

Chapter 5

Self-Regulatory Interplay Between Negative and Positive Emotions: The Case of Loneliness and Nostalgia

Tim Wildschut, Constantine Sedikides, and Filippo Cordaro

5.1 Introduction

The past 20 years have seen a surge in psychological research on emotions. Most of this attention has been devoted to negative affective states such as shame (Tangney, 2003), guilt (Baumeister, Stillwell, & Heatherton, 1994), embarrassment (Keltner & Buswell, 1996), regret (Gilovich & Medvec, 1995), social anxiety (Leary & Kowalski, 1995), and loneliness (Cacioppo et al., 2006). Historically, the study of positive emotions has lagged behind, but in recent years there has been a welcome increase in research on positive affective states such as gratitude (Emmons & McCullough, 2003), pride (Tracy & Robins, 2007), joy (Fredrickson, 2001), self-compassion (Neff, 2003), inspiration (Thrash & Elliot, 2003), passion (Vallerand et al., 2003), and nostalgia (Sedikides, Wildschut, Arndt, & Routledge, 2008).

Much of the impetus for the burgeoning interest in positive emotions was provided by the influential idea that these emotions play a vital role in the regulation of psychological distress and the maintenance of psychological and physiological homeostasis (Aspinwall, 1998; Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000). This view was expressed succinctly, for instance, in Levenson's (1988) *undoing hypothesis*. Levenson proposed that: "the evolutionary meaning of positive emotions such as happiness might be to function as efficient 'undoers' of states of ANS (autonomic nervous system) arousal produced by certain negative emotions" (p. 25). Building on this hypothesis, Fredrickson and Levenson (1998) suggested that:

If negative emotions promote the activation of a limited number of well-rehearsed, time-tested, adaptive actions along with their attendant physiological support, certain positive emotions can be seen as assuming a complementary role, efficiently restoring equilibrium to the organism both in terms of returning physiological activation to prior levels, and restoring psychological openness to a wide range of action possibilities (p. 215).

The objective of this chapter is to review empirical research that highlights the complementary relation between loneliness (a negative emotional state) and

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nostalgia (a positive emotional state). Specifically, we propose that the psychological significance of nostalgia resides in part in its capacity to regulate feelings of loneliness by increasing perceived social connectedness. We review findings showing that loneliness increases nostalgia and that, in turn, nostalgia increases perceived social connectedness. We then examine evidence for the vital implication that, whereas the direct effect of loneliness is to reduce perceived social connectedness, its indirect effect is to increase perceived social connectedness via nostalgia. Finally, we examine how the relation between loneliness and nostalgia is shaped by individual differences that play a governing role in emotion regulation: resilience (Block & Kremen, 1996; Bonanno, 2005) and the attachment-related dimensions of avoidance and anxiety (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003).

5.1.1 Loneliness

Loneliness is a complex emotion marked by negative feelings and cognitions, including unhappiness, pessimism, self-blame, and depression (Cacioppo & Hawkley, 2005). Loneliness is also characterized by perceived lack of social support (Cacioppo et al., 2006) and by having fewer and less satisfying relationships than desired (Archibald, Bartholomew, & Marx, 1995). Furthermore, loneliness is a universal experience, as documented by studies with diverse cultural samples including Chinese Canadians (Goodwin, Cook, & Yung, 2001), Turks and Argentines (Rokach & Bacanli, 2001), Americans and Canadians (Rokach & Neto, 2000), Portuguese (Neto & Barrios, 2001), and British Asians (Shams, 2001). Broadly defined, loneliness may comprise negative affective states such as hurt feelings (Leary, Springer, Negel, Ansell, & Evans, 1998) and unrequited love (Baumeister, Wotman, & Stillwell, 1993). Hurt feelings arise from relational devaluation: that is, the feeling that close others do not value one's relationship with them. Betrayal, criticism, disassociation, and being unappreciated are important precursors to hurt feelings, and hurt feelings are strongly correlated with a sense of social exclusion (Leary et al., 1998). Unrequited love occurs when romantic attraction is not reciprocated, and involves a particularly poignant form of relational devaluation (Baumeister et al., 1993).

