The Love is Not Lost: The Reparative Function of Romantic Nostalgia

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THE LOVE IS NOT LOST: THE REPARATIVE FUNCTION OF ROMANTIC NOSTALGIA

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THE LOVE IS NOT LOST: THE REPARATIVE FUNCTION OF ROMANTIC NOSTALGIA

by

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THESIS

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Abstract

Recent research has found that experiencing romantic nostalgia (i.e. nostalgia specific to one’s romantic partner or relationship) can serve several emotional and experiential benefits to romantic relationships. Yet, research within this domain is still limited—specifically, how nostalgia can improve relationships during turmoil or conflict. Thus, in two studies, the current project investigates the reparative benefits of romantic nostalgia when experienced in the context of relationship turmoil. Study 1 (N = 245) investigated the links between trait romantic nostalgia, the conflict compromise style, and positive relationship experiences: closeness, commitment, and relationship satisfaction. Romantic nostalgia was positively linked to all three relationship experiences, and predicted closeness and relationship satisfaction, above and beyond the conflict compromise style. Using a writing task, Study 2 (N = 174) experimentally manipulated state romantic nostalgia within a conflict context and assessed three relationship reparative intentions as outcomes: willingness to sacrifice, willingness to accommodate, and conflict compromise. Those in the nostalgia condition reported higher levels of willingness to accommodate, but not willingness to sacrifice nor conflict compromise. Taken together, the current project provides mixed support for the reparative benefits of experiencing romantic nostalgia.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Romantic comedies that saturate American cinema and television have practically perfected the following scenario. A romantic couple is experiencing some form of turmoil in their relationship (e.g. an argument or a relationship transgression). They decide to take time to collect their thoughts and emotions (anger, sadness, betrayal). After this time of self-reflection and as they come to reconcile their differences, they paint a vivid picture of the love they have for one another. In doing so, they share their memories of the first time they met, their first date, their first kiss, or any other memory of their affectionate, albeit rocky, relationship. By reliving and sharing these significant events from their relationship, they are able to realize that their current negative experience pales in comparison to the collection of positive moments that have strengthened their relationship.

Although this scenario is highly romanticized, quite literally, by the television and movie industries, much can and should be said about the importance of reflecting on past significant relationship-specific experiences. Experiencing nostalgia through reflecting on these specific autobiographical memories has already been shown to serve several positive benefits to romantic partners (Evans & Fetterman, 2019). The current project, therefore, attempts to further the research of both romantic nostalgia and romantic relationship turmoil by investigating the reparative function of nostalgia.

Nostalgia

As the New Oxford Dictionary of English (1998, p. 1266) defines it, nostalgia is a “sentimental longing or wistful affection for the past.” The feeling itself is one in which one desires to re-experience past life events. This feeling is bittersweet in that it is nearly impossible to fully experience these events again, yet positive in that these past events were significant moments in
the individual’s life (Sedikides et al., 2015). These events that lead to nostalgic feelings are important chapters tying together one’s life narrative (McAdams, 1996). Thus, nostalgic experiences carry personal import to the individual experiencing them, and consequently rely on the ability to relive or re-experience these events (Hepper, Ritchie, Sedikides, & Wildschut, 2012).

The recent surge of nostalgia research has identified three main functions of the nostalgia experience—self-oriented, existential, and, sociality (for a review, see Sedikides et al., 2015). The self-oriented function of nostalgia highlights the increase in self-esteem and overall self-worth individuals may feel when experiencing nostalgia as well as enhanced feelings of self-continuity (the sense that one’s past self has remained consistent over time), inspiration, and optimism (Sedikides et al., 2015). The existential function of nostalgia (i.e. an increased sense of one’s meaning in life) shows how people may feel an increased sense of purpose in their lives after experiencing nostalgia (Sedikides & Wildschut, 2018). This experience may consequently provide people with the motivation and intention to pursue various goals they may find meaningful (Sedikides & Wildschut, 2016). The sociality function of nostalgia demonstrates how individuals may feel increased levels of connectedness to friends or other significant people in these individuals’ lives as a result of this experience (Sedikides et al., 2015).

**Autobiographical Memories as the Root of the Nostalgia Experience**

In order to experience nostalgia, one must bring to mind an experience from his or her past. Therefore, the nostalgia experience relies on the recall and even “re-living” of autobiographical memories. Because these two constructs are intimately linked, it would come as no surprise that autobiographical remembering has been shown to yield similar functions as nostalgia. Three primary functions of autobiographical memories have emerged from this growing body of research: self, social, and directive (for a review, see Bluck, 2003).
Autobiographical memories provide individuals with the sense that their sense of self is consistent with their behaviors or actions, thus serving a function specific to the self (Bluck, 2003; Nelson, 2003). How people see their current selves is contingent on how they view their past experiences (Demiray & Janssen, 2015; Wilson & Ross, 2003). This then leads to an enhancement of emotions such as self-esteem and overall well-being. Autobiographical memories also serve a directive function by stimulating goal pursuit (Biondolillo & Pillemer, 2015; Bluck, 2003; Kuwabara & Pillemer, 2010; Pillemer, 2003). Finally, autobiographical memories allow us to connect socially with close others, thus fulfilling the desire to bond with and be accepted by others (Bluck, 2003; Nelson, 2003).

Nostalgia as a psychological phenomenon is rooted in autobiographical memories. However, experiencing nostalgia involves much more than simply bringing to mind autobiographical memories. In order to experience nostalgia, one must think back and immerse him- or herself in a past life experience (Hepper et al., 2012). For the nostalgic experience, it is necessary for a memory to be subjectively significant. Nostalgia is, in essence, a longing to relive a past life event or experience. Without this experience holding any sentimental value, nostalgia cannot occur in full. Consequently, the emotional benefits of this experience would not be as pronounced either. This is supported by the consistent finding that those who remember and describe nostalgic autobiographical memories experience the psychological benefits to a significantly higher degree than do those who remember and describe an ordinary or mundane autobiographical memory (Sedikides et al., 2015).

**Romantic Relationships as Repositories for Nostalgic Autobiographical Memories**

Autobiographical remembering and the nostalgia experience are closely linked, such that through re-living personally significant autobiographical memories, one can experience nostalgia.
This close link is substantiated by the similar benefits these two psychological phenomena have been shown to serve (Bluck, 2003; Sedikides et al., 2015). Specifically, prior findings have pointed to the sociality function of nostalgia and autobiographical memories, such that remembering nostalgic events from one’s past fosters feelings of connectedness to close others (Bluck, 2003; Nelson, 2003; Sedikides et al., 2015; Wildschut, Sedikides, Arndt, & Routledge, 2006; Zhou, Sedikides, Wildschut, & Gao, 2008).

Based on the described experiences from participants using the Event Reflection Task (Sedikides et al., 2015), most nostalgic memories people bring to mind are ones that involve other people, especially close loved ones (Abeyta, Routledge, & Juhl, 2015). Because of this interpersonal nature of nostalgia, researchers have further investigated the sociality function of nostalgia, specifically as it pertains to interpersonal relationships (Abeyta et al., 2015). For example, nostalgia has been shown to aid in motivation to pursue social goals with loved ones and pursue close relationships. This benefit is facilitated by the interpersonal nature of nostalgic memories, such that when people feel nostalgic regarding social-related topics, they experience greater relationship pursuit motivation (Abeyta et al., 2015).

Nostalgia can—and often is—experienced outside of the interpersonal relationship context. However, one particular type of interpersonal relationship, the romantic relationship, is an integral part of people’s lives, such that individuals’ romantic partners may actually fuse with their own self-concepts (Aron et al., 1992). The experiences people have with their romantic partners and the memories these experiences form shape not only their relationships, but their own personal identities. Thus, these relationship-specific nostalgic memories have the potential to give meaning to relationships and, consequently, individual self-concepts. Experiencing romantic nostalgia—the type of nostalgia specific to one’s current romantic partner or relationship—may
then serve several of the same or similar benefits demonstrated in the nostalgia literature (Sedikides et al., 2015).

Throughout a relationship, romantic partners collectively experience events that influence their relationships or simply allow for them to progress. These events and experiences, when reflected upon after they happen, hold a higher level of significance than past events that are subjectively ordinary (e.g. day-to-day activities). Research regarding these relationship-defining memories (Alea, Singer, & Labunko, 2015) have demonstrated several characteristics that distinctly set them apart from mundane relationship-specific memories, especially in that they help serve several relationship-specific benefits, such as intimacy, commitment, and relationship satisfaction (Alea & Bluck, 2007; Alea & Vick, 2010; Guilbault & Philippe, 2017).

