


RESEARCH ARTICLE

Nostalgia for America's past can buffer collective guilt

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Abstract

This research examined when, and for whom, American collective nostalgia can relieve feelings of collective guilt. In the Pilot Study, path analyses revealed that national glorification is associated with collective nostalgia, and collective nostalgia is associated with lower collective guilt. Our experimental studies test the role of these variables in determining responses to the elevated salience of past ingroup harm doing. Collective nostalgia was associated with lower collective guilt especially after reminders of America's harm doing in Study 1. In Study 2 we predicted and showed that reminders of American harm doing would evoke spontaneous collective nostalgia for participants high in national glorification. The remaining studies tested the hypothesis that collective nostalgia serves to buffer collective guilt. Collective guilt was lower after reminders of past harm doing for participants who engaged in collective nostalgia (Study 3), and this was especially pronounced for participants high in national glorification (Study 4).

'Nostalgia, with its wistful memories, is essentially history without guilt'—Kammen (1991, p. 688)

Longing for past society is a recurrent theme in American culture. Magazines strategically utilize the black and white image to induce nostalgia (e.g., *Time Magazine*; Grainge, 1999, 2000); the television series *Mad Men* capitalized on the nostalgia for the style of 1960s America (Tudor, 2012); and the pseudo-vintage radio show *A Prairie Home Companion* generated a longing for America's mythical good old days by depicting life in Lake Wobegone, a small (fictional) town referred to as "the one time forgot and the decades cannot improve" (Larson & Oravec, 1987; Wilbers, 1989). Similar sentiments appear in business and politics: Athletic clubs market their team's past (Petchesky, 2015), companies leverage nostalgia to sell products (Belk, 1988), and politicians run platforms focused on 'restoring' America to its former glory (Beinart, 2014).

Taken together, these nostalgic longings for America's past can be conceptualized as a collective emotion—a convergence of affective responding in individuals toward specific events or objects (Von Scheve & Ismer, 2013). Specifically, collective nostalgia is defined as sentimental or affectionate feelings predicated on thinking of oneself as a group member that are based on idealistic conceptions of events or features of that group's past (Wildschut, Bruder, Robertson, van Tilburg, & Sedikides, 2014). And, as with other collective emotions, the experience of collective

nostalgia is likely to have implications for social identity processes (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). We focus on the antecedents and consequences of collective nostalgia for America's past and claim that nostalgic recollections of a group's history may serve to downplay group injustices. We use correlational and experimental approaches to test this claim, focusing specifically on the relation between collective nostalgia and collective guilt, another collective emotion that is tied to recognizing injustices perpetrated by one's ingroup.

Collective Guilt

Collective guilt refers to group members feeling guilty about the group's harm to others (Ferguson & Branscombe, 2014; Wohl, Branscombe, & Klar, 2006). People can feel collective guilt about their group's actions even if they were not personally involved; for instance, individuals might experience collective guilt when reminded of historical atrocities committed at the hands of fellow ingroup members from previous generations (e.g., the Dutch colonization of Indonesia; Doosje, Branscombe, Spears, & Manstead, 1998). Collective guilt plays an essential role in facilitating intergroup reconciliation and forgiveness (Van Tongeren, Burnette, O'Boyle, Worthington, & Forsyth, 2014), as it predicts willingness to make reparations to a harmed outgroup (e.g., Doosje, Branscombe, Spears, & Manstead, 2006).

Nevertheless, people are motivated to evade guilty feelings, because they threaten the ingroup's moral

value and therefore are experienced as negative (Sullivan, Landau, Branscombe, Rothschild, & Cronin, 2013). People can evade feeling collective guilt for a potentially blameworthy ingroup action in various ways. Group members are unlikely to feel collective guilt when they believe the action to be legitimate or when they feel their group was not responsible (Ferguson & Branscombe, 2014), for instance.