5.1.2 Nostalgia

The term "nostalgia" derives from the Greek words *nostos* (return) and *algos* (pain). It was coined by the Swiss physician Johannes Hofer (1688/1934) to describe the adverse symptoms displayed by Swiss mercenaries fighting in the service of European monarchs. Hofer conceptualized nostalgia as "a cerebral disease" (p. 387), and his view of nostalgia as a neurological affliction persisted throughout the seventeenth and the eighteenth century. By the early nineteenth century, nostalgia came to be regarded as a form of melancholia or depression, and it remained relegated to the realm of

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psychological disorders for much of the twentieth century. In part, this disconsolate perspective was due to the equation of nostalgia with homesickness. Only in the latter part of the twentieth century did nostalgia acquire a separate conceptual status (Davis, 1979; Sedikides, Wildschut, & Baden, 2004). Current dictionary definitions of homesickness and nostalgia reflect this distinctness. *The New Oxford Dictionary of English* (1998) defines "homesick" as "experiencing a longing for one's home during a period of absence from it" and "nostalgia" as "a sentimental longing for the past" (p. 1266). Whereas there is now a sizeable literature on homesickness (Van Tilburg & Vingerhoets, 2005; Watt & Badger, 2009), empirical research on nostalgia remains scarce and, until recently, confined mainly to the field of marketing and consumer preferences (Holbrook, 1993). Focused on accounting for the market success of certain consumer goods, this research has demonstrated how product styles (e.g., of music) that were popular during one's youth influence one's lifelong preferences. Although these findings are important, we have attempted to lay the foundation for a broader perspective in order to understand more fully the psychological significance of nostalgia (Sedikides et al., 2008; Sedikides, Wildschut, Arndt, & Routledge, 2006).

Nostalgia is a self-relevant and social emotion: The self almost invariably figures as the protagonist in nostalgic memories and is almost always surrounded by close others. Along with close others (family members, friends, romantic partners), the most common objects of nostalgia are momentous events (birthdays, anniversaries, vacations; Wildschut, Sedikides, Arndt, & Routledge, 2006, Studies 1–2). Although nostalgia is characterized by some affective ambivalence, it is a predominantly positive emotion. On the one hand, the simultaneous expression of happiness and sadness is more commonly found in recollections of nostalgic events, compared with ordinary events, and the co-activation of happiness and sadness occurs more frequently as a result of reflection about nostalgic events than as a result of reflection about ordinary or positive events (Wildschut, Stephan, Sedikides, Routledge, & Arndt, 2008). On the other hand, recollections of nostalgic events include more frequent expressions of happiness than of sadness, and nostalgic reflection generates more positive affect (but not more negative affect) than reflection about ordinary events (Wildschut et al., 2006, 2008; Zhou et al., 2008). Moreover, in nostalgic narratives, positive and negative elements are often juxtaposed in a redemption sequence – a narrative pattern that progresses from a bleak to a triumphant life scene (McAdams, 2001).

5.1.3 Interplay Between Loneliness and Nostalgia

Loneliness can be combated in more than one way. Deficiencies in social connectedness elicit a range of compensatory mechanisms geared toward replenishing social connectedness (Maner, DeWall, Baumeister, & Schaller, 2007). For instance, Williams and Sommer (1997) found that women responded to rejection from a group by working harder on a subsequent collective task. Support from social networks alleviates loneliness (Asher & Paquette, 2003) and individuals form social bonds with relative ease (Festinger, Schachter, & Back, 1950). Furthermore, once formed,

individuals attempt tenaciously to maintain social bonds (Vaughan, 1986). Yet, frequently, the formation and maintenance of social networks is impeded or interrupted by situational or individual factors. For instance, the deterioration or even dissolution of valued social bonds that often accompanies life transitions (e.g., transition to college, relocation, migration) can make individuals feel adrift and lonely (Sedikides, Wildschut, Routledge, Arndt, & Zhou, 2009; Van Tilburg & Vingerhoets, 2005). Social networks can also be disrupted by interpersonal rejections (Williams, 1997), and personality dispositions (e.g., shyness, social anxiety) can frustrate the maintenance and formation of social networks (Leary & Kowalski, 1995).