Relationship-defining memories are one’s that carry with them a strong emotional association (Alea & Vick, 2010). Most often this association is positive in nature (Alea & Vick, 2010). This does not necessarily mean that the experience itself was overwhelmingly positive, but when reflecting on this experience, individuals experience general overall positive affect (Alea et al., 2015). For instance, Alea et al. (2015) found that although partners’ relationship-defining memories may have induced negative affect at the time of experiencing them, they nevertheless led to positive outcomes. These experiences demonstrate how their relationships have progressed, grown, and strengthened (Alea et al., 2015).

Relative to everyday or mundane past relationship experiences, relationship-defining memories are also ones that are most often recalled—either reflected on by the self or shared with close others—and are consistently salient (Alea & Vick, 2010; Alea et al., 2015; Drivdahl & Hyman, 2014). When reflecting on these experiences or sharing them with others, individuals are able to vividly recall the details of these experience, as if they happened the day prior (Alea &
Vick, 2010; Cortes, Leith, & Wilson, 2017). Research has shown that when reflecting on relationship-defining memories that hold positive sentimental value, individuals highly satisfied with their relationships subjectively judge these memories as happening in a less distant past than memories of their partners’ transgressions, which hold no sentimental value (Cortes et al., 2017). Therefore, relationship-specific memories alone may not be enough to provide the relationship-specific benefits of intimacy (or closeness), commitment, and relationship satisfaction (Alea & Bluck, 2007; Alea & Vick, 2010; Guilbault & Philippe, 2017). The experience of nostalgia is contingent on these relationship-defining memory characteristics, making it an overall key component triggering these relationship-specific benefits. In other words, relationship-defining memories are nostalgic.

Although an abundance of literature has supported the benefits of remembering significant relationship-specific life events, romantic autobiographical memory research as it pertains directly to the experience of nostalgia is only beginning to blossom. Research on nostalgia’s benefits has recently sparked interest in investigating the potential positive impact on relationship feelings and satisfaction. For example, through a cross-sectional study, Mallory, Spencer, Kimmes, and Pollitt (2018) found that one’s trait nostalgia (or nostalgia proneness) positively correlates with self-reported levels of relationship satisfaction. However, these findings do not assess if state nostalgia has any effect on relationship satisfaction. To test this potential effect, our lab incorporated the experimental methodology commonly used among nostalgia researchers to induce romantic nostalgia. Utilizing a well-established writing task, the Event Reflection Task (Sedikides et al., 2015), our lab (Evans & Fetterman, 2019) found that participants who re-live relationship-specific nostalgic experiences not only reap the benefit of increased relationship satisfaction, but also
higher levels of commitment and closeness. As well as adding to the nostalgia literature, these findings further support the benefits of experiencing relationship-defining memories.

**Relationship Turmoil and Conflict**

Because we are all social beings and desire companionship, romantic relationships often serve several positive emotional and social functions beneficial to our quality of life (Cramer, 2004; Gulledge, Gulledge, & Stahnmann, 2003; Sedikides, Oliver, & Campbell, 1994). As relationships develop, people come to rely on their partners for several social and emotional benefits such as emotional support (Cramer, 2004), affection (Gulledge et al., 2003), companionship, and intimacy (Sedikides et al., 1994). People within romantic relationships come to rely so heavily on their partners to fulfill these social and emotional benefits that their partners become inseparable from their own self-concepts (Aron, Aron, Smollan, 1992). Consequently, romantic relationships greatly impact the shared lives of romantic partners and serve to enhance their overall qualities of life (Braithwaite, Delevi, & Fincham, 2010).

Individuals may not always experience the many emotional and social functions throughout the duration of their relationships. People can feel unfulfilled or dissatisfied with their relationships when experiencing conflict with their romantic partners (Cramer, 2004; Hesse & Mikkelson, 2017; Gunlicks-Stoessel & Powers, 2009), when their partners exhibit unfavorable behaviors (Davis & Outhout, 1987), engage in unconstructive communication, or fail to engage in constructive communication (Theiss & Solomon, 2006; Theiss, Knobloch, Checton, & Magsamen-Conrad, 2009). This lack of fulfillment of one’s romantic needs may lead to several negative emotional consequences. Persons in unfulfilled relationships experience negative emotions of stress (Gunlicks-Stoessel & Powers, 2009), worry (Sedikides et al., 1994), and relational uncertainty (Hesse & Mikkelson, 2017; Solomon & Knobloch, 2004; Theiss & Solomon, 2006). Moreover,
decreased relationship satisfaction increases the likelihood of the relationship ending (Røsand, Slinning, Røysamb, & Tambs, 2014).

**Relationship Maintenance and Reparative Intentions**

Experiencing negative emotions and overall relationship dissatisfaction is undoubtedly cause for concern since humans are driven to regulate our emotional states and maintain emotional homeostasis and overall emotional well-being (see Gross, 1998 & 2002 for reviews on emotion regulation). When experiencing a decrease in positive affect and an increase in negative affect, people seek to resolve the negative emotions and return to a more positive emotional state. Romantic relationships are no different. When experiencing relationship hurt and when this hurt affects emotional well-being, humans feel the need to return to emotional equilibrium (Richards, Butler, & Gross, 2003). Repairing these negative emotions and restoring positive emotions allow partners to return to their former state of a relatively satisfying romantic relationship. Therefore, understanding the most productive ways in which relationship conflict can be resolved is essential to restoring a positive and fruitful relationship. Although people may engage in negative behaviors that may hinder relationship repair (e.g. dominance, submission, avoidance, and separation; Kurdek, 1994; Zacchilli et al., 2009) different conflict resolution styles and behaviors have been shown to resolve conflict in a productive manner (Canary & Cupach, 1988; Kurdek, 1994; Zacchilli et al., 2009), and consequently increase relationship satisfaction (Salvatore, Kuo, Steele, Simpson, and Collins, 2011).

Feelings of relationship uncertainty, as a result of relationship hurt, can be assuaged through positive communication behaviors (Emmers & Canary, 1996). The most constructive strategy is one in which partners attempt to compromise with each other (Canary & Cupach, 1988; Kurdek, 1994; Zacchilli et al., 2009). Additionally, researchers have also identified distinct
behaviors that can lead to relationship repair, both of which have been shown to stimulate forgiveness in the face of relationship turmoil (Karremans & Van Lange, 2004): willingness to sacrifice and accommodate for one’s romantic partner (Karremans & Van Lange, 2004; Rusbult, Hannon, Stocker, & Finkel, 2005). Although very similar behavioral reactions to relationship turmoil, what distinguishes the two is that with willing to sacrifice, the individual is willing to give up something of his or hers (time, energy, etc.) in order to repair the relationship. Accommodation, on the other hand, is an overall willingness to avoid engaging in destructive behavior, and instead, to respond in a constructive manner for the betterment of the relationship (Rusbult, Verette, Whitney, Slovik, & Lipkus, 1991).

These findings only speak to the specific behaviors one can engage in to repair his or her romantic relationship. However, much of this research has neglected possible psychological processes that may lead to an individual or dyad’s ultimate intentions to resolve the turmoil and repair the relationship. During conflict, romantic partners must manage the hurdle of getting to the point of attempting to resolve the conflict. For example, those who have a greater tendency to ruminate in the context of relationship threat are less likely to regulate their negative emotions and return to a more positive emotional state (Jostmann, Karremans, & Finkenauer, 2011). When appraising the relationship as negative and ruminating on the conflict, partners may then be unable to arrive at their destination of enacting behaviors to constructively resolve the conflict, essentially nullifying the effectiveness of these behaviors.

Therefore, it should be just as important to examine how an individual handles his or her own emotions and thoughts regarding the conflict before proceeding with a particular behavior or course of action to the conflict at hand. Reliving relationship-defining nostalgic experiences may allow partners struggling with conflict resolution to see the good that has come of their
relationship. Romantic nostalgia would allow partners to recognize the importance of their shared past experiences to their individual growth as well as the growth of the relationship. In doing so, experiencing romantic nostalgia through reliving autobiographical relationship-defining memories would aid partners in facilitating intentions to repair the relationship.

Current Investigation

This project attempted to bridge the gap between the experience of relationship turmoil and resolving that turmoil, ultimately resulting in repairing the relationship. This is the first attempt to investigate the relationship reparative function of romantic nostalgia. As such, the first of two studies served as an investigation of the two primary individual differences at play within the turmoil/nostalgia/resolution dynamic as predictors of positive relationship emotions and satisfaction: the constructive conflict style (compromise) and trait nostalgia. Relationship satisfaction has already been shown to be predicted by trait romantic nostalgia (Mallory et al. 2018) and the compromise relationship conflict style (Zacchilli et al., 2009). Therefore, this study served to expand these prior findings and explore romantic nostalgia’s predictability of relationship satisfaction and positive relationship-specific emotions, above and beyond compromise.