Feelings of guilt also depend on collective identification (Ferguson & Branscombe, 2014), although research has demonstrated diverging patterns. High identification with the group perpetrating harm can result in more (Doosje *et al.*, 2006) or less collective guilt (Branscombe, 2004; Castano & Giner-Sorolla, 2006; Doosje *et al.*, 1998; Myers, Hewstone, & Cairns, 2009). To explain these conflicting results, Roccas, Klar, and Liviatan (2006) distinguished between the two modes of national identification *glorification* and *attachment*. Glorification refers to perceiving the ingroup as superior to other groups and valuing loyalty to the group, while attachment is felt as an emotional connection to the group, resulting in a high degree of overlap between the individual self-concept and the group. Belief in the superiority of the group can lead people to perceive less injustice when reminded of group harm doing, and motivate people to preserve the image of the group in the face of threats. For example, Israeli participants' self-reported glorification was correlated with lower guilt associated with Israel's treatment of Palestinians, whereas attachment predicted higher guilt (Roccas *et al.*, 2006). The effect of glorification on lower guilt was mediated by the extent to which participants agreed with statements exonerating the group from wrongdoing (e.g., "In my opinion, the Arabs brought the event upon themselves").

It stands that high glorifiers are well poised to defend against threats to the group's moral standing. Besides those mentioned above, what other resources do high glorifiers draw upon to preserve the status of their group? We propose that collective nostalgia is a potential candidate: Nostalgia for the ingroup's past is a collective emotion that can regulate feelings of guilt that arise when reminded of group harm doing by preserving an image of the group as morally superior.

Collective Nostalgia and Collective Guilt

Collective nostalgia is an emotion focusing on events directly experienced with ingroup members (Wildschut *et al.*, 2014), or those remembered through collective history (see Havlena & Holak, 1996). People engaging in this type of nostalgia will often focus on well-known, and sometimes romanticized, historical events, people, or time periods (e.g., the Roaring 20s, the Kennedy family; Havlena & Holak, 1996; Wilson, 2005). Whereas personal nostalgia is focused on "the way *I* was" (Baldwin, Biernat, & Landau, 2015), collective nostalgia is focused on "the way *we* were" (Wildschut *et al.*, 2014), or even more abstractly on "the way *it* was"

(Baker & Kennedy, 1994; Havlena & Holak, 1996; Marchegiani & Phau, 2010).

Qualitative research suggests that collective nostalgia—even for very distant times—is common: College students tended to express a preference for living in past generations, if given the choice of any time in history (e.g., the 1940s; Wilson, 2005). These participants longed for the simplicity, innocence, liveliness, and morality of those times; collective nostalgia can recreate the past as a golden age by giving society a "redeemingly benign aura" (Davis, 1979, p. 14). More recent quantitative evidence supports this notion (Wildschut *et al.*, 2014), showing that collective nostalgia strengthens positive ingroup evaluations (Study 1) and motivates actions that serve to preserve and protect other ingroup members, an effect that was pronounced among participants who strongly identified with the group (Study 3).

Collective Nostalgia Reduces Collective Guilt

It follows from these findings that engaging in collective nostalgia could reduce collective guilt related to ingroup harm doing. Focusing on the redeeming and moral aspects of the group's past through nostalgia might allow people to morally disengage from acts that were perpetrated by the group (i.e., deny responsibility; Leidner, Castano, Zaiser, & Giner-Sorolla, 2010). In other words, nostalgic recollections of the group's past may serve as evidence of the group's moral standing, even in the face of evidence to the contrary.

Collective Guilt Motivates Collective Nostalgia

If collective nostalgia can serve to downplay group harm doing, it may be the case that individuals also turn to nostalgic representations of society when group identity is threatened by reminders of group harm doing. Personal nostalgia can be a response to experienced threats to the self-concept (Baldwin *et al.*, 2015; Routledge, Wildschut, Sedikides, Juhl, & Arndt, 2012; van Tilburg, Igou, & Sedikides, 2013). People may similarly turn to nostalgic representations of the group's past to preserve the group's moral standing, which in turn would buffer against collective guilt.