An alternative strategy for coping with loneliness is to strengthen subjective perceptions of social connectedness and support by drawing on nostalgic memories. In nostalgic reverie, "the mind is 'peopled'" (Hertz, 1990, p. 195). By rekindling meaningful relationships, nostalgia bolsters social bonds and renders accessible positive relational knowledge structures (Baldwin, Keelan, Fehr, Enns, & Koh-Rangarajoo, 1996). Important figures from one's past are brought to life and become part of one's present (Davis, 1979).

5.2 The Relationship Between Nostalgia and Loneliness

5.2.1 Does Loneliness Increase Nostalgia?

There is compelling empirical evidence that lonely individuals seek refuge in nostalgic reverie. Initial results indicating a link between loneliness and nostalgia came from a study in which British undergraduate participants were asked simply to write about the circumstances under which they become nostalgic (Wildschut et al., 2006, Study 2). Analysis of these narrative descriptions revealed that negative affect was the most frequently mentioned trigger of nostalgia (e.g., "Generally I think about nostalgic experiences when things are not going very well – lonely or depressed"). Specifically, 38% of participants listed negative affect as a trigger of nostalgia. The next most frequent trigger (24%) was social interaction (e.g., "Meeting up with people who were there and discussing what happened and laughing/crying about it"). Considering the prominence of negative affect as a trigger of nostalgia, Wildschut et al. examined more closely descriptions coded into this category. They made a distinction between discrete negative affective states (e.g., lonely, scared) and generalized affective states often referred to as negative mood (e.g., sad, depressed). In contrast to more discrete affective states, which "arise from appraisals of specific actual or contemplated states of the world" (Bodenhausen, Sheppard, & Kramer, 1994, p. 46), generalized affective states often lack a clearly delineated referent or antecedent. Some participants mentioned both discrete and generalized negative affective states (e.g., "If I ever feel lonely or sad, I tend to think of my friends or family whom I haven't seen for a long time") and therefore the two categories were not mutually exclusive. Of those who listed negative affect as a trigger

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of nostalgia, 78% referred to negative mood, and 58% referred to discrete negative affective states. Within the latter category, 59% of participants referred to loneliness, making it the most frequently mentioned discrete affective state by far.

In a follow-up study, Wildschut et al. (2006, Study 4) investigated directly the causal impact of loneliness on nostalgia. Does experimentally induced loneliness increase in-the-moment feelings of nostalgia? Wildschut et al. manipulated loneliness by giving British undergraduates false questionnaire feedback. Participants completed a questionnaire labeled "Southampton Loneliness Scale," which comprised 15 statements drawn from the UCLA Loneliness Scale (Russell, 1996). In the high loneliness condition, participants completed items that were designed to elicit agreement by prefacing them with the words "I sometimes" (e.g., "I sometimes feel isolated from others"). In the low loneliness condition, participants completed items that were designed to elicit disagreement by prefacing them with the words "I always" (e.g., "I always feel isolated from others"). As intended, participants in the high loneliness (compared to low loneliness) condition agreed with a greater number of statements. Next, participants in the high loneliness condition were told that they fell in the 62nd percentile of the loneliness distribution and therefore were "above average on loneliness," whereas participants in the low loneliness condition were told that they fell in the 12th percentile and therefore were "very low on loneliness." Participants then completed a manipulation check and Batcho's (1995) Nostalgia Inventory (NI). On this questionnaire, participants rated how much they miss 18 aspects of their past (e.g., "my family," "not having to worry," "music," "having someone to depend on," "holidays I went on," "my family house"). Results revealed that participants in the high loneliness (compared to low loneliness) condition felt more lonely and experienced stronger in-the-moment feelings of nostalgia.