The second purpose of this project was to understand how state (or situational) nostalgia can lead to reparative intentions. As such, Study 2 experimentally manipulated romantic nostalgia within a relationship turmoil context. From inducing romantic nostalgia, the goal was to understand the causal nature of state romantic nostalgia as an enhancer of reparative intentions, namely willingness to sacrifice, willingness to accommodate, and conflict compromise.
Chapter 2: Study 1

Study 1 served as an initial trait-level study assessing the relationships between various emotional, personality, and relationship-based traits. As such, this study then provided a solid foundation for Study 2. I first hypothesized that trait romantic nostalgia and the constructive conflict style, compromise, would correlate positively with feelings of closeness and commitment as well as relationship satisfaction. Moreover, I hypothesized that trait romantic nostalgia would positively predict closeness, commitment, and relationship satisfaction, above and beyond compromise.

Method

Participants

Since this study utilized a correlational design, I recruited 251 participants from Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) for $0.50 USD. In order to complete the study, participants were required to be both at least 18 years old and in a romantic relationship at the time they take the survey. To determine the sample size needed for sufficient statistical power for a correlational design, Study 1 relied on the results of Schönbrodt and Perugini (2013), who investigated several sample size points at which correlations stabilize. Using a Monte-Carlo simulation approach, they determined critical points of stabilization in which correlations only fluctuate within different windows of deviation (i.e. “corridors of stabilization”) with 80%, 90%, and 95% confidence, based on 100,000 bootstrap samples (Schönbrodt & Perugini, 2013). They further recommend using a confidence percentage of 80%, which mirrors traditional power analysis calculations, and a narrow corridor of stabilization, ± .10 (Schönbrodt & Perugini, 2013). Finally, with the help of the findings from a meta-meta-analysis conducted by Richard, Bond, and Stokes-Zoota (2003), they determined that effect size estimates between $\rho = .1$ and $\rho = .2$ are typical for personality and social
psychological research (Schönbrodt & Perugini, 2013). That being said, for correlations between $r = .1$ and $r = .2$, with a corridor of stability of $\pm .10$ and 80% confidence, Schönbrodt and Perugini (2013) found that correlations stabilize between 238 and 252 participants.

Although participants who were not in relationships were not allowed to complete the study, when asked to indicate their relationship lengths, four participants (presumably in relationships) indicated that they have been in their relationships for zero years, zero months, and zero weeks. In other words, these participants indicated that they were not currently in romantic relationships. As such, they were removed from the final analyzable sample. Furthermore, two participants were removed due to acquiescence bias (i.e. responding to all items, even reverse scored items, by selecting the same high-end response option). The removal of these participants resulted in a final analyzable sample of 245 (see Table 1 for sample characteristics).

**Procedure**

Through MTurk participants received a link to the online survey. Upon providing consent within the survey, participants completed the initial demographic assessment (see Appendix A) followed by the measures assessing romantic nostalgia proneness, relationship conflict styles, relationship satisfaction, and the relationship-specific emotions of closeness and commitment. Each of these measures were counterbalanced to account for ordering effects. Within the demographic questionnaire, participants answered a question regarding their current relationship status. Participants who indicated that they were not currently in a romantic relationship (a stated requirement within the study information provided to participants) were directed to the end of the survey and were thanked for their participation without being provided an MTurk code to receive their payment. Participants who indicated that they were currently in a romantic relationship were
allowed to proceed to complete the study and were then provided an MTurk code to receive payment.

**Materials**

The online survey contained a series of scales assessing romantic nostalgia, relationship conflict, relationship emotions and satisfaction, and personality. Each of these scales have been validated in prior research. Some of these scales have been adapted for the current purposes to assess romantic relationship specific emotions and feelings.

**Romantic Relationship-Specific Southampton Nostalgia Scale (SNS-RR)**

This study used a version of the Southampton Nostalgia Scale (SNS; Sedikides et al., 2015) modified and adapted specifically for romantic relationships. The original five-item version of this scale, which assesses overall nostalgia proneness, was validated for its initial development (Routledge, Arndt, Sedikides, & Wildschut, 2008). Subsequently, this scale was expanded as two items were added and its validation was again supported (Sedikides et al., 2015).

For the current study, participants were asked to answer seven questions pertaining to their proneness to experiencing romantic nostalgia. The first six questions assessed romantic nostalgia’s overall importance to participants (e.g. “How valuable is romantic nostalgia to you?”) as well as how frequently they recall romantic nostalgic experiences (e.g. “How often do you experience nostalgia about your romantic partner and/or romantic relationship?”) on a scale from 1 (Not at all) to 7 (Very much). The last questions assessed the specific frequency to which participants bring to mind romantic nostalgic experiences from 1 (At least once a day) to 7 (Once or twice a year). For each participant, scores on these seven items were averaged to compute a composite trait romantic nostalgia score ($M = 4.40, SD = 1.47, \alpha = .93$). Participants’ composite scores ranged from 1.00 to 7.00. See Appendix B for the assessment in its entirety.
**Romantic Partner Conflict Scale (RPCS)**

To assess an individual’s personal constructive conflict style, this study used the compromise factor of the RPCS (Zacchilli et al., 2009). A distinct factor of the RPCS determined by a confirmatory factor analysis, the compromise factor was further validated in terms of its construct and convergent validity (Zacchilli et al., 2009). For the current study, participants were asked to rate each of the 14 items on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) how much they are most likely to handle conflict in terms of each of the conflict behavior items (e.g. “We try to collaborate so that we can reach a joint solution to conflict”). For each participant, scores on these 14 items were averaged to compute a composite compromise conflict style score ($M = 5.59$, $SD = 1.04$, $\alpha = .95$). Participants’ composite scores ranged from 1.36 to 7.00. See Appendix C for the assessment in its entirety.

**Unidimensional Relationship Closeness Scale (URCS)**

Along with assessing romantic nostalgia and the compromise conflict style, the goal of the present study was to assess how these two trait characteristics are associated with relationship emotions and experiences. As such, this study used the URCS (Dibble, Levine, & Park, 2012) to assess relationship closeness. In its scale development using both exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis, this scale was supported as both a valid and reliable measure of relationship closeness (Dibble et al., 2012). Participants were asked to rate each of the 11 items of this assessment (e.g. “My relationship with my romantic partner is close.”) based on their current feelings of closeness in their romantic relationships on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). For each participant, scores on these 11 items were averaged to compute a composite closeness score ($M = 5.91$, $SD = 1.02$, $\alpha = .94$). Participants’ composite scores ranged from 2.36 to 7.00. See Appendix D for the assessment in its entirety.
Investment Model Scale – Commitment Level Facet (IMS-C)

Moreover, this study assessed commitment using the commitment facet of the Investment Model Scale (IMS), which was developed through a factor analytic approach and supported as a valid and reliable assessment of relationship commitment (Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998). This subscale of the IMS assesses participants feelings of closeness on a seven-item scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree; e.g. “I want our relationship to last for a very long time”). For each participant, scores on these seven items were averaged to compute a composite commitment score ($M = 5.85$, $SD = 1.19$, $\alpha = .86$). Participants’ composite scores ranged from 1.00 to 7.00. See Appendix E for the assessment in its entirety.

Investment Model Scale – Satisfaction Level Facet (IMS-S)

Finally, to understand how romantic nostalgia and compromise are associated with overall relationship satisfaction, this study made use of the satisfaction subscale of the IMS (Rusbult et al., 1998). Like the commitment facet of the IMS, the satisfaction facet was developed, validated, and supported as a reliable factor of the IMS (Rusbult et al., 1998). Like the IMS-C, participants rated their feelings of satisfaction on this five-item scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree; e.g. “I feel satisfied with our relationship”). For each participant, scores on these five items were averaged to compute a composite relationship satisfaction score ($M = 5.60$, $SD = 1.20$, $\alpha = .90$). Participants’ composite scores ranged from 1.00 to 7.00. See Appendix F for the assessment in its entirety.

