



## Nostalgia proneness and reduced prejudice

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### ABSTRACT

We examined the association between nostalgia proneness and prejudice. In four correlational studies, we assessed nostalgia proneness, empathy, motivation to control prejudiced reactions, and blatant as well as subtle prejudice expression. The more prone to nostalgia participants were, the more likely they were to be motivated to control prejudice against an outgroup (African-Americans; Studies 1–4). Further, motivation to control prejudice mediated the relation between nostalgia proneness and reduced blatant/subtle prejudice expression (Studies 2–4). Finally, the stronger motivation to control prejudice and subsequent prejudice expression reduction was mediated by empathy that accompanied higher levels of nostalgia proneness (Studies 3–4). Nostalgia has implications for intergroup perception, and specifically prejudicial attitudes.

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Nostalgia is a social emotion, as it entails bringing to mind important persons from one's past and experiencing high levels of empathy. We ask whether the social character of nostalgia has implications for prejudice. Is nostalgia proneness associated with stronger motivation to control prejudiced reactions and thereby weaker expression of prejudice? We also ask if empathy mediates the association between nostalgia proneness, motivation to control prejudiced reactions, and prejudice expression. We define the constructs of interest, formulate hypotheses, and test these hypotheses in four correlational studies.

### 1. Nostalgia

The *New Oxford Dictionary of English* (1998) defines nostalgia as “a sentimental longing or wistful affection for the past” (p. 1266). This definition is shared by laypersons across cultures (Hepper, Ritchie, Sedikides, & Wildschut, 2012; Hepper et al., 2014). Nostalgia involves reflections (often through rose-colored glasses) on key figures (e.g., family members, friends, partners) or on meaningful events (e.g., childhood, anniversaries, graduations) from one's past. The nostalgizer revisits the relevant memory fondly and tenderly, misses those persons or events, and may even yearn for a return to the past (Sedikides et al., 2015). Nostalgia, then, is a social emotion. It is also an emotion experienced frequently (modally three times a week; Wildschut, Sedikides, Arndt, & Routledge, 2006) and across the lifespan (Hepper, Wildschut, Sedikides, Robertson, & Routledge, under review).

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### 2. Prejudice expression and motivation to control prejudice

We define prejudice as “an individual-level attitude...toward groups and their members that creates or maintains hierarchical status relations between groups” (Dovidio, Hewstone, Glick, & Esses, 2010, pp. 7–8). In the current article, we examine both the expression of prejudice and the motivation to control prejudice. First, we distinguish, after Pettigrew and Meertens (1995), between blatant and subtle prejudice expression. Blatant prejudice expression refers to reluctance for having close contact with the stereotyped target (e.g., an ethnic minority group) and to perceptions of threat from the stereotyped target. Subtle prejudice expression refers to defense of traditional values against values of the stereotyped target, exaggeration of cultural differences between the ingroup and the stereotyped target, and denial of positive emotions for the stereotyped target.

Second, individuals may vary in their motivation to control prejudiced reactions. Those who do not express prejudice may be genuinely non-prejudiced or motivated to control it (Devine, 1989; Dunton & Fazio, 1997). When motivated to control prejudice, individuals may correct for their automatically activated prejudiced reactions by neutralizing them or altering them in favor of the stereotyped target (Olson & Fazio, 2004).

### 3. Nostalgia and prejudice: hypotheses

We addressed the relations among dispositional nostalgia (i.e., individual-level proclivity to nostalgize), motivation to control prejudice, and expression of blatant and subtle prejudice. We formulated the following hypotheses: *H1*. The more prone to nostalgia one is, the more likely one will be to control prejudice (nostalgia  $\Rightarrow$  prejudice control);

H2. Stronger motivation to control prejudice mediates high nostalgic individuals' reduction of prejudice expression (nostalgia  $\Rightarrow$  prejudice control  $\Rightarrow$  prejudice expression); H3. Empathy is the key mechanism through which high nostalgics control prejudice and reduce prejudice expression (nostalgia  $\Rightarrow$  empathy  $\Rightarrow$  prejudice control  $\Rightarrow$  prejudice expression). We summarize these hypotheses in Fig. 1.

We derived the rationale for all hypotheses from the social character of nostalgia. To begin, nostalgic recollections are rich in their social repertoire. Relative to regular autobiographical narratives, they include a high number of first-person plural pronouns (e.g., “ours,” “we”) and social words (“friend,” “mother”; Wildschut, Sedikides, & Robertson, under review), and often describe meaningful interactions with close others (Abeyta, Routledge, Royle, Wildschut, & Sedikides, 2015; Wildschut et al., 2006). Also, individuals high (vs. low) on trait nostalgia display a stronger preference for song lyrics (Batcho, DaRin, Nave, & Yaworsky, 2008) and activities (Batcho, 1998) in which relationships occupy central place, report stronger intentions to interact with others (Abeyta, Routledge, & Juhl, 2015), and manifest higher levels of perceived social support (Zhou, Sedikides, Wildschut, & Gao, 2008).