5.2.2 Does Nostalgia Increase Social Connectedness?

The documented effect of loneliness on nostalgia is consistent with the possibility that nostalgia serves to regulate deficiencies in social connectedness. To further examine this idea, Wildschut et al. (2006, Studies 5–7) tested whether nostalgia strengthens social connectedness. They randomly assigned participants to a nostalgia or control condition. In the nostalgia condition, participants were instructed to recall a nostalgic event from their lives, and to reflect upon the event and how it made them feel. In the control condition, participants were instructed to recall an ordinary event from their lives, and to reflect upon the event and how it made them feel. Following a manipulation check, social connectedness was assessed with either (1) the items "loved" and "protected," (2) the Revised Experiences in Close Relationships Scale (ECR-R; Fraley, Waller, & Brennan, 2000) which measures attachment-related anxiety and avoidance, and (3) the Interpersonal Competence Questionnaire (Buhrmester, Furman, Wittenberg, & Reis, 1988) which taps perceived competence in initiating social interactions, self-disclosing, and providing emotional support. Nostalgic

(compared to control) participants manifested stronger feelings of nostalgia (as assessed by the manipulation check) and stronger social connectedness: they felt more loved and protected, evinced reduced attachment-related anxiety and avoidance, and reported greater interpersonal competence. In a subsequent study with Chinese undergraduates, Zhou, Sedikides, Wildschut, and Gao (2008, Study 3) further found that nostalgic (compared to control) participants scored higher on perceived social support, as assessed by the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS; Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet, & Farley, 1988), and estimated that they had a greater number of friends who would help them to earn research credits.

5.2.3 Does Loneliness Increase Social Connectedness Via Nostalgia?

So far, we have reviewed evidence that loneliness increases nostalgia and that nostalgia, in turn, increases social connectedness. This evidence raises the possibility that loneliness affects social connectedness in two distinct ways. The direct effect of loneliness is to reduce social connectedness: The lonelier one feels, the fewer social connections one perceives. However, loneliness may also have an indirect positive effect by increasing social connectedness via nostalgia: The lonelier one feels, the more nostalgic one becomes, and the more social connectedness one may then experience. This pattern of relations would give rise to a situation of "statistical suppression." Such situations can be described in terms of an implicit causal model involving an initial predictor (e.g., loneliness), an intervening variable (e.g., nostalgia), and an outcome (e.g., perceived social connectedness). Suppression occurs when the direct effect of the initial predictor is directionally opposite to its indirect effect via the intervening variable. When the intervening variable is controlled, the direct effect of the initial predictor is strengthened (Paulhus, Robins, Trzesniewski, & Tracy, 2004).

In a series of studies with Chinese participants, Zhou et al. (2008) examined the possibility that nostalgia counteracts reductions in perceived social support caused by loneliness. In one study, 758 Chinese children who had migrated with their parents from rural to urban areas completed measures of loneliness, nostalgia (Southampton Nostalgia Scale [SNS]; Routledge, Arndt, Sedikides, & Wildschut, 2008), and perceived social support. The results of this study are presented in Fig. 5.1 (top panel). Zero-order correlations revealed that (1) loneliness was negatively associated with perceived social support, (2) loneliness was positively associated with nostalgia, and (3) nostalgia was positively associated with perceived social support. These results showed that, whereas the direct effect of loneliness is to decrease perceived social support, the indirect effect of loneliness is to increase perceived social support via nostalgia. Indeed, when Zhou et al. regressed perceived social support onto both loneliness and nostalgia, they found a unique negative association between loneliness and perceived social support, and a unique positive association between nostalgia and perceived social support. Importantly, the negative

Fig. 5.1 Association between loneliness ($N = 758$) and social support, standardized regression coefficients

association between loneliness and social support was more negative for children who had migrated from rural to urban areas than for children who had not migrated (high level of nostalgia).

A subsequent study with Chinese students who had migrated from rural to urban areas (low level of nostalgia) found that loneliness had a direct negative effect on perceived social support. In contrast, for students who had not migrated (high level of nostalgia), loneliness had an indirect positive effect on perceived social support via nostalgia. Participants in the high nostalgia condition had less social support, but they boosted their perceived social support via nostalgia.