Results

Correlations

As an initial study, I was simply interested in investigating potential relationships between the scales used in this study. Therefore, to test the first hypothesis, I assessed these relationships
with zero-order correlations (see Table 2). As hypothesized, the compromise conflict style was positively correlated with relationship satisfaction as well as the relationship-specific emotions, closeness and commitment. Furthermore, in accordance with the first hypothesis, romantic nostalgia was also positively correlated with relationship satisfaction as well as the relationship-specific emotions, closeness and commitment.

**Multiple linear regression analyses**

In order to test the second hypothesis, namely that romantic nostalgia would predict each of the relationship emotions and satisfaction, above and beyond compromise, the data were submitted to a multiple linear regression analysis. For closeness, the model revealed a combined effect of compromise and trait romantic nostalgia, $R^2 = .510$, $F(2, 242) = 125.86$, $p < .001$. Compromise alone significantly predicted closeness, $\beta = .694, p < .001$, 95% CI [.603, .785]. More importantly, in line with the second hypothesis, trait romantic nostalgia significantly predicted closeness, $\beta = .162, p < .001$, 95% CI [.071, .253], $\Delta R^2 = .025$, above and beyond the effect of compromise. When predicting commitment, the same model revealed that compromise and trait romantic nostalgia combined significantly predicted, $R^2 = .324$, $F(2, 242) = 58.09$, $p < .001$. Again, compromise alone significantly predicted commitment, $\beta = .656, p < .001$, 95% CI [.532, .780]. However, trait romantic nostalgia was not a significant predictor of commitment above and beyond compromise, $\beta = .102, p = .105$. Finally, when predicting relationship satisfaction, both compromise and romantic nostalgia had a combined effect, $R^2 = .495$, $F(2, 242) = 118.37$, $p < .001$. In this case, not only did compromise alone predict satisfaction, $\beta = .807, p < .001$, 95% CI [.699, .916], but, more importantly, so did romantic nostalgia, $\beta = .168, p = .003$, 95% CI [.060, .276], $\Delta R^2 = .020$, above and beyond compromise.
Discussion

According to the results of Study 1, there seems to be evidence to support the link between one’s proneness to experience nostalgia and positive relationship experiences, namely, closeness, commitment, and relationship satisfaction. Moreover, this link seems to hold for closeness and relationship satisfaction when accounting for the ability to compromise with one’s romantic partner. Therefore, Study 1 provided a promising foundation on which to further explore the importance of romantic nostalgia in romantic relationships, especially if and when relationship turmoil ensues. However, since Study 1 was merely correlational, causal inferences of romantic nostalgia cannot be drawn from its results. As such, Study 2 attempted to explore the causal effect of experiencing situational romantic nostalgia on relationship reparative intentions within the context of relationship turmoil.
Chapter 3: Study 2

Study 1 predicted a positive relationship between trait romantic nostalgia (i.e. nostalgia proneness), relationship conflict styles, and positive romantic-specific emotions: closeness, commitment, and relationship satisfaction. The aim of Study 2 was then to understand how experimentally manipulating the nostalgia experience can facilitate relationship reparative intentions. Therefore, I hypothesized that participants in the nostalgia writing (vs. ordinary writing) condition would experience greater intentions to repair the relationship, through higher reported scores on willingness to sacrifice, willingness to accommodate, and conflict compromise.

Method

Participants

This study utilized a one-way between-subjects design with two levels of a writing manipulation (nostalgia vs. neutral) as the independent variable. As such, I conducted a power analysis for the proposed study using G*Power (Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner, & Lang, 2009) to determine the number of participants needed for adequate statistical power (i.e., 90%). The desired effect size used in the power analysis was determined by taking the largest effect size from a previous study, which used the same one-way between subjects manipulation to explore romantic nostalgia’s relationship benefits (Evans & Fetterman, 2019). The minimum sample size to detect the effect size of $\eta^2 = .058$ was 174 when $\alpha = .05$ (two-tailed). However, I collected data from 200 participants, as I expected that some participants would not follow the instructions for the writing manipulation and be dropped from analyses.

As in Study 1, participants were recruited using MTurk and were compensated with $1.00 USD. The only participation requirement (aside from being at least 18 years of age) was that participants had to currently be in committed a romantic relationship at the time of the study.
Participants who indicated that they were not currently in a committed romantic relationship at the time they followed the survey link from MTurk were automatically directed to the end of the survey without a code to receive compensation. As expected, of the 200 participants, 26 participants were removed from analysis for failure to follow the writing instructions. This resulted in a final sample of 174 participants (see Table 3 for sample characteristics).

**Research design and procedure**

This study utilized a one-way between-subjects design in which participants in a Nostalgia condition were compared to those in a Neutral condition on intentions to repair relationship turmoil through self-reported willingness to sacrifice, willingness to accommodate, and conflict compromise. After providing consent, participants were instructed to complete the same sociodemographic questionnaire as that of Study 1 (see Appendix A). To simulate a turmoil context, all participants then completed a relationship turmoil induction task. In this task, participants were asked to think of a specific recent ordinary event in which their romantic partners caused them to experience general negative emotions or affect. After reflecting on this event, participants were instructed to write about this event in detail for three minutes including how it made them feel (see Appendix G for the complete instructions). To test how participants felt following this negative relationship experience writing task, participants reported their current state of valence and arousal using the Self-Assessment Manikin (SAM; Bradley & Lang, 1994; Hodes, Cook, & Lang, 1985; Lang, 1980).

Participants were then randomly assigned to one of two writing conditions: romantic nostalgia \((n = 89)\) or romantic neutral \((n = 85)\). Table 3 provides sample characteristics for each condition. Participants in the Romantic Nostalgia condition were given The New Oxford Dictionary (1998) definition of nostalgia and were asked to think of a nostalgic event specific to
their romantic partners or relationships. Like the conflict writing task, participants were then asked to write about this nostalgic event for three minutes. In the Romantic Neutral condition, participants were asked to think and write about an ordinary or mundane experience specific to their romantic partners or relationships. They also did this for three minutes (See Appendix H).

Following the nostalgia/neutral writing task, participants then completed a series of questionnaires. As mentioned previously, the primary purpose of this study was to test romantic nostalgia’s capability to increase various relationship reparative intentions during times of conflict. As such, participants were first assessed on their feelings of nostalgia (manipulation check), followed by the dependent variables of interest: willingness to accommodate, willingness to sacrifice, and their compromise conflict. Each dependent variable was measured using self-report assessments. Furthermore, these dependent variable measures (not including the manipulation check) were counterbalanced to account for ordering effects.

**Materials**

*Relationship turmoil induction*

In this task, participants were instructed to contemplate about a recent ordinary or everyday past event from their romantic relationship, in which their romantic partners caused them distress or negative affect. They were then asked to write about this event for three minutes. This task was modified from the Event Reflection Task developed by Sedikides et al. (2015), which originally was designed to induce nostalgia (see Appendix G). Importantly, participants were instructed not to write about a traumatic experience. Additionally, within the recruitment requirements, participants were asked not to participate if they considered their relationships to be physically or emotionally abusive in any way. In case participants did experience an overwhelming sense of negative affect by the time they completed the study, they were also provided with resources for
the National Domestic Violence Hotline and the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline in the debriefing information. Moreover, for those who were not assigned to the nostalgia condition, the debriefing information provided information regarding the potential usefulness of thinking about a nostalgic experience and writing about it, and consequently suggested doing so.

**Self-Assessment Manikin (SAM)**

To assess participants’ levels of valence (positive vs. negative emotion) as well as arousal following the turmoil induction, I utilized the SAM (Bradley & Lang, 1994; Hodes, Cook, & Lang, 1985; Lang, 1980). The SAM was developed by Lang (1980) and Hodes et al. (1985) as a simpler measure of valence and arousal than earlier multiple item measures of these constructs. This measure was further validated by Bradley and Lang (1994) as an effective assessment of valence and arousal following experimental stimuli.

On the valence item of this measure, participants were shown five versions of an image of a “manikin” at five different levels of valence (negative valence at the low end of the spectrum and positive at the high end). They then indicated which number value corresponding to each image was most indicative of how they were currently feeling on a nine-point scale (1 = strongly negative, 9 = strongly positive; \( M = 4.80, SD = 2.05 \)). Participants’ scores ranged from 1 to 9. A participant scoring a 1 (strongly negative) on this measure previously wrote about how the romantic partner purchased an unreliable vehicle after disregarding the participant’s input. The car then needed significant repairs shortly after the purchase. On the positive valence end of the spectrum, a participant scoring a 9 on this measure previously wrote about being involved in an argument at a shopping mall with the romantic partner.

