

Investigating Gratitude and Nostalgia: A Research Proposal Examining the Chain Mediating Roles of Self-Compassion and Meaning in Life

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Abstract: Nostalgia is a multifaceted, ego-driven social emotion that emerges during reflections on the past and encourages prosocial behaviors. Gratitude is regarded as both a temperament and a moral sentiment aimed at an elevated state of acknowledgment, playing a significant role in fostering positive psychological outcomes. Besides, self-compassion is characterised by three fundamental elements: mindfulness, common humanity, and self-kindness, the act of treating oneself with kindness and empathy when confronted with difficulties, which can help alleviate emotional distress and promote emotional recovery, which means in life is defined as an individual's subjective perception that their life possesses coherence, purposefulness, and meaningfulness. This research proposal will provide a feasibility programme for future formal studies. Study 1 intends to recruit 160 participants online through a questionnaire, while Study 2 plans for online recruitment of 210 participants, employing an experimental approach to manipulate nostalgia versus non-nostalgia conditions. The results will likely indicate a positive relationship between nostalgia and gratitude, with self-compassion and meaning in life acting as chain mediators in explaining how nostalgia promotes gratitude. In other words, nostalgia can facilitate the experience of gratitude through a chain of mediating factors, including self-compassion and meaning in life.

Keywords: Nostalgia, Self-compassion, Meaning in life, Gratitude

1. Introduction

1.1. Nostalgia

According to The New Oxford Dictionary of English, nostalgia is "a sentimental longing for, or remembrance of, the past" and is a self-relevant emotion [1]. This emotion is typically expressed in narrative form and pertains to significant occasions in a person's life, such as holidays, marriages, or graduations [2][3]. As such, nostalgia serves a number of self-related purposes: it elicits favourable traits in oneself [4], enhances self-esteem [5], and fosters a more optimistic outlook on one's future [6].

1.2. Gratitude

Gratitude is regarded as a mindset and a moral emotion focused on a deeper understanding [7]. It has been conceptualised as an emotion of gratitude and delight elicited when bestowing a benefit in the form of a tangible item on a particular person or as a fleeting instance of tranquil euphoria elicited by the splendour of nature [8]. Gratitude significantly contributes to attaining positive psychological outcomes, including indicators of psychological health and subjective well-being [9].

Since nostalgia can have a positive impact through the recollection of past events and gratitude is also a feeling of appreciation for specific occurrences in life that further enhance aspects of life's meaning [7], they could be related. These studies suggest that evoking nostalgia may increase gratitude.

1.3. Self-compassion

Self-compassion is characterized by the following three elements: mindfulness, which involves keeping a balanced viewpoint even though facing difficulties; common humanity, recognizing that experiencing difficulties is a common human experience; and self-kindness, the practice of approaching one's own self-reflection with caution and compassion when facing challenges [10]. Self-compassion equips individuals with essential self-regulatory resources that enable them to engage in significant health behaviors [11]. As an emotional regulator, self-compassion can help alleviate emotional distress and promote emotional recovery.

Self-compassion has been associated with an increased perception of meaning in life across various domains [12]. Maintaining a meaningful life is closely tied to fundamental desires for self-respect and a sense of belonging [13]. By promoting feelings of love and connection and enhancing one's self-image, self-compassion attends to these fundamental requirements. [10]. Significantly, the cultivation of self-compassion not only enhances one's self-relationship but also influences interpersonal connections. [14]. Treating oneself with compassion can lead to more helpful behaviour towards others [15], and successful social connections are strongly associated with leading a meaningful life [13].

Gratitude, on the other hand, entails appreciation and thankfulness for others and is often closely linked to social relationships and well-being. While they are frequently considered distinct emotions, they may interact with regard to the regulation of emotion, social connections, and the state of psychological health. The complexities of these relationships are contingent upon the affective experiences of the individual, the context of society, and specific circumstances. Consequently, the purpose of this study is to investigate the correlation between self-compassion and gratitude to better understand how they interact in various domains within the field of psychology, particularly in the contexts of emotion regulation and social interactions.

1.4. Meaning in Life

Nostalgia has been shown to provide psychological benefits [1], with one such benefit being increased meaning in life (MIL). MIL is often described as the personal assessment of an individual regarding the extent to which their existence exhibits predictability, order, orientation, or purpose (purposefulness), and value or worth (meaningfulness) [16]. Experiments conducted in laboratory and field settings consistently demonstrate that nostalgia increases MIL [17].

Fear management theory suggests that humans seek lasting meaning in life due to their awareness of the death dilemma. It proposes that nostalgia acts as a psychological safeguard against the absolute, unavoidable physical peril of annihilation, alleviating meaning anxiety and enhancing one's sense of meaning in life [18]. Furthermore, Hepper and his partners employed a prototype approach to examine the influence of nostalgia on the formation of life's identity [17]. By

employing prototypes, they discovered that people of varying ages experienced an elevated sense of meaning when reflecting on an event that embodied the central (rather than ancillary) attributes of nostalgia.

This proposal aims to investigate relationships among nostalgia, self-compassion, meaning in life, and gratitude. The proposal hypothesises a positive correlation between nostalgia and gratitude and that meaning in life and self-compassion mediate these emotions. The research seeks to provide deeper insights into the interaction of these emotions and psychological states, further enhancing our understanding of individual emotional experiences and mental health domains. Doing so contributes to a more comprehensive comprehension of the complexity and profound significance of human emotional experiences.