5.3 The Role of Nostalgia

The evidence reviewed here suggests that the regulation of social support is an important individual difference in the experience of loneliness across domains. The

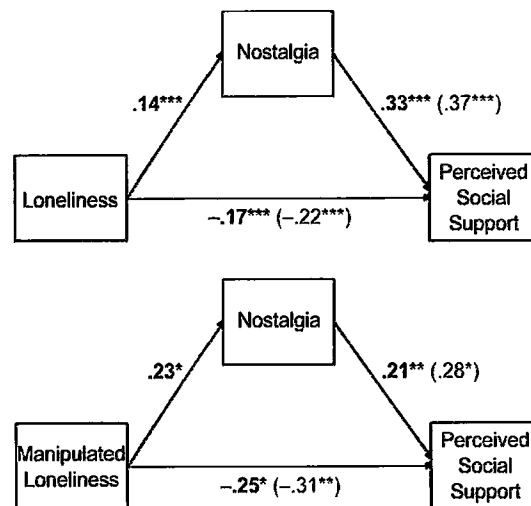


Fig. 5.1 Associations among loneliness, nostalgia, and perceived social support in Study 1 (*top*; $N = 758$) and Study 2 (*bottom*; $N = 84$). Shown are zero-order correlations (in *boldface*) and standardized regression coefficients (in *parentheses*); * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

association between loneliness and perceived social support became significantly more negative after the palliative effect of nostalgia was controlled. In sum, lonely migrant children perceived little social support but were also the most nostalgic. This high level of nostalgia, in turn, increased their perceptions of social support.

A subsequent experiment by Zhou et al. (2008) involved Chinese university students who were randomly assigned to either a high loneliness or a low loneliness condition. Loneliness was manipulated by giving participants false feedback regarding questionnaire scores (Wildschut et al., 2006, Study 4). Following this manipulation, participants completed state measures of nostalgia and perceived social support. Results revealed that loneliness reduced social support but increased nostalgia, and that nostalgia was positively associated with social support. Importantly, whereas the direct effect of loneliness was to reduce social support, its indirect effect was to increase social support via nostalgia (Fig. 5.1, bottom panel). Participants in the high loneliness (compared to low loneliness) condition perceived less social support, but they also felt more nostalgic. In turn, this nostalgic reverie boosted their perceptions of social support.

5.3 The Role of Individual Differences

The evidence reviewed so far is consistent with the idea that nostalgia facilitates the regulation of loneliness by strengthening social connectedness. We now focus on individual differences that have been shown to affect self-regulation in a broad range of domains. These are resilience (Block & Kremen, 1996; Bonanno, 2005) and the

attachment-related dimensions of avoidance and anxiety (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003). Do these factors also influence the extent to which individuals regulate loneliness by utilizing nostalgia as a source of social connectedness and support?

5.3.1 Resilience

Resilience is the ability to recover from (or to resist being affected by) shock, insult, or disturbance (Garmezy, 1991). Resilient individuals confronted with challenging or even traumatic life circumstances (ranging from a terrorist attack to divorce, death of a spouse, and poverty) are characterized, after an initial period of adjustment, by a "stable trajectory of healthy functioning across time" (Bonanno, 2005, p. 136). Such individuals are then able to carry out effectively their personal and social responsibilities, to experience positive emotions, and to engage in creative activities (Block & Kremen, 1996; Bonanno, 2005). Resilient individuals capitalize on available personal and social resources to self-regulate effectively in the face of adversity (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004).

A study by Zhou et al. (2008, Study 4) revealed that resilience plays an important role in shaping the association between loneliness and nostalgia. These researchers assessed resilience (Resilience Scale; Wagnild & Young, 1993), loneliness, nostalgia, and perceived social support in a sample of Chinese factory workers. Results again showed that, whereas the direct effect of loneliness is to reduce perceived social support, its indirect effect is to increase perceived social support via nostalgia. More importantly, the positive association between loneliness and nostalgia was significantly stronger among participants who were high (compared to low) in resilience. Thus, it is highly resilient individuals who are most likely to recruit nostalgia in response to loneliness. Resilience did not qualify the strength of the association between nostalgia and perceived social support. In all, the Zhou et al. findings showed that both resilient and non-resilient people derive social support from nostalgia, but that highly resilient people are more likely to recruit nostalgia when lonely.