For the arousal item, participants were shown the same images of the “manikin,” but at different levels of arousal. Using this image, they indicated which of the response options
corresponding to the images was most indicative of their current arousal level (1 = little to no arousal, 9 = high arousal; \( M = 4.02, \ SD = 2.06 \)). Participants’ scores ranged from 1 to 9. A participant scoring 1 (low arousal) on this measure previously wrote about how this person’s romantic partner wanted to go to a favorite location regardless of the fact that the weather would not permit this, which the participant told the romantic partner. Consequently, the romantic partner became “annoyed and aggravated,” which consequently caused the participant to become aggravated as well. On the high arousal end of this spectrum, a participant scoring a 9 on this measure previously wrote about how the romantic partner did not approve of this participant’s parenting style. See Appendix H for both items of the SAM and their corresponding scales.

**Nostalgia induction and manipulation check**

This study induced romantic nostalgia through the Event Reflection Task (Sedikides et al., 2015). Participants in the nostalgia condition were first given The New Oxford Dictionary (1998) definition of nostalgia and subsequently asked to think about a nostalgic experience pertaining specifically to their romantic partners or relationships and write about it for three minutes. Those in the ordinary condition were instructed to think about an ordinary, mundane experience they have had with their current romantic partners and write about it for three minutes. Following their respective writing tasks, participants answered two questions assessing their levels of felt nostalgia (as a manipulation check; \( M = 3.81, \ SD = 1.03, \ \alpha = .96 \)) on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree): “Right now, I am feeling quite nostalgic,” and “Right now, I’m having nostalgic feelings.” Participants’ composite felt nostalgia scores, computed by taking their averages on these two items, ranged from 1.00 to 5.00. See Appendix I for the task instructions.
Willingness to Sacrifice Scale

To assess the reparative intention of willingness to sacrifice, this study utilized the five-item “Willingness to Sacrifice for the Environment” (Davis, Le, & Coy, 2011) adapted specifically for this study and modeled after a previous three-item relationship-specific version of this measure developed by Etcheverry and Le (2005). Both of these measures from which the adapted version was derived were both supported as being internally reliable measures of willingness to sacrifice for their respective targets (Davis et al., 2011; Etcheverry & Le, 2005). For the current study’s assessment, participants rated their willingness to engage in different sacrificial behaviors in the context of the relationship turmoil experience they wrote about (e.g. “With the negative relationship experience in mind, I would be willing to give up things that I like doing if they hurt my relationship”). They did so on a seven-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree; $M = 5.41$, $SD = .98$, $\alpha = .83$). For each participant, scores on these seven items were averaged to compute a composite willingness to sacrifice score. Participants’ composite scores on this construct ranged from 2.20 to 7.00. See Appendix J for the entire assessment.

Willingness to Accommodate Scale

To assess participants’ overall willingness to accommodate for their romantic partners during relationship turmoil, I used the 16-item accommodation scale developed by Rusbult et al. (1991) and modified it for the context of the relationship turmoil induction. Based on a previously developed theoretical model of accommodative behaviors (Rusbult & Zembrodt, 1983; Rusbult, Zembrodt, & Gunn, 1982), this measure was developed and consequently supported as a valid and reliable assessment of accommodation processes (Rusbult et al., 1991). In line with this theoretical model, this scale assessed the four components of accommodation, with four items to assess each component: exit (e.g. “With the negative relationship experience in mind, I would threaten to leave
my romantic partner”; $M = 2.31$, $SD = 1.47$, range = 1.00 to 7.00, $\alpha = .82$), neglect (“With the negative relationship experience in mind, I would avoid dealing with the situation”; $M = 3.18$, $SD = 1.63$, range = 1.00 to 9.00, $\alpha = .79$), voice (e.g. “With the negative relationship experience in mind, I would try to resolve the situation and improve conditions”; $M = 7.02$, $SD = 1.57$, range = 2.00 to 9.00, $\alpha = .83$), and loyalty (e.g. “With the negative relationship experience in mind, I would forgive my partner and forget about it”; $M = 5.93$, $SD = 1.50$, range = 2.00 to 9.00, $\alpha = .67$). As the example items suggest, the exit and neglect factors are negative accommodative behaviors, while the voice and loyalty factors exemplify positive behaviors (Rusbult et al., 1991). Participants were asked to indicate how likely they would behave in the accommodative behaviors on a scale of 1 (I would never do this) to 9 (I would constantly do this). Composite scores for each factor were computed by averaging their respective items. Moreover, a total accommodation score was calculated by reversing the negative intention scores, exit and neglect, and taking the mean of all 16 items ($M = 6.86$, $SD = 1.12$, range = 4.31 to 8.94, $\alpha = .85$; see Appendix K).

**Romantic Partner Conflict Scale (RPCS)**

Study 2 also utilized the compromise factor assessment of the RPCS (Zacchilli et al., 2009; $M = 5.76$, $SD = .98$, range = 1.36 to 7.00, $\alpha = .95$). However, unlike Study 1 which used the original trait-level assessment of the compromise style, for the current study, I modified the wording to assess participants’ conflict compromise in the context of the negative relationship experience they wrote about (e.g. “I would try to collaborate so that we can reach a joint solution to the conflict”). See Appendix L for the adapted form of the scale.

**Results**

First, to test the effect of the writing manipulation on the reparative intentions of interest, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed on the manipulation check. As predicted,
those in the romantic nostalgia writing condition \((M = 4.25, SD = .82)\) scored significantly higher on felt nostalgia than did their romantic neutral counterparts \((M = 3.34, SD = 1.03)\), \(F(1,172) = 42.09, p < .001, \eta^2 = .197, 95\% CI [.100,.296].\)

In order to assess the differences in reparative intentions between those in the romantic nostalgia condition to those of the romantic neutral condition, each reparative intention was also analyzed using a one-way ANOVA (see Table 4). Contrary to the hypothesis, those in the romantic nostalgia condition did not score significantly higher on willingness to sacrifice than did those in the romantic neutral condition. Moreover, regarding the conflict compromise intention, those in the romantic nostalgia condition also did not score significantly higher than those in the romantic neutral condition.

However, those in the romantic nostalgia condition did score significantly higher on overall willingness to accommodate than those in the romantic neutral condition. To further test which accommodative behaviors were greater among those experiencing romantic nostalgia, each accommodation factor was submitted to a one-way ANOVA (see Table 4). For the negative exit factor, those in the romantic nostalgia condition did not score significantly lower than those in the romantic neutral condition. However, for the negative neglect factor, those in the romantic nostalgia condition did score significantly lower than those in the romantic neutral condition. For both the positive accommodative behaviors, voice and loyalty, there were no significant differences between conditions.

**Discussion**

By understanding the state-level experience of nostalgia, Study 2 served as an extension to the trait-level findings of Study 1. This study provided some evidence that experiencing situational romantic nostalgia can foster intentions to repair romantic relationships, namely willingness to
accommodate. However, the effect of romantic nostalgia on both willingness to sacrifice and conflict compromise was not significant. Nevertheless, the findings taken together still provided support, albeit limited, for the importance of experiencing romantic nostalgia during relationship turmoil.
Chapter 4: General Discussion

Through a correlational study (Study 1) and a subsequent experiment (Study 2), the current project investigated the relationship reparative nature of romantic nostalgia. Study 1 supported the positive link between trait romantic nostalgia and positive relationship experiences, namely closeness and relationship satisfaction, while holding constant one’s compromise conflict style. However, the relationship between trait romantic nostalgia and commitment did not hold when holding compromise constant. This could be explained by the nature of the compromise conflict style as a means to maintain the relationship and allow it to continue to last (Zacchilli et al., 2009). This desire for a relationship to last for a long time (i.e. “long-term orientation”) has been distinguished as a component of the commitment construct (Arriaga & Agnew, 2001; Rusbult et al., 1998). Although preliminary research has shown romantic nostalgia to foster relationship commitment (Evans & Fetterman, 2019), consistent research on nostalgia as a whole has consistently supported its utility as a catalyst to increasing social connectedness, a construct similar to relationship closeness. Moreover, as the link between compromise and trait romantic nostalgia was not significant, these two constructs on their own may be either linked to different positive relationship experiences or linked to similar relationship experiences but to different extents. However, this is still merely speculation and deserves further empirical investigation.

Study 2 tested state romantic nostalgia’s ability to induce reparative intentions in the context of relationship turmoil. In line with this study’s hypothesis, remembering a romantic nostalgic experience (compared to a mundane romantic experience) led to increased willingness to accommodate and specifically, decreased neglect. However, experiencing romantic nostalgia did not facilitate increased willingness to sacrifice nor did it facilitate greater conflict compromise,
which both contradicted the hypothesis of Study 2. Several aspects of this study’s design could account for this lack in statistical significance, which are discussed in the following section.

