatening stimulus (e.g., death of a loved one, health problems, relationship dissolution, and income loss) or is a deliberate response to an uncomfortable psychological state (e.g., sadness, loneliness, anxiety, and alienation), although it can also be triggered by fortuitous stimuli (e.g., old photographs, letters, or CDs). Most important, nostalgia, by being a stock of positive feelings, can ward off external threat or distressing thoughts. Nostalgia serves three core existential functions: self-enhancement, alignment with the cultural worldview, and fostering of close relationships. Successful fulfillment of one or more of these functions contributes to positive affectivity and a state of reassurance, warmth, and security.

We do not wish to argue that nostalgia has uniquely beneficial effects on psychological functioning. As stated earlier, nostalgia is somewhat associated with ambivalence and confusion. Also, nostalgia may, if excessive and uncontrollable, interfere with enjoyment of the present. It may also make one feel closed to new opportunities, experiences, and relationships.

These rather extreme cases aside, however, we do expect for nostalgia to be associated with psychological well-being. As a predominantly positive emotion, nostalgia may contribute to a broader thought-action repertoire (Fredrickson, 2001; Fredrickson, Tugade, Waugh, & Larkin, 2003), fostering creative and productive thinking. Indeed, if nostalgia clarifies and enhances the positivity of identity, while cementing close relationships, we would expect it to be linked with several markers of psychological well-being, such as feeling content or happy, being able to grow, and being able to plan and achieve (Taylor, Lerner, Sherman, Sage, & McDowell, 2003). Contrary, then, to Ortony et al.'s (1988) argument, we believe that nostalgia can have a bearing on goals and action. It can have motivational implications.

We also expect nostalgia to be associated with physical well-being. Although there is no direct evidence addressing this question, we can speculate based on the results of a study by Danner, Snowdon, and Friesen (2001). These researchers coded for emotional content the handwritten diaries of Catholic nuns (ages 75–95) which were composed at an early age (Mean age = 22 years). Early positive emotionality predicted survival rates 60 years later. In a similar vein, Emmons and McCullough (2003) demonstrated that positive emotions (e.g., gratitude, counting one's blessings) predicted psychological and physical well-being. Assuming that nostalgia is a typically positive emotion, it is likely to have long term implications for physical health.

Finally, who are the persons most likely to wax nostalgic? Although extant research has not succeeded in relating individual differences in nostalgia proneness to other personality variables (e.g., Batcho, 1998), we think that the issue deserves additional consideration. For example, are anxious-ambivalent persons more likely to engage in nostalgia than their securely attached counterparts? Are low self-esteem individuals more nostalgic than high self-esteem ones? Are individuals with interdependent self-construals more likely to be nostalgic than those with independent self-construals? We hope that future research addresses these and other questions pertaining to the emotion of nostalgia and its relevance to daily life.

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### NOTE

1. We are pleased to be able to offer some narrative relief for the hooked-up reader. The story has more steam, culminating in a Hollywood-type happy-ever-after finale. Calypso is ordered by Zeus to release Odysseus. She helps him build a raft, and Odysseus sails away toward Ithaca, but his raft is wrecked by Poseidon near the island of Scheria (current Corfu), home of the Phaeacians and princess Nausicaa. Despite her unrequited infatuation with Odysseus, Nausicaa graciously orders the Phaeacian seamen to take him to his homeland. They lay Odysseus near an olive tree on Ithaca's shore and depart without waking him. In plotting and sinister mood, Odysseus traps into death the brazen fellows who dallied with Penelope, is reunited with his wife and son, and is reinstated as the ruler of Ithaca. (For the latest scholarship on Homer and *The Odyssey*, see <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/>.)

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