5.3.2 Attachment-Related Individual Differences

Attachment-related individual differences, like individual differences in resilience, are known to play a critical role in the regulation of emotional distress (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003). In a series of studies, Wildschut, Sedikides, Routledge, Arndt, & Cordaro (2010) examined how individual differences in attachment-related avoidance (avoidance) and attachment-related anxiety (anxiety) shape the dynamic relation between loneliness and nostalgia. According to attachment theory (Bowlby, 1982; Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003), individual differences in reactions to distress are a manifestation of two underlying dimensions: anxiety and avoidance. The former reflects the extent to which the self is seen as worthy of love and support, whereas the latter reflects the extent to which others

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are seen as responsive to one's distress. These internal working models of self and others begin to develop early in life in response to experiences with attachment figures (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978) and are thought to remain relatively stable across time (Sharfe & Bartholomew, 1994).

There is strong empirical evidence that avoidance in particular is negatively associated with support-seeking behavior (Feeney, 2006). Such evidence is consistent with the idea that highly avoidant individuals view others as unavailable or unresponsive and, hence, do not rely on social bonds to regulate distress. Importantly, research has also revealed that avoidance interacts with emotional distress to shape support-seeking behavior (Fraley & Shaver, 2000). That is, the positive association between emotional distress and support-seeking is stronger when others are seen as responsive (i.e., when avoidance is low) than when others are seen as unresponsive (i.e., when avoidance is high).

5.3.2.1 Is the Effect of Loneliness on Nostalgia Shaped by Attachment-Related Individual Differences?

To the extent that nostalgia serves as a source of social connectedness and support, one would expect the positive association between loneliness and nostalgia to be stronger when avoidance is low rather than high. Wildschut et al. (2010, Study 1) tested this idea by assessing avoidance and anxiety, and then asking participants to write about the circumstances under which they become nostalgic. Afterwards, participants' responses were coded for instances in which loneliness was identified as trigger of nostalgia. Low-avoidance (compared to high-avoidance) participants more frequently stated that they become nostalgic in response to loneliness.

To achieve a more detailed understanding of the association between loneliness and nostalgia, Wildschut et al. (2010, Study 2) conducted a follow-up study that distinguished among three facets of loneliness connectedness (Hawkey, Browne, & Cacioppo, 2005): isolation (reflecting feelings of aloneness, anonymity, and withdrawal), relational connectedness (corresponding to familiarity, intimacy, and emotional support), and collective connectedness (dealing with feelings of group cohesion and similarity). Wildschut et al. measured how often participants felt lonely (differentiating between different facets of loneliness as assessed by the UCLA Loneliness Scale, see Hawkey et al.) and how frequently participants experienced nostalgia. They then tested whether the strength of the association between loneliness facets and nostalgia varied as a function of attachment-related individual differences. Results revealed that deficiencies in relational connectedness were the strongest predictor of increased nostalgia, and that this association between relational connectedness and nostalgia was present only for low-avoidance participants. That is, for low-avoidance (but not high-avoidance) participants, a perceived lack of emotional support and intimacy was linked with increased nostalgia.

Building on these findings, Wildschut et al. (2010, Study 3) sought to corroborate the postulated causal impact of deficiencies in relational connectedness on increased nostalgia among low-avoidance (compared to high-avoidance) persons.

They examined the impact of a validated social exclusion manipulation (Twenge, Baumeister, Tice, & Stucke, 2001) on in-the-moment feelings of nostalgia. In the *future alone* condition, participants were given false personality feedback suggesting that they would not enjoy lasting friendships or marriages. In the *future belonging* condition, participants were given false personality feedback suggesting that they would enjoy a stable marriage and rewarding friendships throughout life. This manipulation thus targets specifically (anticipated) deficiencies in relational connectedness. After participants received the false personality feedback, they reported on their in-the-moment feelings of nostalgia. Results revealed that social exclusion (compared to social inclusion) increased nostalgia among low-avoidance participants, but not among high-avoidance participants. These findings provided further convergent evidence for the idea that the psychological significance of nostalgia resides partly in its capacity to strengthen social connectedness, and that low-avoidance (compared to high-avoidance) persons are more apt to regulate deficiencies in relational connectedness by recruiting nostalgia.

5.3.2.2 Is the Effect of Nostalgia on Social Connectedness Shaped by Attachment-Related Individual Differences?

An important remaining question is whether deficiencies in relational connectedness elicit nostalgia more strongly among low-avoidance (compared to high-avoidance) persons, given that low-avoidance persons are more capable of deriving from nostalgia precisely the feelings of intimacy and emotional support that are optimally suited to redress deficiencies in relational connectedness (Cutrona & Russell, 1990). There are, of course, alternative explanations. Perhaps low-avoidance (compared to high-avoidance) persons are more likely to turn to nostalgia, not because they derive from it more social connectedness, but because nostalgia has other desirable effects, such as augmenting positive affect and boosting self-esteem (Wildschut et al., 2006).