Connecting these ideas together, we expect that individuals who are dispositionally likely to experience collective nostalgia would show lower levels of collective guilt after a reminder of ingroup harm doing. In addition, we expect that greater feelings of collective guilt after a reminder of ingroup harm doing will be associated with a compensatory increase in collective nostalgia, with the aim of alleviating guilt.

Collective Nostalgia and Glorification

Collective nostalgia appears to be more closely connected to a collective identity associated with glorification versus attachment. National glorification involves beliefs that the nation is morally superior to outgroups, and emphasizes loyalty and obedience to the group

(Roccas et al., 2006). Collective nostalgia seems to have similar components. For instance, collective (national) nostalgia is associated with stronger ingroup identification and expression of outgroup prejudice (Smeekes, 2015). More specifically, Smeekes, Verkuyten, and Martinovic (2015) demonstrated that collective (national) nostalgia predicts less support for extending individual rights to immigrants, which was mediated by the belief that the first inhabitants of a country are entitled to it. Moreover, collective nostalgia is routinely invoked by politicians (e.g., populist right-wing leaders in Europe) to justify exclusionary action against groups that are framed as deviant from the ingroup identity (e.g., recent migrants; Mols & Jetten, 2014). Thus, collective nostalgia can both promote beliefs that elevate the superiority and exclusivity of the ingroup, as well as serve to justify actions that follow from those beliefs. We would expect collective nostalgia to be more strongly associated with glorification compared to attachment, would expect glorifiers in particular to turn to collective nostalgia in the face of group threats, and would expect collective nostalgia to be a resource for preserving the group identity for glorifiers in particular.

The Current Theoretical Model and Research

Five studies tested three related hypotheses. Initially we investigated our underlying assumptions by examining whether dispositional levels of national glorification would be positively associated with dispositional collective nostalgia, which in turn would be negatively associated with collective guilt (Pilot Study).

In Studies 1–4, we experimentally investigated how these factors would interact to determine responses to the salience of past illegitimate ingroup harm doing. Our overarching theoretical model is presented in Figure 1. First, in keeping with past social identity research, we expected that a reminder of ingroup harm doing would elevate collective guilt; however, in line with our perspective, we further hypothesized that individuals would be motivated to engage in collective nostalgia to avoid or alleviate guilt. It follows that those who are most likely to spontaneously engage in collective nostalgia will show less collective guilt after reminders of group harm doing (Study 1). Further, people

should be motivated to spontaneously engage in collective nostalgia to the extent that they feel guilt after a reminder of ingroup harm doing, an effect that should be most prominent among high glorifiers (Study 2).

Our perspective also suggests that collective nostalgia is a resource on which ingroup members draw in order to preserve the moral standing of the ingroup in the face of threat. Thus, we predict that (A) collective guilt will be lower after a reminder of ingroup harm doing if individuals have the opportunity to engage in collective nostalgia (Study 3), and (B) this effect should be especially pronounced among those high in national glorification (Study 4).

Pilot Study

In order to verify the basic assumptions underlying our theoretical model, we first explored the relations among collective nostalgia, national identification, and collective guilt. We expected collective nostalgia—but not other forms of nostalgia—to be associated with lower collective guilt, as collective nostalgia downplays negative aspects of the past and highlights the redeeming moral aspects of one's group (Davis, 1979; Stern, 1992).

We also expected the two forms of group identification, *attachment* and *glorification* (Roccas et al., 2006) to be associated with collective nostalgia. People who feel close to America should also be those who feel sentimental and affectionate feelings about America's past. Moreover, people who view America as superior to other nations or groups should be those who tend to wax nostalgic about America's past, because collective nostalgia represents the group in a morally elevated or "glorified" way (Davis, 1979; Wilson, 2005). We did not have any specific hypotheses about how attachment and glorification would be related to the other forms of nostalgia.

Finally, we aimed to replicate prior research by showing that glorification—and not attachment—is associated with lower collective guilt (Roccas et al., 2006).

