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Nostalgia for host culture facilitates repatriation success: The role of self-continuity

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ABSTRACT

Repatriation (returning home after having lived abroad) can be psychologically distressing. We theorized and found evidence that feeling nostalgic about a host culture contributes to repatriation success. We tested a sample of over 700 international teachers who worked in the United States (host culture) and then returned to their home countries. As hypothesized, nostalgia for the host culture was positively associated with repatriates' self-continuity (a sense of connection between one's past and present selves). Self-continuity, in turn, mediated the positive relation between host-culture nostalgia and psychological adjustment (self-esteem, approach motivation, job satisfaction). The findings have implications for the literatures on (a) multicultural experience and repatriation, and (b) the emotion of nostalgia and its relation to psychological adjustment.

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“Coming back to where you started is not the same as never leaving.” – Terry Pratchett (2004),
A Hat Full of Sky

Economic globalization has increased the internationalization of labor markets (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2006; Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2008). To respond to these changes, global organizations now rely on international assignments as a key part of their human resource strategies (Baruch, Altman, & Tung, 2016; Black, Gregersen, Mendanhall, & Stroh, 2001; Carpenter, Sanders, & Gregersen, 2001), and individual professionals increasingly seek out opportunities to work overseas (“Travelling talent: Skilled workers are nowadays eager to work abroad,” 2014). Although the literature has been concerned with benefits of multicultural experiences for sojourners (Leung, Maddux, Galinsky, & Chiu, 2008; Maddux & Galinsky, 2009), it has not adequately addressed the problems encountered by sojourners who return to their home countries – a process termed re-entry, re-acculturation, or repatriation (Gregersen & Stroh, 1997; Sussman, 2000).

The challenges of repatriation are often underestimated by expatriates themselves (Black, 1992; Rogers & Ward, 1993; Sussman, 2001). This is perhaps because repatriation does not

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involve speaking a new language, struggling to make culturally isomorphic attributions, or learning new cultural norms. Consequently, it may appear (to repatriates and external observers alike) that repatriation does not require forming new support networks or re-learning one's way in a changed environment. Yet, repatriation is psychosocially distressing, and ironically repatriates often experience "reverse culture shocks" (Adler, 1981). In the process of adapting to a host culture, repatriates undergo transformations and internalize aspects of the new culture into their self-concepts. Upon returning home, repatriates must reconcile their newly acquired self-aspects with their former (i.e., home culture) self, and this challenging task may be complicated even further when the home culture has undergone changes during repatriates' time abroad. This reconciliation attempt often has negative consequences. Adler reported that repatriates "felt a discontinuity and a loss of momentum in their careers" (p. 346).

Given these challenges of repatriation, one might argue that letting go of (i.e., "forgetting about") the host cultural experience is a sensible strategy for repatriates. We maintain and document, however, that holding on to the host cultural experience is a more effective adjustment strategy. Specifically, we propose that feeling nostalgic about the host culture (henceforth, host nostalgia) can sooth repatriates' adjustment difficulties through its positive association with self-continuity and, in turn, psychological adjustment.

Host nostalgia

Our conceptualization of host nostalgia draws on the psychological literature concerning nostalgia, a sentimental longing for one's past. Nostalgia is a self-relevant and social emotion (Sedikides, Wildschut, Arndt, & Routledge, 2008; Sedikides, Wildschut, Routledge, Arndt, et al., 2015). Nostalgic narratives typically consist of predominantly fond, personally meaningful, and rosy memories (e.g., one's childhood or close relationships), and include descriptions of keepsakes and familiar sensory cues (e.g., music and smells; Hepper, Ritchie, Sedikides, & Wildschut, 2012; Reid, Green, Wildschut, & Sedikides, 2015). Such nostalgic accounts feature the self as the protagonist in momentous events or rituals involving close others (e.g., holidays, anniversaries, reunions, vacations), entail a blend of cognition and affect, and are bittersweet albeit considerably more sweet (i.e., positive or joyful) than bitter (i.e., negative or sad; Abeyta, Routledge, Roynance, Wildschut, & Sedikides, 2015; Sedikides & Wildschut, 2016a; Wildschut, Sedikides, Arndt, & Routledge, 2006).