To address this question, Wildschut et al. (2010, Study 4) assessed attachment-related individual differences and then randomly assigned participants to a nostalgia or control condition. Participants in the nostalgia condition were instructed to recall a nostalgic event, whereas participants in the control condition were instructed to recall an ordinary event from their past. Following this manipulation (and a successful manipulation check), participants completed brief state-level measures of positive affect ("Thinking about this event makes me feel happy," "... makes me feel in a good mood"), positive self-esteem ("... makes me feel I have many positive qualities," "... makes me value myself more"), and social connectedness ("... makes me feel loved," "... makes me feel connected to loved ones"). Results revealed that, whereas manipulated nostalgia increased positive affect and positive self-esteem irrespective of attachment-related individual differences, manipulated nostalgia strengthened social connectedness only among low-avoidance participants. These findings suggest that low-avoidance (compared to high-avoidance) persons are more apt to derive social connectedness (but not positive affect or self-esteem) from nostalgia.

5.4 Conclusion

Whereas negative research, recent positive emotion research in many aspects of adjustment to, that have examined self-relevant events. These studies have shown the importance of nostalgia in perceived social

5.4.1 Summary

The first question addressed in this paper was whether the evidence on the identified loneliness levels of state-level second question on connectedness in university students and their lives scores addressed the connectedness. We found that, with support, the impact of nostalgia. Finally, and the attachment evidence indicates the association among highly non-resilient) loneliness. Study revealed an interaction underscored the an antecedent individuals. For avoidance) increased emotional support connectedness

5.4 Concluding Remarks and Future Directions

Whereas negative emotions have long been the focus of attention for emotion research, recent years have witnessed a marked shift toward increased interest in positive emotions. Research on positive emotions has highlighted their vital role in many aspects of daily experience and their involvement in the regulation of, and adjustment to, negative affective states. In this chapter, we reviewed recent studies that have examined the question of whether nostalgia – a predominantly positive self-relevant emotion – plays a role in the regulation of, and adjustment to, loneliness. These studies provided evidence for the idea that the psychological significance of nostalgia resides in part in its capacity to diminish loneliness by increasing perceived social connectedness.

5.4.1 Summary of Evidence

The first question we examined was whether loneliness increases nostalgia. The evidence on this point showed that British university students often spontaneously identified loneliness as a trigger of nostalgia, and that they showed increased levels of state nostalgia following an experimental loneliness induction. The second question we examined was whether nostalgia increases perceived social connectedness. The evidence on this point revealed that both British and Chinese university students who recalled a nostalgic (compared to ordinary) event from their lives scored higher on various measures of social connectedness. Third, we addressed the issue of whether loneliness could increase perceived social connectedness via nostalgia. A series of studies with different Chinese samples found that, whereas the direct effect of loneliness is to reduce perceived social support, the indirect effect of loneliness is to increase perceived social support via nostalgia. Finally, we considered the role of individual differences in resilience and the attachment-related dimensions of avoidance and anxiety. Here, the evidence indicated that the association between loneliness and nostalgia (but not the association between nostalgia and perceived social support) was stronger among highly resilient individuals. It would appear that resilient (compared to non-resilient) individuals are more inclined to recruit nostalgia in response to loneliness. Studies on the role of attachment-related avoidance and anxiety revealed an important role for avoidance (but not for anxiety). These studies underscored the particular importance of deficits in relational connectedness as an antecedent to nostalgia among low-avoidance (but not high-avoidance) individuals. Furthermore, evidence revealed that, for low-avoidance (but not high-avoidance) individuals, nostalgia provided precisely the feelings of intimacy and emotional support that are optimally suited to redress deficiencies in relational connectedness.