However, one cannot count out the possibility that experiencing state romantic nostalgia simply serves limited relationship reparative utility. The findings of Study 2 in which state romantic nostalgia failed to facilitate state conflict compromise are consistent with those of Study 1, in which trait romantic nostalgia was not positively associated with the conflict compromise style. This could be additional support for the notion that these two constructs might benefit romantic relationships in slightly different ways. Regarding willingness to sacrifice, one explanation for the insignificant difference between the nostalgia and neutral conditions could be the very nature of the willingness to sacrifice measure. Of a possible maximum score of seven on this scale, participants’ average score was a 5.41, which suggests a negative skew within the distribution of these data. Participants seem to be less inclined to admit they are not willing to sacrifice for their romantic partners when experiencing conflict. Again, the explanations for why state romantic nostalgia did not increase these two dependent variables are merely postulates, which should be addressed with further empirical scrutiny.

Regardless of the limited significance of the project’s findings, the project as a whole, nevertheless, helps add to the growing autobiographical memory, nostalgia, and relationship research literatures. Until now, the research regarding autobiographical memories (relationship-defining memories specifically) and nostalgia occurred in parallel. By incorporating the relationship turmoil research, this project, therefore, allows these three lines of research to intersect. Moreover, the findings of both studies provide initial evidence of the reparative benefits romantic nostalgia can serve when partners experience turmoil.
Theoretical and Practical Implications

The findings of these two studies contribute to the growing romantic relationship literature, and in turn, provide a more comprehensive understanding of the ways in which individuals can improve their close relationships during even their most stressful and trying moments. Research has already investigated another psychological process, mindfulness, as a contributor to managing the stress of romantic relationships and aiding in relationship repair (Barnes, Brown, Krusemark, Campbell, & Bogge, 2007). Consequently, these two theoretical and empirical domains may intersect and provide a comprehensive understanding of how individual psychological processes can facilitate reparative action within a social/relationship-specific context. This project, therefore, continues this line of research and serves as a catalyst for further research investigating psychological components that may aid in relationship repair.

Because of the overall negative nature of relationship turmoil, individuals experiencing turmoil might be the most to benefit from the nostalgia experience. Only very recently have counseling and therapy researchers begun to understand nostalgia’s importance (Mallory et al., 2018). The current project provides some initial empirical evidence of romantic nostalgia’s reparative function. By furthering this investigation through future research and elaborating on this empirical evidence, relationship and marital counselors would be able to incorporate nostalgia as a tool to stimulate relationship repair in their own practices. This would especially be useful if the turmoil experienced by one or both romantic partners is particularly debilitating. By building on these findings, nostalgia and relationship researchers alike can help foster a new means of approaching relationship conflict in a therapeutic setting.
Additional Considerations and Future Directions

The current project is an initial step in systematically understanding the impact romantic nostalgia can have on intentions and efficacy to repair relationships during times of turmoil or conflict. Given that the findings of the project as a whole provide mixed evidence of nostalgia’s beneficial role in relationship repair, any inferences that can be made should be taken in the context of the nature of both studies. Moreover, several aspects of the current project must also be taken into consideration, which should then be addressed in future research to create a more comprehensive understanding of nostalgia’s reparative benefits.

Sampling considerations

First, these findings should not be interpreted without consideration of both studies’ sample characteristics. The use of samples recruited through MTurk comes with its own unique set of limitations. Recently, researchers who utilize this particular crowdsourcing sample have come across the issue of participants effectively dodging recruitment requirements researchers set within their MTurk studies (Dennis, Goodson, & Pearson, 2019). Specifically, through the use of virtual private servers (VPS), participants are able to get around the requirement that participants must be located within the United States (Dennis et al., 2019). This issue was particularly problematic for the second study in which participants were required to provide two written essays. For these writing prompts, several participants provided essays that were not coherently written. In other words, they simply wrote words related to the prompt but taken together made no logical sense, a clear indication that these participants were unfamiliar with the English language. This finding mirrors that of Dennis et al. (2019) who ruled out the likelihood that these responses were due to the use of “bots,” another growing concern among MTurk users (Stokel-Walker, 2018). Additionally, several participants simply copy-and-pasted essays from online sources (e.g. articles
and blog posts); however, this is not necessarily an issue of participants dodging recruitment requirements as it is an issue of participants not following instructions.

Fortunately for Study 2, screening and removing bad responses was possible by carefully reading each participant’s writing prompts, and consequently removing responses that met the issues listed above. However, this particular screening procedure is not bulletproof, as there may have been responses that are deemed legitimate on the surface, but may have still been the work of fraudulent respondents. Moreover, I was unable to adequately screen and remove poor responses from Study 1 as each measure only included multiple-choice responses.

Researchers should not disregard the use of other crowdsourcing sites that may be less prone to the issues MTurk has suffered over the last year. Crowdsourcing platforms that are specifically designed for conducting academic or business-related research may be less prone to employing participants who provide low-quality responses. Additionally, these platforms may provide additional safeguards that more effectively prevent the use of “bots” or VPS. Therefore, platforms such as Prolific should be explored furthered as a potential alternative to MTurk.

As a whole, experiments and correlational studies conducted via online survey platforms are prone to distractions, and it is impossible to know with absolute certainty the nature of these distractions for any single participant. However, collecting data from participants in a controlled laboratory setting circumvents this issue and facilitates the effectiveness of experimental manipulations. That being said, future studies—especially ones that employ experimental designs—would benefit more from utilizing the traditional university student samples.

**Design considerations**

Both the variables measured within this project as well as those not measured need further scrutiny when considering the advancement of research within this domain. In regards specifically
to Study 1, not only were there high positive correlations between the compromise conflict style and the positive relationship experiences (closeness, commitment, and relationship satisfaction), but each of these three experiences were highly correlated with each other. Although the relationship literature has provided an abundance of support for the distinction between these three related constructs (Berscheid, Snyder, & Omoto, 1989; Rusbult, 1983), future relationship research would benefit from an extended analysis of the true nature of the relationship among these positive relationship experiences. This understanding would then help shape future analyses regarding these experiences as either correlates with or outcome variables from romantic nostalgia.

In addition to this projects measured variables, several other variables not included in either study should also be taken into consideration for future research. Specifically, relationship characteristics should further be investigated as potential covariates in future analyses. Characteristics such as relationship length and status may contribute to one’s experience of nostalgia relative to another. For example, if a participant has been married for several years, this person may have more nostalgic experiences to re-live in order to feel nostalgic than someone who has only been dating for a month. Moreover, when specifically investigating relationship conflict as a context in which romantic nostalgia can flourish, it would be important to understand if participants are already currently seeking marriage or relationship therapy for currently experienced relationship turmoil. This may then influence if and how these participants use romantic nostalgia as a reparative tool. Along this line of assessing aspects of relationship turmoil, when describing a relationship conflict or turmoil experience, one’s perception of fault may also contribute to his or her affective or arousal experience. If a participant firmly believes that he or she is the victim, this person may be less inclined to restore the relationship than someone who feels at fault for the current turmoil. Therefore, future studies investigating both the experience of
romantic nostalgia and relationship turmoil should control for these variables when executing their analyses.

Because the current project simply simulates relationship turmoil in the form of a writing task, this stimulus may not have been an effective method of inducing a turmoil context. This is substantiated by the valence and arousal findings, such that the mean scores of both of these measures were just under the moderate response options. Moreover, it is unclear how well this stimulus translates to real-world everyday conflict.

Future research would benefit from a more generalizable conflict context, in which conflict, romantic nostalgia, and intentions to repair the conflict are assessed when the conflict itself occurs. For example, when partners decide to engage in relationship or marital counseling, they frequently seek this therapeutic help when they are experiencing turmoil. In other words, the context of relationship conflict is not only already salient to both partners, but the nature of the context is strong enough that it provides a real threat to their relationships. When simply writing about a recent relationship conflict or irritation, this negative experience becomes briefly salient, but may not be a strong enough stimulus to evoke negative affect and an overall negative appraisal of the relationship. Participants may otherwise be completely happy and satisfied in their relationships, which would hinder the effectiveness of a brief conflict writing task designed to instantaneously induce relationship dissatisfaction. Therefore, it would be beneficial to test the potential benefit of romantic nostalgia within a more naturalistic conflict context. As alluded to, this could be done with the help of counselors who help partners experiencing conflict. As such, further projects would benefit by using dyadic studies that would investigate how partners within a relationship interact with one another following a nostalgic experience.
Much of the nostalgia literature has investigated the immediate effects of state nostalgia within a laboratory setting (Sedikides et al., 2015). However, it is unclear as to how long the positive benefits of nostalgia last after re-living nostalgic experiences. Especially if nostalgia is intended to enhance reparative intentions, it would be necessary to know if the effect of nostalgia lasts long enough for the intentions to lead to reparative behaviors. If nostalgia’s effects are immediate and not long-lasting, it would then be important to know how often people need to re-live relationship defining memories in order to facilitate relationship repair.