In the context of repatriation, we argue that host nostalgia is spontaneous and common. Anecdotal evidence suggests that repatriates often describe the years spent in the host culture with sentimental longing (Black et al., 2001). This is not surprising, given that multicultural immersion is a meaningful life experience that can lead to questioning of basic assumptions that had been taken for granted (Leung et al., 2008; Tadmor, Galinsky, & Maddux, 2012). Moreover, multicultural experience can offer opportunities for deeper engagement with a new set of values, norms, and habits. Sojourners often begin to identify with the host culture (Ward & Searle, 1991) and adopt attitudes and behaviors characteristic of that culture (Lee & Larwood, 1983) while living there. Upon returning home, then, repatriates may experience host nostalgia.

Host nostalgia and self-continuity

To understand the relevance of host nostalgia in soothing the repatriation process, we introduce the concept of self-continuity, defined as a sense of connection between one's past and

present self (Sedikides & Wildschut, 2016b; Sedikides et al., 2016; Vignoles, 2011). Self-continuity solidifies identity (i.e., feeling the same person over time; James, 1890; Neisser, 1988) and synthesizes the stream of experience (Atchley, 1989; Madell, 1981). Davis (1979) was the first to propose a link between nostalgia and self-continuity. He argued that nostalgia encourages “an appreciative stance toward former selves; ... reinterpreting ‘marginal, fugitive, and eccentric facets of earlier selves’ in a positive light” (pp. 35–36). Subsequent research has confirmed Davis’s intuition by demonstrating that nostalgia fosters self-continuity in both younger and older adults (Sedikides, Wildschut, Gaertner, Routledge, & Arndt, 2008). For example, Sedikides, Wildschut, Routledge, and Arndt (2015) experimentally induced nostalgia (vs. ordinary autobiographical recollection vs. positive autobiographical recollection) and assessed self-continuity. Nostalgia augmented self-continuity. One might therefore deduce that feeling nostalgic about the *home* culture (henceforth, home nostalgia) will strengthen self-continuity in repatriates, thus allowing them to reap its psychological benefits. Notwithstanding, we propose that host nostalgia is also effective in fostering self-continuity. This is because, while living abroad, repatriates typically invest substantial effort and time acquiring knowledge of local norms and values in order to fit into the host culture (Maurer & Li, 2006; Paik & Sohn, 2004; Toh & Denisi, 2007). As part of this adaptation process, repatriates often incorporate new elements from the host culture into their self-concept (Chen, Benet-Martínez, & Bond, 2008). Given that people’s self-concepts are heavily influenced by their cultural environment (Markus & Kitayama, 2010; Sedikides, Gaertner, & Cai, 2015), those who have multicultural experience may develop multiple self-concepts (Haritatos & Benet-Martínez, 2002; Sussman, 2000). Thus, leaving a host culture risks losing a part of the self-concept that one has come to value (Kraimer, Shaffer, Harrison, & Ren, 2012). Host nostalgia can fill that void. In the absence of the former physical environment and direct socio-cultural contact, host nostalgia can enable repatriates to integrate further the host cultural experience into their current self-concepts. Instead of leaving behind the host cultural experience as an extraneous and irrelevant part of their life, host nostalgia would serve as a linchpin that connects repatriates’ experiences across markedly different cultures, and thus facilitates self-continuity.

Hypothesis 1: Host nostalgia is associated with higher self-continuity among repatriates.

Self-continuity and psychological adjustment

We propose that, by virtue of its positive link with self-continuity, host nostalgia facilitates repatriates’ psychological adjustment after returning home. Self-continuity confers psychological benefits. For example, self-continuity is positively associated with well-being (McAdams, Reynolds, Lewis, Patten, & Bowman, 2001; Sedikides et al., 2016; Troll & Skaff, 1997) as well as psychological equanimity (i.e., a sense of order and significance that buffers fear of death; Landau, Greenberg, & Solomon, 2008; Landau, Greenberg, & Sullivan, 2009), and is negatively associated with psychopathology and self-harming behavior (e.g., suicide; Chandler, Lalonde, Sokol, & Hallett, 2003; Lampinen, Odegard, & Leding, 2004).

