

Back to the future: Nostalgia increases optimism

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New research from the University of Southampton shows that feeling nostalgic about the past will increase optimism about the future.

The research, published in the *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, examined the idea that [nostalgia](#) is not simply a past-orientated emotion but its scope extends into the future, with a positive outlook.

Dr Tim Wildschut, co-author of the study, comments: "Nostalgia is experienced frequently and virtually by everyone and we know that it can maintain psychological comfort. For example, nostalgic reverie can combat loneliness. We wanted to take that a step further and assess whether it can increase a feeling of optimism about the future."

In one of the reported studies within the paper, the researchers asked participants to bring to mind a nostalgic event and write about it. The number of optimistic words included in the narrative was compared to a control group who were asked to recall and write about an ordinary event. The nostalgic narratives contained a significantly higher proportion of optimistic expressions than the ordinary stories.

A further study capitalised on music's capacity to evoke nostalgia. Participants listened to either a nostalgic or control song (which had been previously validated). Those who listened to the nostalgic song reported higher levels of optimism than those who listened to the control song.

In a final study, participants were presented with song lyrics that half the

group had previously identified to be nostalgic. They were then asked to complete questions about how they felt. Those who read the personally nostalgic lyrics reported [higher levels](#) of optimism than those who read the control lyrics.

The studies also highlighted the roles of self-esteem. Dr Wildschut explains: "Nostalgia raises self-esteem which in turn heightens optimism. Our findings have shown that nostalgia does have the capacity to facilitate perceptions of a more positive future. Memories of the past can help to maintain current feelings of self-worth and can contribute to a brighter outlook on the [future](#). Our findings do imply that nostalgia, by promoting optimism, could help individuals cope with psychological adversity."

Provided by University of Southampton

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