

Shared Romantic Nostalgia Benefits Relationship Well-Being

PRESENTER:

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BACKGROUND

Nostalgia, a sentimental longing for the past, is associated with greater psychological outcomes. It has been found that individuals who are more nostalgic are likely to claim higher satisfaction in their romantic partnerships. However, it is not yet known whether sharing these nostalgic thoughts **within a romantic dyad** can benefit both partners and the relationship.

HYPOTHESIS

Sharing relationship-oriented nostalgia will result in beneficial effects that are comparable to (or better than) those created by individual nostalgia.

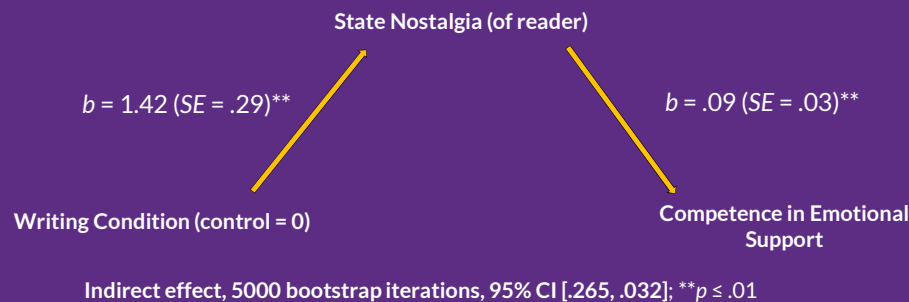
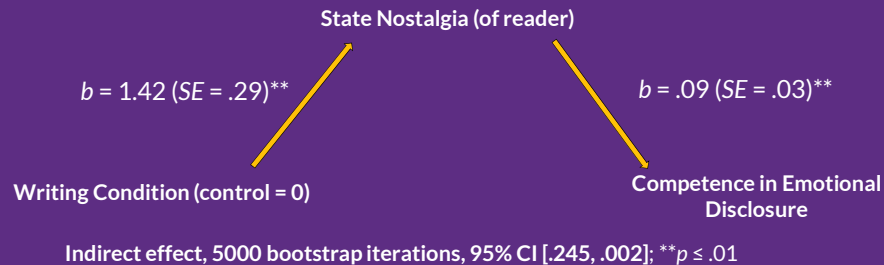
METHOD

- 146 individuals from TCU (18-33 years old; $M = 20.08$, $SD = 2.44$; 122 female [83%]) and their romantic partners participated in the study in exchange for course credit
- One partner was randomly assigned to one of three conditions: either writing about a shared, romantic nostalgic experience, a personally nostalgic experience, or an ordinary event
- The partner then answered questions about the relationship
- Later, the other partner read the narrative, provided their written reaction to it, & answered the same relationship questions
- Linguistic Inquiry & Word Count (LIWC; Pennebaker et al., 2017) was used to assess and content code the written narratives of both partners

Sharing relationship nostalgia between members of a romantic couple has positive effects on the relationship.

RESULTS

- A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) showed that partners who read a romantically nostalgic response were significantly more nostalgic than both other control conditions, $F(2, 144) = 12.91, p \leq .001$
- There was also a significant indirect effect of writing condition on interpersonal competence scores through state nostalgia (i.e., mediation)
- Partners who read a romantically nostalgic response reported higher confidence in disclosing emotions and providing emotional support to a close other (see Figures for comparisons between romantic nostalgia and ordinary conditions)
- LIWC analyses showed that the nostalgia essays were longer, more social, and used more first-person plural pronouns (e.g., we, us) compared to the other two conditions ($ps \leq .05$)
- The responses to nostalgia essays were also longer, more authentic, and more time-related and used more first personal plural pronouns compared to the responses in the other two conditions ($ps \leq .05$)



MEASURES

- **State Nostalgia** (Wildschut et al., 2006)
 - "Right now, I am feeling quite nostalgic." (1 = *strongly disagree*; 6 = *strongly agree*)
- **Interpersonal Competence** (Buhrmester et al., 1988)
 - "Letting down your protective 'outer shell' and trusting a close companion." (1 = *"I'd feel very uncomfortable in this situation"*; 5 = *"I could handle this situation very well"*)

CONCLUSION

- We reveal that there are clear and immediate benefits for romantic relationships of engaging in and communicating shared nostalgia.
- Future research should focus on exploring causal and correlational connections of romantic nostalgia and its outcomes over longer periods of time
- Future work should also extend this to other demographics of romantic relationships (e.g., age, ethnicity, sexual orientation) and other types of relationships (e.g., friendships, parent-child)
- Finally future work should further explore additional dependent variables to probe specific outcomes of sharing romantic nostalgia

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Research suggests that nostalgia, a sentimental longing for the past, is beneficial for the self. In extension, the current research suggests that reading the nostalgic narrative of a romantic partner also has positive outcomes, for both the reader and the writer.