We operationalized psychological adjustment in terms of three facets: self-esteem, approach motivation, and job satisfaction. (1) Self-esteem reflects the value one places on the self (Rosenberg, 1965). It is negatively associated with loneliness (Jones, Freeman, & Goswick, 1981; Leary & Baumeister, 2000), anxiety (Pyszczynski & Greenberg, 1987; Tarlow & Haaga, 1996), and depression (Gjerde, Block, & Block, 1988; Orth, Robins, & Roberts, 2008;

Tennen & Herzberger, 1987), and it is positively related to subjective well-being (Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, & Vohs, 2003; DeNeve & Cooper, 1998). Furthermore, self-esteem buffers psychological threats. For example, positive self-views predict psychological well-being in times of stress (Marshall & Brown, 2006; Sedikides, Gregg, Cisek, & Hart, 2007; Taylor, Lerner, Sherman, Sage, & McDowell, 2003a, 2003b) and shields individuals from the aversive psychological effects of death awareness (Abeyta, Juhl, & Routledge, 2014). (2) Approach motivation is “the energization of behavior by, or the direction of behavior toward, positive stimuli (objects, events, possibilities)” (Elliot, 2006, p. 111). It is linked with lower levels of depression, anhedonia, and negative affect (Coats, Janoff-Bulman, & Alpert, 1996; Sideridis, 2005; Trew, 2011), and is positively associated with well-being, and relationship functioning (Elliot, Thrash, & Murayama, 2011; Gable, Reis, & Elliot, 2000; Impett et al., 2010). (3) Job satisfaction is an important indicator of repatriation success. Organizational behavior research on repatriation has shown that job dissatisfaction is one of the primary reasons for job turnover and maladjustment among repatriates (Feldman & Thompson, 1993; Lazarova & Cerdin, 2007).

Hypothesis 2: Host nostalgia is positively associated with repatriates’ psychological adjustment (as indexed by self-esteem, approach motivation, and job satisfaction), via increased self-continuity.

Method

Participants

The sample consisted of international teachers who completed a placement in U.S. school districts. The placements were full-time, salaried positions that included structured professional development opportunities. Placements were arranged by a U.S. company that served as an intermediary between international teachers and U.S. school districts, and were allocated following a competitive application process. Key selection criteria included applicants’ educational background and experience. We obtained the email addresses of 6137 teachers who, after a stay in the United States, had returned to their home countries. We did so through the U.S. company that served as intermediary between international teachers and U.S. school districts. From this company, we also acquired participants’ background data: age, gender, ethnicity, and the years they started and finished working as teachers in the United States. Then, we sent private emails to the teachers and invited them to complete an online survey. Participation was voluntary and included a chance of winning a £20 Amazon voucher.

In total, 1347 participants clicked the survey link. Nine hundred sixty-three participants completed the survey. There were no significant differences in gender composition or ethnicity between participants who completed the survey and those who did not. However, the former were younger and had taken part in the teachers’ program in more recent years. These differences may be due to a technicality: it is likely that the email records for participants who completed the teaching program longer ago had expired. We excluded 149 participants who reported that they were currently staying in the United States, and were therefore ineligible for our study. We excluded a further 27 participants who reported that they were currently living in a country other than their home country. Finally, we excluded five participants due to missing data. We analyzed data from 782 participants with complete responses ($M_{\text{age}} = 40.92$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 8.43$, range = 26–78 years; 68.29% female; 41.94% Caucasian, 39.13% Latin American, 6.65% Asian, 5.75% African, 6.52% reported as “other”). They

originated from 41 different countries (see Table S1, available online as supplemental material).

Materials

Host nostalgia

Following prior research practices (Routledge et al., 2011; Wildschut et al., 2006; Wildschut, Sedikides, Routledge, Arndt, & Cordaro, 2010), we first defined nostalgia for participants ("According to the Oxford Dictionary, 'nostalgia' is defined as a 'sentimental longing for the past'"). We then instructed them to indicate how nostalgic they felt (1 = *not at all nostalgic*, 5 = *very nostalgic*) about each of the following 10 objects that they had encountered in their host culture: "the friends I made there," "the school where I taught," "the town where I lived," "the people I worked with," "the natural scenery where I lived," "the restaurants I visited," "the people I met," "the weather/climate where I lived," "the children I taught," and "the apartment/house I lived in" ($M = 3.78$, $SD = .79$; $\alpha = .89$). A recent cross-cultural investigation involving 18 countries across six continents revealed a high level of cross-cultural agreement in conceptions of the word "nostalgia" (Hepper et al., 2014). In combination with the fact that we provided a definition, these findings allay concerns regarding the degree of shared understanding of the word "nostalgia" by participants from different home countries.