We derived the rationale for H1 and H2 from research by Turner and colleagues. They induced nostalgia in undergraduates by asking them to imagine and then write about a nostalgic or ordinary encounter with an outgroup member—either an overweight person (Turner, Wildschut, & Sedikides, 2012) or a person with mental illness (Turner, Wildschut, Sedikides, & Gheorghiu, 2013). Nostalgic (vs. control) participants reported more positive attitudes toward the outgroup (overweight persons, persons with mental illness) and a greater willingness to interact with members of the outgroup. Although these studies (1) were predominantly concerned with intentions for intergroup contact, (2) did not examine prejudice per se, and (3) adopted an experimental approach, the findings align with the possibility that nostalgia proneness entails motivation to control prejudice.

We derived H3 from the relation between nostalgia and empathy (feeling concerned and touched, or feeling vicariously others' emotions; Davis, 1983; Vreeke & Van der Mark, 2003). Some research has shown that nostalgia prone individuals are higher on trait empathy (Juhl, Wildschut, Sedikides, Diebel, & Vingerhoets, under review), and other findings have indicated that empathy is associated with prejudice reduction (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008; Vescio, Sechrist, & Paolucci, 2003). Relatedly, when experimentally manipulated, nostalgia increases in-the-moment empathy. Zhou, Wildschut, Sedikides, Shi, and Feng (2012, Study 2) induced nostalgia with a narrative task (writing about a nostalgic vs. ordinary autobiographical event) and then instructed participants to read information about a fictitious charitable organization (“Half the Sky Foundation”). Subsequently, Zhou et al. assessed state empathy with four adjectives derived from the relevant literature (e.g., “sympathetic,” “tender”) and measured donation intentions as well as actual donations. Nostalgic participants reported higher levels of empathy than controls. Zhou et al. replicated these findings with a

different charitable cause (Study 3) and a sample of ethnically diverse participants varying on age (Study 4). In all three studies, empathy mediated the effect of nostalgia on donation intentions and donations. Lastly, in Turner et al. (2013), nostalgic participants reported higher levels of social connectedness (measured with such items as “connected to loved ones” and “I can trust others”), a construct similar to empathy. Further, social connectedness mediated the effect of nostalgia on outgroup attitudes and intergroup contact intentions.

#### 4. Overview

In Study 1, we assessed whether nostalgia proneness was associated with motivation to control prejudice toward an ethnic minority (African Americans). Here, we tested H1. In Study 2, we examined the associations among nostalgia proneness, motivation to control prejudice, and expression of prejudice against the same ethnic minority. Here, we tested H2 (and retested H1). In Study 3, we assessed the relations among nostalgia proneness, empathy, motivation to control prejudice reactions, and expression of prejudice against said ethnic minority. Here, we tested H3 (and retested H1 and H2). Moreover, we controlled for positive affect (PA) and Big Five personality. Finally, in Study 4, we assessed the replicability of key Study 3 findings with a different measure of nostalgia proneness, while attempting to clarify findings from all prior studies.

#### 5. Study 1

We investigated, in Study 1, whether nostalgia proneness is linked with motivation to control prejudice against African Americans. We tested H1: The more prone to nostalgia one is, the more likely one will be to control prejudice.

##### 5.1. Method

###### 5.1.1. Participants

We recruited 183 participants via Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk). All participants were US residents and had a 95% or higher job acceptance rate on MTurk. Given that a key measure concerned attitudes of Caucasians (ethnic majority) toward African Americans (ethnic minority), we screened out 34 non-Caucasian participants. We further excluded two participants who did not complete the nostalgia proneness measure. From the remaining 147 participants, 86 were women and 60 men (one participant did not report sex and age). Participants' ages ranged from 18–75 years ( $M = 38.43$ ,  $SD = 13.32$ ).

###### 5.1.2. Procedure and measures

We assessed nostalgia proneness with a face-valid measure that we constructed. The measure did not include the word nostalgia, such that any associations between nostalgia proneness and motivation to control

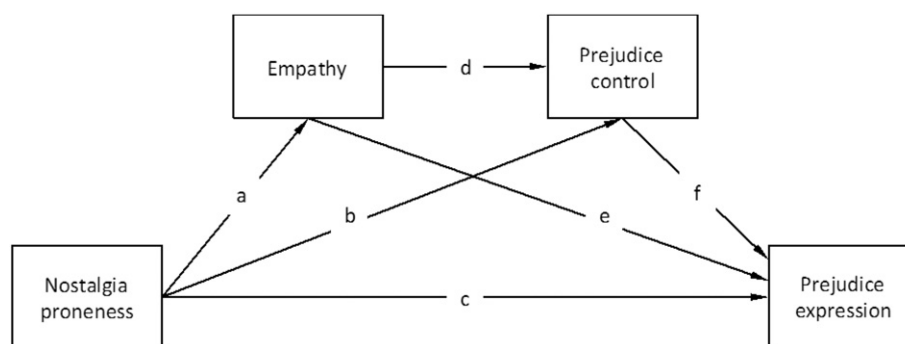


Fig. 1. Hypotheses tested in Studies 1–4. H1: Nostalgia proneness predicts stronger motivation to control prejudice (path b). H2: Stronger motivation to control prejudice mediates the negative association between nostalgia proneness and prejudice expression (path b  $\times$  path f). H3: The negative association between nostalgia proneness and prejudice expression is serially mediated by empathy and motivation to control prejudice (path a  $\times$  path d  $\times$  path f).

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