5.4.2 Limitations and Further Research Directions

One must keep in mind that the research reviewed here was conducted predominantly (although not exclusively) with samples of college-age, British female subjects. The question whether age-related changes in motivation have a bearing on nostalgia presents one suitable avenue for future research. The interaction between gender and culture in shaping nostalgia is another issue that deserves careful scrutiny.

According to socio-emotional selectivity theory (Carstensen, Isaacowitz, & Charles, 1999), with advancing age people come to view their life-span as limited and shift attention from future-oriented, knowledge-related goals toward a desire to find purpose and meaning in life, to enjoy intimate friendships, and to be embedded in a social network. This raises two important issues pertaining to nostalgia. First, are such age-related changes in motivation reflected in the frequency and content of nostalgia? We would expect older (as compared to younger) adults to be more prone to nostalgia and more likely to give center stage to close others in their nostalgic reverie. The second issue is whether nostalgia acquires greater significance in old age. Although the problem of loneliness is not specific to old age, bereavements and declines in health status may render older adults particularly vulnerable to social isolation (Victor, Scambler, Bowling, & Bond, 2005), thus impairing the formation of intimate friendships and social networks they so highly value. Under these circumstances, nostalgia may play a vital role in reestablishing at least a symbolic connection with significant others.

Relevant to the role of gender, it seems plausible that British college students do not identify strongly with narrowly prescribed gender roles, and that gender differences in this population are therefore attenuated. In cultural contexts that place a stronger emphasis on traditional gender roles, however, strong differences between women and men may well arise. In general, gender differences are shaped by culture (Hyde, 2003) and so it would be unwarranted to generalize possible gender differences in a British college sample across different cultural settings.

Many other issues await empirical investigation. For instance, the extant literature does not inform the important question of whether, by virtue of its capacity to strengthen social connectedness, nostalgia can increase psychological and physical well-being. With respect to psychological well-being, there is a wealth of evidence that strong social bonds are associated with increased happiness (Sarason, Sarason, & Gurung, 1997). Concerning physical well-being, Berkman (1995) reviewed eight prospective epidemiological studies and concluded that mortality rates are lower among individuals with strong social bonds. Based on this evidence, we expect nostalgia to be positively associated with indices of both psychological and physical well-being. Could it be that these beneficial effects of nostalgia may accrue particularly to low-avoidance individuals because they are more likely than high-avoidance individuals to derive social connectedness from nostalgia?

Equally as important, the psychological significance of nostalgia may extend beyond its capacity to regulate loneliness by increasing social connectedness. For instance, nostalgia may also serve to imbue life with meaning, which could

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facilitate coping with existential fears. One of the primary human challenges is carving out a meaningful existence. Yet, awareness of inevitable mortality presents a major obstacle on the path to psychological equanimity. According to terror management theory (Pyszczynski, Greenberg, Solomon, Arndt, & Schimel, 2004), one can mitigate existential anxiety through shared beliefs about the nature of reality that imbue life with meaning. Nostalgia can contribute an overall sense of enduring meaning to one's life. In recent studies, we have explored this line of inquiry. For instance, in several studies testing American undergraduates, Routledge et al. (2008) examined this existential function of nostalgia. After being reminded of their mortality (relative to an aversive dental procedure), the more nostalgic the participants felt, the more meaningful they perceived their life to be. Also, after reminders of mortality (relative to a dental procedure or failing an important exam), participants who were more prone to nostalgia (e.g., had reported frequent engagement in nostalgia), or who had received a nostalgia induction, actually had fewer death-related thoughts. Nostalgia boosted perceptions of life as meaningful and assuaged existential threat.

Another interesting question is whether nostalgia can facilitate continuity between past and present selves. Nostalgia may facilitate use of positive perceptions about the past to bolster a sense of continuity and meaning in one's life (Sedikides, Wildschut, Gaertner, Routledge, & Arndt, 2008). An additional function of nostalgia may be its motivating potential. Nostalgia may boost optimism, spark inspiration, and foster creativity (Stephan, Wildschut, Sedikides, Routledge, & Arndt, 2008). Recent research provides initial evidence for both of these possibilities.

Nostalgia is emerging as a fundamental human strength. It is part of the fabric of everyday life and plays a versatile role in maintaining psychological equanimity. By so doing, nostalgia can help people navigate successfully the vicissitudes of life.

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