Additionally, the primary purpose for this project has been to explore how romantic nostalgia during relationship turmoil can facilitate reparative intentions. This assumes that these intentions then lead to relationship reparative behaviors. However, this is beyond the scope of this thesis. If nostalgia does, in fact, enhance intentions to improve the relationship, it would then be necessary to understand how these intentions translate to the very behaviors they theoretically lead to. This issue as well as that of the longevity of nostalgia’s effects could be addressed using a longitudinal design. First, this design would allow researchers to understand if experiencing nostalgia at one time point translates to positive attitudes toward the relationship, and consequently, reparative intentions at a later time point. Second, this design would then permit researchers to assess if and how participants engaged in reparative action following a nostalgic experience during relationship turmoil.

Although each of the raised issues could be addressed by incorporating more dyadic in-vivo and longitudinal methods, they could also be addressed in a more everyday context. Therefore, research should make use of daily diary methods—also known as experience-sampling methods (Larson & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014) or real-time data capture studies (Nehrkorn-Bailey, Reardon, & Patrick, 2018)—to assess the effects romantic nostalgia on reparative intentions on
days in which people experience relationship turmoil. This method along with dyadic and longitudinal designs would then further the validity of the current project’s findings and contribute to the overall understanding of nostalgia as a means to facilitate relationship repair.

**Conclusion**

This project attempted to expand on the research of three psychological domains: autobiographical memories, nostalgia, and relationship turmoil. Although prior research on both autobiographical memories and nostalgia has begun to explore its benefits within romantic relationships, the investigation of romantic nostalgia’s reparative function during negative experiences has been essentially unexplored. This work furthers this directional shift from a generic understanding of nostalgia’s benefits to an understanding of the impact of this phenomenon on one of the closest forms of interpersonal relationships.
References


Table 1: Sample Characteristics for Study 1 ($N = 245$)

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*Note*: Participants were given the option to select any and all ethnicity/race options with which they identify. Since the sums of the frequencies are greater than the sample sizes of each group, percentages are omitted.
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<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
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<th>3.</th>
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*p < .05, ***p < .001
Table 3: Sample Characteristics for Study 2 for Entire Sample and by Experimental Condition

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<th>Neutral Condition (n = 85)</th>
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<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
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<td>91.01</td>
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*Note 1:* Relationship length is measured in months.

*Note 2:* Participants were given the option to select any and all ethnicity/race options with which they identify. Since the sums of the frequencies are greater than the sample sizes of each group, percentages are omitted.
Table 4: Main Effects of Condition on Reparative Intentions in Study 2

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<th>Reparative Intention</th>
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<td>Nostalgia</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
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<td>1. Sacrifice</td>
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<td>3. Accommodate</td>
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<td>6.66(1.16)</td>
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<td>b. Neglect</td>
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<td>3.47(1.80)</td>
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<td>c. Voice</td>
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<td>d. Loyalty</td>
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<td>5.71(1.50)</td>
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*p < .05
Appendix A: Sociodemographic Questionnaire

How old are you?
What is your gender?
  o Male
  o Female
  o Other (please specify) ____________

How would you describe your status with regard to close romantic relationships?*
  o Not in a romantic relationship (i.e. single)
  o Dating multiple people
  o Dating someone casually
  o In a committed relationship

How would you describe the status of your committed romantic relationship?
  o Dating (not married or engaged), not living together
  o Dating (not married or engaged), living together
  o Engaged, not living together
  o Engaged, living together
  o Married, not living together
  o Married, living together

How long have you been in a romantic relationship? (Please indicate the duration in months and years. If you have been in this relationship for less than a year, please enter "0" in the "Years" text box and enter the number of months in the “Months” box. If you’ve been in this relationship for less than a month, please enter “0” into the “Months” text box.)

    Years ____________________
Months

Weeks

Are you currently in a same-sex romantic relationship?

○ Yes

○ No

Please indicate the ethnic or national origin group(s) to which you belong:

☐ Mexican National

☐ Mexican American

☐ Other Hispanic/Latin ethnic group (please specify)____________________

☐ White

☐ African American

☐ Asian American

☐ Native American

☐ Other (please specify)____________________

What is your primary language?

Please list any other languages spoken in your home.

*Participants who did not select that they are in a committed relationship were directed to the end of the study.
Appendix B: Romantic Relationship-Specific Southampton Nostalgia Scale (SNS-RR)

Instructions: This questionnaire is about nostalgia regarding your current romantic partner and/or romantic relationship. According to the Oxford Dictionary, “nostalgia” is defined as a “sentimental longing for the past.”

1. How valuable is romantic nostalgia for you?
   1 Not at all          2 3 4 5 6          7 Very much
2. How important is it for you to bring to mind nostalgic experiences about your current romantic partner or relationship?
   1 Not at all          2 3 4 5 6          7 Very much
3. How significant is it for you to feel nostalgic about your romantic partner and/or romantic relationship?
   1 Not at all          2 3 4 5 6          7 Very much
4. How prone are you to feeling nostalgic about your romantic partner and/or romantic relationship?
   1 Not at all          2 3 4 5 6          7 Very much
5. How often do you experience nostalgia about your romantic partner and/or romantic relationship?
   1 Very rarely         2 3 4 5 6          7 Very frequently
6. Generally speaking, how often do you bring to mind nostalgic experiences about your romantic partner and/or romantic relationship?
   1 Very rarely         2 3 4 5 6          7 Very frequently
7. Specifically, how often do you bring to mind nostalgic experiences about your romantic partner and/or romantic relationship?
_____ At least once a day
_____ Three to four times a week
_____ Approximately twice a week
_____ Approximately once a week
_____ Once or twice a month
_____ Once every couple of months
_____ Once or twice a year
Appendix C: Romantic Partner Conflict Scale (RPCS) – Compromise Factor (Study 1)

Think about how you handle conflict with your romantic partner. Specifically, think about a significant conflict issue that you and your partner have disagreed about recently. Using the scale below, fill in which response is most like how you handled conflict.

- Strongly disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat disagree (3)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Somewhat agree (5)
- Agree (6)
- Strongly agree (7)

1. My partner and I collaborate to find a common ground to solve problems between us.
2. We try to collaborate so that we can reach a joint solution to conflict.
3. We collaborate to come up with the best solution for both of us when we have a problem.
4. In order to resolve conflict, we try to reach a compromise.
5. When my partner and I have conflict, we collaborate so that we are both happy with our decision.
6. The best way to resolve conflict between me and my partner is to find a middle ground.
7. Our conflicts usually end when we reach a compromise.
8. When we disagree, we work to find a solution that satisfies both of us.
9. When my partner and I disagree, we consider both sides of the argument.
10. We often resolve conflict by talking about the problem.
11. We try to find solutions that are acceptable to both of us.
12. Compromise is the best way to resolve conflict between my partner and me.

13. I try to meet my partner halfway to resolve a disagreement.

14. My partner and I negotiate to resolve our disagreements.
Appendix D: Unidimensional Relationship Closeness Scale (URCS)

Instructions: The following questions refer to your relationship with your romantic partner. Please think about your relationship with your romantic partner when responding to the following questions. Please respond to the following statements using this scale:

- Strongly disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat disagree (3)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Somewhat agree (5)
- Agree (6)
- Strongly agree (7)

1. My relationship with my romantic partner is close.
2. When we are apart, I miss my romantic partner a great deal.
3. My romantic partner and I disclose important personal things to each other.
4. My romantic partner and I have a strong connection.
5. My romantic partner and I want to spend time together.
6. My romantic partner is a priority in my life.
7. My romantic partner and I do a lot of things together.
8. When I have free time I choose to spend it alone with my romantic partner.
9. I think about my romantic partner a lot.
10. My relationship with my romantic partner is important in my life.
11. I consider my romantic partner when making important decisions.
Appendix E: Investment Model Scale – Commitment Level Facet (IMS-C)

Please respond to the following statements using this scale:

- Strongly disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat disagree (3)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Somewhat agree (5)
- Agree (6)
- Strongly agree (7)

1. I want our relationship to last for a very long time.
2. I am committed to maintaining my relationship with my partner.
3. I would not feel very upset if our relationship were to end in the near future. (r)
4. It is likely that I will date someone other than my partner within the next year. (r)
5. I feel very attached to our relationship—very strongly linked to my partner.
6. I want our relationship to last forever.
7. I am oriented toward the long-term future of my relationship (for example, I imagine being with my partner several years from now).