Home nostalgia

It is important to examine whether the role of host nostalgia is unique or can be subsumed under a general tendency to experience nostalgia, including nostalgia for one's home culture. We therefore also assessed home nostalgia. Once again, we first provided the definition of nostalgia (as above) and then we instructed participants to indicate how nostalgic they felt (1 = *not at all nostalgic*, 5 = *very nostalgic*) about each of the following 10 objects that they had encountered in their home country before joining the international teacher's program: "someone I loved," "not having to worry," "feelings I had," "vacations I went on," "my family," "places," "having someone to depend on," "my friends," "my pets," "things I did" ($M = 3.36$, $SD = .81$; $\alpha = .88$).

Self-continuity

Participants completed a 2-item validated measure (Sedikides et al., 2015, 2016) of the extent to which thinking nostalgically about their years in the United States made them "feel connected with my past" and "feel that there is continuity in my life" (1 = *not at all*, 6 = *extremely*; $M = 4.59$, $SD = 1.20$; $\alpha = .92$).

Psychological adjustment

We operationalized psychological adjustment in terms of three facets: self-esteem, approach motivation, and job satisfaction. (1) We assessed self-esteem with five items from the Core Self-Evaluations Scale (CSES; Judge, Erez, Bono, & Thoresen, 2003): "I complete tasks successfully," "I am confident I get the success I deserve in life," "When I try, I generally succeed," "I determine what will happen in my life," and "Overall, I am satisfied with myself." Items were rated on 5-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*; $M = 4.19$, $SD = .52$; $\alpha = .88$). (2) We measured approach motivation with a 2-item measure developed by Cunningham, Raye, and Johnson (2005): "I focus on opportunities that will enhance my life," and "I am

primarily motivated by seeking potential successes." Participants rated these items on a 7-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*; $M = 5.80$, $SD = .99$; $\alpha = .65$). (3) To assess job satisfaction, we used the short form of Brayfield and Rothe's (1951) job satisfaction scale. The five items are: "Most days I am enthusiastic about my work," "I feel fairly satisfied with my present job," "Each day at work seems like it will never end" (reverse scored), "I find real enjoyment in my work," "I consider my job rather unpleasant" (reverse scored) (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*; $M = 5.51$, $SD = 1.04$; $\alpha = .80$). We standardized (z scores) the three facets (self-esteem, approach motivation, job satisfaction) to create a shared metric and then averaged them to create a composite index of psychological adjustment ($M = .00$, $SD = .73$). The reliability coefficient for this composite index equals .86 (for reliability of linear composites, see Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994, p. 269).

Control variables

Demographic background

Given that demographic characteristics may be related to psychological adjustment, we controlled for participants' gender, age, and ethnicity. Here, ethnicity is coded as four dummy variables: African, Asian, Caucasian, and Latino. We coded "other" as the reference category (i.e., "0" for all four abovementioned dummy variables.).

Years since return

We calculated the number of years that had passed since participants returned to their home country (year in which participants completed the present study – year of repatriation; $M = 4.63$, $SD = 2.93$, range = .08–20.17 years).

Total years in the United States

We calculated the number of years that participants stayed in the United States (year of repatriation – year of program start; $M = 3.38$, $SD = 1.39$, range = .67–11.83).

Program completion

Participants reported their reason for leaving the international teacher position. The most common reason was end of contract or visa expiration. Participants were initially given a 2–5 year contract, depending on visa arrangements. Approximately 30% of the teachers left the program before the end of their contract due to personal or family reasons, which could have affected repatriation ease. We formed a dummy variable to differentiate participants who completed the international teacher program from those who did not (0 = *did not complete*, 1 = *completed*; $M = .69$, $SD = .46$).

Current job status

Given that repatriation success might be influenced by career changes, we created a dummy variable to specify which participants continued to be teachers (0 = *not teaching*, 1 = *teaching*; $M = .90$, $SD = .30$).

Data analysis

Participants originated from 41 different countries. To examine and, if necessary, control for the influence of home culture on self-continuity and psychological adjustment, we used multilevel modeling. Participants (level-1 units) were nested within their respective countries of origin (level-2 units). To assess the appropriateness of this approach, we first tested unconditional means models (Singer, 1998). In these models, the intercept was treated as a random variable to estimate the variance component representing country-of-origin effects. This variance component was significant for both self-continuity ($\tau = .089$, $SE = .042$, $z = 2.14$, $p = .016$) and psychological adjustment ($\tau = .041$, $SE = .017$, $z = 2.43$, $p = .008$), indicating the presence of country-of-origin effects and thereby confirming the appropriateness of multilevel analyses.

