

Those Were the Days: Counteracting Loneliness with Nostalgia

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With the days getting shorter (and colder) and the Holidays quickly approaching, many of us start thinking back to days gone by. This sentimentality and desire for the past is known as nostalgia. All of us are struck with nostalgic feelings from time to time but a new study in the October issue of *Psychological Science*, a journal of the Association for Psychological Science, indicates that nostalgia may serve a greater purpose than just taking us back to the good old days.

Psychologists Xinyue Zhou and Ding-Guo Gao from Sun Yat-Sen University, along with Constantine Sedikides and Tim Wildschut from the University of Southampton explored the connection between loneliness and nostalgia. They ran a series of experiments that had participants answer questions related to feelings of loneliness, social support and nostalgia. The study participants included children, college students and factory workers. In addition, the factory workers were also assessed on their resilience (their ability to recover from traumatic events and adverse life situations).

The results showed that individuals who felt the loneliest reported receiving the least amount of social support. What was interesting, however, was that these participants turned out to be the most nostalgic. In addition, when nostalgia was induced in a number of the study participants, they in turn perceived to have the greatest amount of social support. These findings suggest that nostalgia amplifies perceptions of social support, and in this way, counteracts feelings of loneliness. In addition, the findings revealed that the most resilient individuals are more likely to use nostalgia to overcome feelings of loneliness.

These results have very important implications to clinical psychology and indicate that nostalgia may be used in cognitive therapy, as a coping mechanism that individuals turn to when they are confronted with social exclusion. The authors suggest that “individuals could be trained to benefit from the restorative function of nostalgia when actual social support is lacking or is perceived as lacking”.