Method

Participants were 102 U.S. adults (51% female, $M_{\text{age}} = 35.59$) who participated on MTurk. Participants

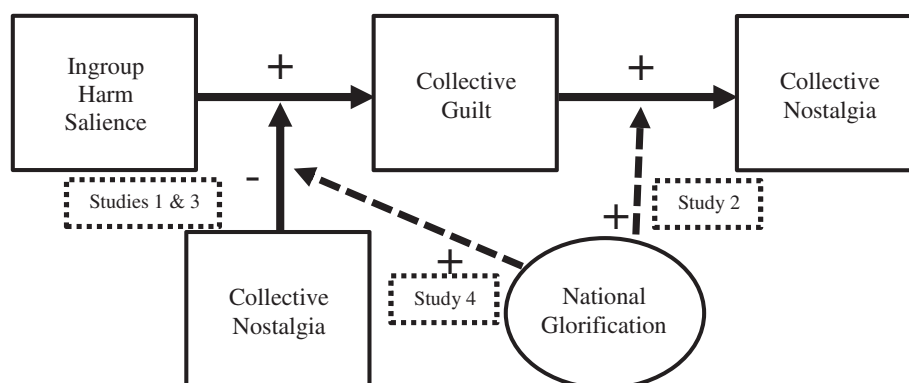


Fig. 1: Theoretical model tested in Studies 1–4

Table 1. Pilot study: Correlations among nostalgia, national identification, and collective guilt

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Personal nostalgia						
2. Popular culture nostalgia	.56**					
3. Childhood nostalgia	.51**	.58**				
4. Collective nostalgia	.36**	.45**	.49**			
5. National attachment	.36**	.37**	.38**	.52**		
6. National glorification	.18	.25*	.38**	.59**	.73**	
7. Collective guilt	.07	.05	.01	-.29*	-.22*	-.42**

** $p < .001$,

* $p < .05$.

were predominately White (85%). After agreeing to participate, participants used a 5-point scale (1 = *not at all*, 5 = *extremely*) to indicate how nostalgic they feel about four aspects of the past. Four items for each subscale assessed nostalgia for *personal experiences* ("certain vacations or trips you took;" $\alpha = .76$), *popular culture* ("certain TV shows you watched;" $\alpha = .87$), *childhood* ("the feeling of youthfulness and childhood;" $\alpha = .90$), and *society* ("the way society was;" $\alpha = .78$).¹ The *society* subscale served as our measure of collective nostalgia (see Appendix for full scale). Participants also filled out a measure of American national identification (Roccas et al., 2006). Using a 7-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*; 7 = *strongly agree*), participants responded to eight items assessing attachment to America (e.g., "I love America;" $\alpha = .92$) and eight items assessing glorification of America (e.g., "America is better than other nations in all respects;" $\alpha = .85$). Finally, we assessed collective guilt using a measure in which participants used a 7-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*) to indicate their agreement with five statements about America's harmful actions toward other groups (e.g., "I feel guilty about America's harmful actions toward other groups"; $\alpha = .94$; Branscombe, Slugoski, & Kappen, 2004).

Results and Discussion

Correlations among all the variables can be found in Table 1. Collective nostalgia was the only form of nostalgia significantly correlated with collective guilt, $r = -.29$, $p = .003$. National attachment was significantly correlated with each form of nostalgia (r s = .36–.52) and national glorification was significantly correlated with all but personal nostalgia (r s = .25–.59). Both attachment, $r = -.22$, $p = .03$ and glorification, $r = -.42$, $p < .001$, were associated with lower guilt.

¹Items were generated by the first author using exploratory and confirmatory methods. A CFA testing the appropriateness of the four-factor model (with factors correlated) showed acceptable fit, $\chi^2(98) = 167.60$, RMSEA = .061, RMSEA 95%CI = [.045, .077], SRMR = .060, CFI = .954. The four-correlated-factors model was a better fit than a variety of competing models, including all combinations of combined factors, a single factor, and a fully orthogonal four-factor model. A higher-order model fit the data equally well, suggesting that the four factors represent a higher-order construct, which we suggest is *nostalgia proneness*.