Results

We present zero-order correlations among key study variables in Table 1. (We present a correlation matrix including control variables in Table S2, available online as supplemental material.)

Self-continuity

First, we tested Hypothesis 1. We used multilevel analyses, with participants (level-1 units) nested within their respective countries of origin (level-2 units). The intercept was treated as a random variable to model the variance component representing country-of-origin effects. Host nostalgia and home nostalgia were the level-1 predictor variables (Table 2, Model 1). Consistent with the hypothesis, host nostalgia was prognostic of higher self-continuity (controlling for home nostalgia). Home nostalgia was also linked to higher self-continuity (controlling for host nostalgia). An analysis that included the control variables as additional level-1 predictors yielded practically identical results (see Table S3, available online as supplemental material).

Psychological adjustment

To test Hypothesis 2, we first regressed psychological adjustment on host nostalgia and home nostalgia (Table 2, Model 2). As hypothesized, host nostalgia was positively associated with psychological adjustment (controlling for home nostalgia). The link between

Table 1. Zero-order correlations among study variables.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Host nostalgia	–	.33***	.27***	.09*	.13***	–.03	.09*
2. Home nostalgia		–	.16***	.02	.10**	–.03	.04
3. Self-continuity			–	.24***	.30***	.18***	.33***
4. Self-esteem				–	.43***	.29***	.78***
5. Approach motivation					–	.21***	.74***
6. Job satisfaction						–	.68***
7. Psychological adjustment							–

Note: Psychological adjustment is a composite of self-esteem, approach motivation, and job satisfaction.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Table 2. Multilevel models predicting self-continuity and psychological adjustment.

Predictors	Outcomes											
	Model 1: Self-continuity				Model 2: Psychological adjustment				Model 3: Psychological adjustment			
	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i> (739)	<i>p</i>	<i>d</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i> (739)	<i>p</i>	<i>d</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i> (738)	<i>p</i>	<i>d</i>
Host nostalgia	.391	7.44	<.001	.55	.098	2.93	.003	.22	.034	1.02	.309	.08
Home nostalgia	.229	4.31	<.001	.32	.063	1.86	.064	.14	.024	.72	.469	.05
Self-continuity									.160	7.20	<.001	.53

Note: We calculated effect size *d* based on *t* values, using the transformation $d = 2t/\sqrt{df}$.

home nostalgia and psychological adjustment was marginal (controlling for host nostalgia). Next, we again regressed psychological adjustment on host nostalgia and home nostalgia, this time adding self-continuity (i.e., the postulated mediator) to the model (Table 2, Model 3). As hypothesized, the association between self-continuity and psychological adjustment was significant: higher self-continuity predicted higher psychological adjustment. When controlling for self-continuity, neither host nostalgia nor home nostalgia was significantly associated with psychological adjustment. Analyses that included the control variables as additional level-1 predictors produced essentially identical results, with the exception that the previously marginal positive association between home nostalgia and psychological adjustment in Model 2 became statistically significant (supplemental Table S3).

In a final step, we tested the indirect effects of host nostalgia and home nostalgia on psychological adjustment via self-continuity. We treated paths *a* (from the predictor to the mediator) and *b* (from the mediator to the outcome) as fixed effects and used the MCMED macro (Hayes, 2013a) to construct 95% Monte Carlo confidence intervals (CI) for the indirect effects (denoted as *ab*).¹ We present the results of these analyses in Table 3. The indirect effect of host nostalgia on psychological adjustment via self-continuity was significant (i.e., the 95% Monte Carlo CI did not include 0). The indirect effect of home nostalgia on psychological adjustment via self-continuity was also significant. We repeated these tests of indirect effects for each of the three facets of psychological adjustment (self-esteem, approach motivation, job satisfaction). Results of these facet-level analyses revealed significant indirect effects (via self-continuity) of host nostalgia and home nostalgia on self-esteem, approach motivation, and job satisfaction (Table 3). All indirect effects remained significant in analyses that included the control variables (see Table S4, available online as supplemental material).

Table 3. Monte Carlo confidence intervals for indirect effects.