Note: “r” = Reverse-scored item.
Appendix F: Investment Model Scale – Satisfaction Level Facet (IMS-S)

Please respond to the following statements using this scale:

- Strongly disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat disagree (3)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Somewhat agree (5)
- Agree (6)
- Strongly agree (7)

1. I feel satisfied with our relationship.
2. My relationship is much better than others’ relationships.
3. My relationship is close to ideal.
4. Our relationship makes me very happy.
5. Our relationship does a good job of fulfilling my needs for intimacy, companionship, etc.
Appendix G: Relationship Turmoil Induction Task

Instructions

We want you to think of a relatively recent instance during your romantic relationship in which your romantic partner did something that you did not like, annoyed you, or made you experience negative emotions. Please think of a relatively ordinary negative event, and not a traumatic experience. This can be anything from (but not limited to) a disagreement or argument you two had, to a behavior that annoyed you or made you angry. Please think about this particular event, and immerse yourself in it. Please spend a couple of minutes thinking about the event and how it makes you feel.

Once you have thought about the negative experience and how it makes you feel and you are ready to write about it, press continue.

Using the space provided below, for the next few minutes, we would like you to write about the negative experience. Immerse yourself into this experience. Describe the experience and how it makes you feel.

*The survey will automatically move forward after 3 minutes. Please continue writing for the entire 3 minutes.*
Appendix H: Self-Assessment Manikin (SAM)

Valence

Using the scale and pictures above, which number corresponds with how you feel right now emotionally?

Arousal

Using the scale and pictures above, which number corresponds with the amount of arousal you feel right now?
Appendix I: Nostalgia Induction Task

General Instructions

In this study, we are interested in how you think about events in your life. First, you will write about an event involving your romantic partner or romantic relationship. Then, you will complete a short questionnaire. When writing about the event in your life, we ask you to write for 3 minutes. This is very important: Please note that, if you just repeat words over and over, copy and paste information, or do not follow the directions of the writing prompt, your hit will be rejected. On the next page, you will receive more information about the writing task.

Nostalgia Instructions

According to the Oxford Dictionary, ‘nostalgia’ is defined as a ‘sentimental longing for the past. Please think of a nostalgic event in your life involving your relationship with your romantic partner. That is, try to think of the most nostalgic past event involving your romantic partner or romantic relationship. Bring this nostalgic experience to mind and immerse yourself in it. Please spend a couple of minutes thinking about how it makes you feel.

Once you have thought about the nostalgic event that involves your romantic partner or romantic relationship and how the event makes you feel, press continue.

Using the space provided below, we would like you to write about the nostalgic event involving your romantic partner or romantic relationship. Immerse yourself into this nostalgic experience. Describe the experience and how it makes you feel.

The survey will automatically move forward after 3 minutes. Please continue writing for the entire 3 minutes.
Neutral Instructions

Please think of an ordinary event in your life involving your relationship with your romantic partner. That is, try to think of a past event that is ordinary, normal, and every day that involves your romantic partner or romantic relationship. Bring this ordinary experience to mind and immerse yourself in it. Please spend a couple of minutes thinking about how it makes you feel.

Once you have thought about the ordinary event that involves your romantic partner or romantic relationship and how the event makes you feel, press continue.

Using the space provided below, we would like you to write about the ordinary event involving your romantic partner or romantic relationship. Immerse yourself into this ordinary experience. Describe the experience and how it makes you feel.

The survey will automatically move forward after 3 minutes. Please continue writing for the entire 3 minutes.
Appendix J: Willingness to Sacrifice Scale

Instructions: Based on the negative relationship experience you described earlier, to what extent does each statement describe your current attitudes based on the scale provided?

- Strongly disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat disagree (3)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Somewhat agree (5)
- Agree (6)
- Strongly agree (7)

1. With the negative relationship experience in mind, I would be willing to give up things that I like doing if they hurt my relationship.

2. With the negative relationship experience in mind, I would be willing to take on more responsibilities if they will help benefit my relationship.

3. With the negative relationship experience in mind, I would be willing to do things for my relationship, even if I’m not thanked for my efforts.

4. With the negative relationship experience in mind, even when it is inconvenient to me, I would be willing to do what I think is best for my relationship.

5. With the negative relationship experience in mind, I would be willing to go out of my way to do what is best for my relationship.
Appendix K: Willingness to Accommodate Scale

Willingness to Accommodate Scale

Please read each of the following statements concerning the manner in which you would respond to the negative relationship experience you described earlier. Use the following scale provided to rate each item.

- I would never do this (1)
- (2)
- I would seldom do this (3)
- (4)
- I would sometimes do this (5)
- (6)
- I would frequently do this (7)
- (8)
- I would constantly do this (9)

1. With the negative relationship experience in mind, I would threaten to leave my romantic partner. (E)

2. With the negative relationship experience in mind, I would try to resolve the situation and improve conditions. (V)

3. With the negative relationship experience in mind, I would forgive my partner and forget about it. (L)

4. With the negative relationship experience in mind, I would avoid dealing with the situation. (N)
5. With the negative relationship experience in mind, I would feel so angry I want to walk right out the door. (E)

6. With the negative relationship experience in mind, I would calmly discuss things with my romantic partner. (V)

7. With the negative relationship experience in mind, I would patiently wait for things to improve. (L)

8. With the negative relationship experience in mind, I would sulk and not confront the issue. (N)

9. With the negative relationship experience in mind, I would do something equally unpleasant in return. (E)

10. With the negative relationship experience in mind, I would try to patch things up and solve the problem. (V)

11. With the negative relationship experience in mind, I would hang in there and wait for my romantic partner’s mood to change – these times pass. (L)

12. With the negative relationship experience in mind, I would ignore the whole thing. (N)

13. With the negative relationship experience in mind, I would do things to drive my partner away. (E)

14. With the negative relationship experience in mind, I would spend less time with my romantic partner. (N)

15. With the negative relationship experience in mind, I would talk to my partner about what’s going on, trying to work out a solution. (V)

16. With the negative relationship experience in mind, I would give my romantic partner the benefit of the doubt and forget about it. (L)

Note: E = Exit; V = Voice; L = Loyalty; N = Neglect
Appendix L: Romantic Partner Conflict Scale (RPCS) – Compromise Factor (Study 2)

Keeping in mind the negative relationship experience you wrote about, think about how you would handle this conflict with your romantic partner if it happened again. Using the scale below, fill in which response is most like how you would handle this conflict if it happened again.

- Strongly disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat disagree (3)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Somewhat agree (5)
- Agree (6)
- Strongly agree (7)

1. I would collaborate to find a common ground to solve this problem between us.
2. I would try to collaborate so that we can reach a joint solution to the conflict.
3. I would collaborate to come up with the best solution for both of us.
4. In order to resolve this conflict, I would try to reach a compromise.
5. During this conflict, I would collaborate so that we are both happy with our decision.
6. The best way to resolve this conflict between me and my partner would be to find a middle ground.
7. This conflict would end when we reach a compromise.
8. During this disagreement, I would work to find a solution that satisfies both of us.
9. During this disagreement, I would consider both sides of the argument.
10. I would resolve this conflict by talking about the problem.
11. I would try to find a solution that is acceptable to both of us.
12. Compromise would be the best way to resolve this conflict between my partner and me.

13. I would try to meet my partner halfway to resolve this disagreement.

14. I would negotiate to resolve this disagreement.
Vita

Nicholas D. Evans is a PhD student in the Social, Cognitive, Neurosciences program at the University of Texas at El Paso. He received a Bachelor of Science (magna cum laude) with a major in Psychology from Aquinas College in 2016. His undergraduate research experiences working alongside at Victor Karandashev, Ph.D. involved a psychometric investigation of a newly developed a scale assessing different forms of relationship-specific feelings.

His research interests primarily involve the emotional and behavioral experiences within romantic relationships. Under the guidance of Adam K. Fetterman, Ph.D., he is interested in expanding the literature on the nostalgia experience to the romantic relationship domain. Moreover, he is interested in understanding how using romantic metaphors serve relationship benefits. He is expected to complete his Doctor of Philosophy in Psychology in May 2022.

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