We further tested our hypotheses using path analyses, which controlled for interrelations among predictor and outcome variables.² We specified a model in which attachment and glorification were simultaneous predictors of each of the nostalgia types, and then each nostalgia type was a predictor of collective guilt. To account for collinearity, we also estimated the covariance between attachment and glorification, and the covariances among the nostalgia types (Figure 2). As expected, glorification significantly predicted higher collective nostalgia, $\beta = .45$, $z = 3.90$, $p < .001$, whereas the effect of attachment was less than half the size and not statistically significant, $\beta = .20$, $z = 1.76$, $p = .08$. Only collective nostalgia was associated with (lower) guilt, $\beta = -.44$, $z = 4.01$, $p < .001$. The bootstrapped indirect effect of glorification on lower guilt through collective nostalgia (a path \times b path) was significant, *indirect effect* = $-.25$, $SE = .10$, 95% CI [$-.49$, $-.09$].³

Lending support to our basic assumptions, the pilot data showed that national glorification, when compared to national attachment, is most strongly associated with collective nostalgia. Moreover, only collective nostalgia is associated with lower collective guilt. We probe these associations further in the following experiments, which test the theoretical model of reactions to harm salience as a function of collective nostalgia and national glorification (Figure 1).

Study 1

If dispositional collective nostalgia can keep feelings of guilt at bay, then participants chronically high in collective nostalgia should be particularly adept at avoiding guilt feelings when faced with reminders of ingroup harm doing. We tested this hypothesis in Study 1: Participants reported their collective nostalgia, were subtly reminded of America's harm doing, and then reported how guilty they felt about America's past actions. We predicted that participants high in collective nostalgia would leverage this emotion to evade guilt, but especially when harm doing was salient.

²Path analyses were conducted with the lavaan package for R (Rosseel, 2012).

³One thousand resamples were used in the bootstrapping procedure.

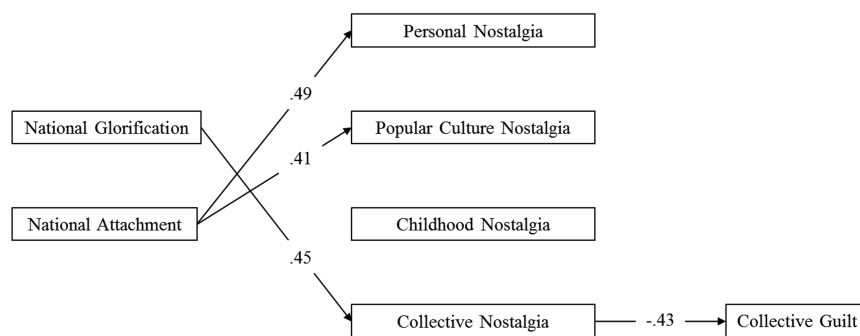


Fig. 2: Path diagram depicting significant associations among national identification, nostalgia, and collective guilt (Pilot Study). National glorification is associated with higher collective nostalgia, which is associated with lower collective guilt. Numbers reflect standardized coefficients. For display purposes, covariances among the variables are not shown

Method

Participants were 101 U.S. adults (50% female, $M_{\text{age}} = 35.32$ years) who participated on Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) website. Participants were predominately White (79%). After agreeing to participate, participants completed the same nostalgia measure as in Study 1 (subscales $\alpha = .69-.87$).

Historical events manipulation. Following the nostalgia measure, participants read that we were interested in how familiar they are with a few defining moments in America's history. Participants were then randomly assigned to either the harm salience or control condition. In the harm salience condition, participants viewed a list of 10 historical events in order from earliest (year 1776) to latest (year 1969). Five events were intended to make salient the harm America has caused other groups (e.g., "Close to 4000 Cherokee Indians die during a government-mandated relocation to the West"). Three events were positive (e.g., "Apollo 11 lands on the moon with the team of Neil Armstrong, Buzz Aldrin, and Michael Collins"⁴) and the remaining two events were negative but not associated with harm to other groups (e.g., "President John F. Kennedy is assassinated in Dealey Plaza, Dallas, Texas").