Predictors	Indirect effect via self-continuity							
	Psychological adjustment		Self-esteem		Approach motivation		Job satisfaction	
	<i>ab</i>	95% CI	<i>ab</i>	95% CI	<i>ab</i>	95% CI	<i>ab</i>	95% CI
Host nostalgia	.063	[.040, .087]	.057	[.032, .089]	.067	[.039, .101]	.063	[.035, .093]
Home nostalgia	.037	[.018, .057]	.033	[.016, .055]	.039	[.019, .063]	.037	[.017, .060]

Note: *ab* is indirect effect of predictor variable on outcome variable, via self-continuity.

Discussion

Based on the relevance of self-continuity for psychological adjustment, we proposed host nostalgia as a linchpin that can connect repatriates' experiences across diverse cultures, and thereby improve their current psychological adjustment (indexed by self-esteem, approach motivation, and job satisfaction). We obtained evidence consistent with this proposition in a sample of nearly 800 repatriates from 41 countries. Host nostalgia was related to higher self-continuity and psychological adjustment. Further, self-continuity mediated the positive association between host nostalgia and psychological adjustment (as well as each of its three facets). We further established that the role of host nostalgia is unique rather than subsumed under a general tendency to experience nostalgia, including home nostalgia. Indeed, both host nostalgia and home nostalgia independently predicted higher levels of self-continuity and ensuing psychological adjustment. This finding suggests that the strong overall link between nostalgia and self-continuity (Sedikides et al., 2015, 2016) can be partitioned into unique component processes, each tailored to address specific sources of discontinuity. Whereas host nostalgia may serve primarily to integrate the host cultural experience into repatriates' current self-concepts and thereby facilitate the integration of experiences across different cultural contexts, home nostalgia could help repatriates to absorb the inevitable changes that occurred at home during their absence.

Our research makes several novel contributions to the literature. Most important, we challenge the intuitive idea that, to readjust to their home culture, repatriates should "forget and move on" from their international experience. To the contrary, we show that repatriates who dwell nostalgically on their international experiences report more self-continuity and ensuing psychological adjustment following their return home. Furthermore, our investigation suggests that cultural travelers should integrate their newly-acquired cultural knowledge into a coherent, continuous identity, thus facilitating repatriation success. Whereas past research on immigrants (Berry, 2006) and expatriate workers (Church, 1982; Mendenhall & Oddou, 1985; Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001) indicates that expatriates who live and work in a foreign culture are likely to experience negative affect and psychological stress, our findings show that such predicaments may also entail long-term benefits. Having overcome challenges in a foreign culture, repatriates can use host nostalgia to their advantage upon returning home.

Implications

These findings have both theoretical and practical implications. Whereas a great deal of the repatriate literature has examined organizational factors such as organizational policies, support, and identities (Black et al., 2001; Harvey, 1989; Kraimer et al., 2012; Lazarova & Cerdin, 2007; Stroh, Gregersen, & Black, 1998), little research has focused on repatriates' psychological features. Our results suggest that understanding psychological processes, such as host nostalgia, could shed new light on the repatriation process and its downstream implications for repatriates' psychological adjustment. To our knowledge, no studies have directly tested the function of host nostalgia in the context of international adjustment. Our findings indicate that focusing on host nostalgia may contribute to more personalized, flexible, and economical means of easing repatriates back into their home countries.

More broadly, our findings indicate that the emotion of nostalgia merits serious consideration in the organizational behavior literature (Gabriel, 1993). Nostalgia has a powerful, positive influence on how individuals perceive themselves, their lives, and their relationships with others (Sedikides, Wildschut, Routledge, Hepper, et al., 2015). Research has established nostalgia's capacity to buffer the negative effect of poor performance feedback (Vess, Arndt, Routledge, Sedikides, & Wildschut, 2012), boredom (Van Tilburg, Igou, & Sedikides, 2013), existential insecurities (Routledge et al., 2011), loneliness (Zhou, Sedikides, Wildschut, & Gao, 2008), as well as aversive organizational experience such as procedural justice (Van Dijke, Wildschut, Leunissen, & Sedikides, 2015) and burnout (Leunissen, Sedikides, Wildschut, & Cohen, 2016). Moreover, prior research suggests that organizational change can increase employees' nostalgia for the past. For example, Brown and Humphreys (2002) conducted a qualitative study in which they interviewed faculty members of a Turkish training institution for women. Institutional nostalgia informed people's understanding of the workplace and helped faculty deal with administrative changes. In another qualitative study, Milligan (2003) used interviews and observation to learn how employees coped with organizational relocation. Employees reverted often to nostalgia as a way of adjusting to their new environment. In the current study, we found that host nostalgia is common for repatriates and has vital implications for re-entry success. Follow-up investigations could examine the relevance of nostalgia for other domains of organizational behavior, such as prior employers, industries, or different phases of one's career development.