2. Study 1

2.1. Method

2.1.1. Participants

A power analysis was conducted a priori utilising G*Power [18]. In order to achieve power $(1 - \beta) = 0.95$, it will be necessary for 110 participants to identify moderate correlations with $\rho = 0.35$, utilising a Type-I error $\alpha = 0.05$ (two-tailed). Due to the potential for attrition and insufficient data that are inherent in online research [19], this study will collect data from a larger participant pool of 150.

2.1.2. Procedure and materials

Once informed consent has been obtained, participants will be required to disclose demographic details such as age, gender, and nationality. Subsequently, they will complete the nostalgia and gratitude measures presented randomly. Nostalgia will be assessed using The Southampton Nostalgia Questionnaire (Southampton Nostalgia Scale: SNS) [20], which involves five questions rated on a 7-point Likert scale. The scale begins with the statement, "Nostalgia is a sentimental longing for the past." Proceeded by items that evaluate nostalgic tendencies (e.g., 'How prone are you to feeling nostalgic?'; 1 = not at all, 7 = very much). Routledge and colleagues (2008) have provided evidence supporting the reliability and construct validity of the SNS [20].

Gratitude will be assessed using The Gratitude Survey-Six Item Form (GQ-6) [21]. This survey measures a disposition to perceive and value the favourable aspects of living. The items will be evaluated by participants using a seven-point Likert scale, where 7 indicates strong agreement and 1 indicates strong disagreement. For instance, one of the items is 'I am grateful to a wide variety of people'. A cumulative score will be derived from all items, with higher scores signifying increased gratitude. Positive associations with life satisfaction, positive affect, forgiveness, and empathy, and negative associations with vengeance and negative affect, indicate the construct validity of the GQ-6 [22].

2.2. Data collection and analysis

SPSS 22.0 and AMOS 22.0 will be applied to analyse and process the statistics. The main focus is on the standard method bias in the data and the correlation between the two variants.

3. Study 2

3.1. Method

3.1.1. Participants

In order to identify indirect effects via chain mediators, 158 participants will be needed to assess moderate correlations ($r = 0.35$) with a power of $(1 - \beta) = 0.90$. This estimation is based on 1000 replications and a Type-I error of $\alpha = 0.05$ (two-tailed). Due to the possibility of attenuations related to online research, the sample size was exceeded by the research staff.

3.1.2. Procedure and materials

Following the acquisition of informed consent, participants should furnish statistics encompassing their age, gender, and nationality. Participants will be allocated at random to the experimental or control group. Unlike the control group, the experimental group will be engaged in a writing task specifically designed to elicit feelings of nostalgia. Subsequently, participants will complete measures related to self-compassion, meaning in life, and gratitude. Self-compassion will be measured using the short form of The Self-Compassion Scale (SCS) [23], involving 12 items. For example, one item is 'I'm intolerant and impatient towards those aspects of my personality that I don't like' (reverse scored). Responses will be gained for each item using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Rarely) to 5 (Almost Always). To calculate the overall self-compassion score, negatively worded items will be reverse-scored, and the resulting sum will be applied to all 12 items. A higher score on the scale of 12 to 60 represents an individual's degree of self-compassion. In another study, the correlation between this scale and the full scale was excellent ($r = .97$) [23].

Besides, meaning in life will be measured using The Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ), consisting of two five-item subscales: the presence of meaning in life and the search for meaning. The presence subscale assesses the degree to which individuals attribute meaning to their lives (e.g., "I understand my life's meaning" and "My life has no clear purpose") [24]. The search subscale assesses the degree to which participants are proactively in pursuit of meaning or a goal in their own lives. (e.g., "I am searching for meaning in my life" and "I am looking for something that makes my life feel meaningful"). All items are rated from 1 (Absolutely Untrue) to 7 (Absolutely True). Upon completion, the subjects will be given a small gift, and the purpose of the study will be explained.

3.2. Statistics and analyses

Data will be processed and analysed through SPSS 22.0. Mediating effects will be tested using the Process programme.

4. Conclusion

The aim of this research is to examine the correlation between nostalgia and gratitude while also considering the chain mediating effects of self-compassion and the sense of meaning in life. We formulated two hypotheses: first, there is a positive correlation between nostalgia and gratitude emotions (Hypothesis 1, Experiment 1); second, meaning in life and self-compassion act as chain mediating factors in the connection between nostalgia and gratitude (Hypothesis 2, Experiment 2). To test these hypotheses, this research proposal plans to induce nostalgia through event recall and employ an inter-subject design.

4.1. Nostalgia and Gratitude

We hypothesize a positive correlation between nostalgia and feelings of gratitude. Prior studies on nostalgia and prosocial behavior have helped to inform our hypothesis. This aligns with previous studies indicating that individuals in the nostalgia group tend to be more inclined to donate money to strangers [25]. While there is a limited focus on the direct relationship between nostalgia and gratitude, investigating gratitude, a positive and universally recognized prosocial behavior, holds research value.

4.2. Chain mediation of self-compassion and meaning in life

As chain mediators of the positive correlation between nostalgia and gratitude, self-compassion and meaning in life are postulated to influence this relationship. Specifically, increased levels of nostalgia are expected to relate to higher self-compassion, which, in turn, fosters an enhanced sense of meaning in one's life. This heightened sense of meaning is then expected to increase gratitude or gratitude-related activities. Some scholars have postulated that nostalgic events, often called 'culture-life-scripts', provide a platform for individuals to experience a sense of meaning in their lives [26]. Additionally, nostalgia aligns with the belief that life is meaningful [27]. Given that increased degrees of self-compassion have been linked to a greater sense of meaning in life [28], this study innovatively employs self-compassion and meaning in life as consecutive mediators with regard to the relation between nostalgia and gratitude.

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