Managing repatriation has wider social ramifications, particularly as the number of repatriates increases (Brookfield Global Relocation Trends, 2013; World Bank, 2011). Our results have practical implications for international organizations, including government agencies, that are tasked with sending employees to work in other cultures and then bringing them back when the work is completed. Specifically, it may be valuable for organizations to develop programs that encourage returning individuals to reflect on the best times and pivotal memories of their experiences abroad. In addition to reflecting on these times or memories, sharing them with co-workers or individuals who have also traveled to the host culture may further bolster self-continuity and ensuing psychological adjustment. In all, boosting employees' nostalgia for their experiences abroad may constitute a low-cost strategy to facilitate re-entry success.

Limitations and future research

Our study has several limitations. First, we used a one-wave, cross-sectional design. As such, we cannot rule out the perennial reverse-causality and third-variable problems. For example, it is possible that repatriates are more nostalgic about their experiences abroad if they gained something from it, such as friends, wealth, knowledge, or skills. This raises the possibility that repatriates who are high in host nostalgia are also the ones who have gained more from their experience, and that it is these gains in "cultural capital" (rather than host nostalgia) that are driving increased psychological adjustment (third-variable problem). Prior experimental evidence, however, supports the postulated causal direction from nostalgia to self-continuity, and from self-continuity to psychological adjustment (i.e., subjective vitality; Sedikides et al., 2016). Although these earlier findings offer reassurance, they were limited by an exclusive focus on undergraduate participants in laboratory settings. These are

limitations that the present study sought to address by recruiting a unique, demographically diverse sample and testing pertinent hypotheses in a “real-life” context. We propose that this triangulation of diverse research designs and methodologies is ideally suited to address the idiosyncratic limitations of individual studies (Campbell & Fiske, 1959).

Despite the diversity of our sample, we acknowledge that this study was confined to a single profession and a single host culture – international teachers in the United States. There may be unique characteristics of this group, such as an interest in American culture, which caused it to self-select into the program and to work in the United States. Although self-initiated expatriation (Ariss, 2010; Tharenou & Caulfield, 2010) is a worthwhile phenomenon to study, future investigations should test the replicability of our findings to other professions and other host countries.

A further limitation pertains to the respective assessments of host nostalgia and home nostalgia. Although the assessment format of both scales was identical, their content was tailored specifically to fit the host- or home-cultural experience (i.e., target specific). For example, “my family” is a suitable object of home nostalgia but not of host nostalgia. Future research would do well to assess host nostalgia and home nostalgia using a combination of general (e.g., “How nostalgic do you feel about your host/home country?”) and target-specific measures. Nonetheless, the fact that we obtained parallel (yet independent) findings for host nostalgia and home nostalgia should count against the possibility that results were contaminated by variations in scale content.

Finally, a promising direction for future research is to examine the role of host nostalgia in a wider range of situations during international adjustments. What makes host nostalgia particularly intriguing is that it is a psychological state that links the expatriation and repatriation processes: Feeling nostalgic about the host culture highlights the implication of expatriation process during the repatriation stage. For example, repatriates who had a more positive experience in the host culture might be more likely to feel nostalgic about the host culture. Alternatively, there are perhaps conditions under which host nostalgia might hinder the repatriation process. The feeling of host nostalgia might highlight the disadvantage of certain home cultural environments, which prevent the repatriates from reintegrating in the home culture. In this regard, future research should employ longitudinal designs that capture the adaptation experience during the relocation process and that can address how experiences in the host culture, such as assimilation or marginalization, affect host culture nostalgia upon repatriation. Future research should also include a wider range of measurements, such as job turnover or informant (e.g., partners, friends, colleagues) reports of psychological adjustment.

Conclusion

Returning to one’s home culture is not the same as never leaving (Pratchett, 2004), and repatriation can be challenging. Our research shows how host nostalgia – through associated increases in self-continuity – can help repatriates bridge their identities and lives across home and host cultures, thus aiding re-entry success.

Note

1. Because the a and b paths were treated as fixed effects, there is no level-2 covariance between these parameters and the simple ab product is sufficient to quantify the indirect effect (Hayes, 2013b).

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