In the control condition, participants viewed the same list of events, except that the harmful events were replaced with others not likely to increase the salience of American harm doing (e.g., "Samuel Morse first publicly demonstrates the telegraph"; "Franklin D. Roosevelt is inaugurated to an unprecedented 4th term as President of the United States"). To bolster the cover story, and to encourage encoding of the information, participants in both conditions indicated on a 5-point scale (1 = *not at all*, 5 = *extremely*) how familiar they were with each event.

Collective guilt. After the manipulation, we assessed collective guilt using the same scale as in Study

1 ($\alpha = .97$). Participants then completed demographics and were debriefed.

Results and Discussion

We tested the hypothesis that collective nostalgia can be leveraged to buffer collective guilt with a hierarchical regression analysis. Step 1 included the three non-collective nostalgia types (personal, cultural, and childhood) as predictors of collective guilt. In Step 2, collective nostalgia and historical events condition (coded 0 = control, 1 = harm doing) were included as predictors of collective guilt. Finally, the collective nostalgia \times condition interaction was included as a predictor in Step 3.

None of the non-collective nostalgia types were significant predictors in Step 1 (Table 2). Only collective nostalgia was a significant predictor in Step 2, replicating results from Study 1. Importantly, the predicted collective nostalgia \times condition interaction was significant in Step 3 ($\Delta R^2 = .04$, $p = .04$). We probed this interaction with the PROCESS macro for SPSS (Model 1; Hayes, 2012) using both simple slopes analyses and Johnson-Neyman significance regions.⁵ Although collective nostalgia was associated with lower guilt in the control condition, $b = -.50$, $SE = .20$, $t(94) = 2.57$, $p = .01$, this effect was over twice as large in the harm salience condition, $b = -1.09$, $SE = .21$, $t(94) = 5.29$, $p < .001$. Guilt was higher in the harm salience condition for participants low in collective nostalgia (-1 SD from the mean), although the effect was not statistically significant, $b = .43$, $SE = .39$, $t(94) = 1.09$, $p = .28$. Guilt was lower in the harm salience condition for participants high in collective nostalgia ($+1$ SD from the mean), although this effect also failed to reach conventional levels of significance, $b = -.76$, $SE = .40$, $t(94) = 1.91$, $p = .06$. However, the Johnson-Neyman significance regions indicated that guilt was lower in the harm salience (vs. control) condition for participants scoring 3.63 ($z = 1.17$) or higher on the collective nostalgia scale (Figure 3).

⁴Although the landing was made possible by all three members of the Apollo 11 team, it should be noted that Collins remained in orbit inside the command module.

⁵The Johnson-Neyman regions of significance approach identifies the value(s) of a moderator (M) at which point the effect of the independent variable (X) on the dependent variable (Y) becomes significant at $p = .05$. The Johnson-Neyman significance region defines the range of M values for which the effect of X on Y is significant at $p \leq .05$.

Table 2. Study 1: Hierarchical regression model predicting collective guilt

Step	R ²	Independent variable	b	SE	β	t	p
1	.001	Intercept	4.39	.86		5.11	< .001
		Personal nostalgia	-.02	.28	-.01	-.09	.93
		Cultural nostalgia	-.01	.22	.00	-.02	.98
		Childhood nostalgia	.09	.26	.05	.33	.74
2	.228	Intercept	5.13	.79		6.53	< .001
		Personal nostalgia	.28	.25	.14	1.12	.27
		Cultural nostalgia	.08	.20	.04	.38	.71
		Childhood nostalgia	.04	.23	.02	.15	.88
		Collective nostalgia	-.78	.15	-.05	-5.28	< .001
		Condition	-.16	.29	-.50	-.55	.58
3	.263	Intercept	4.31	.87		4.98	< .001
		Personal nostalgia	.28	.25	.14	1.12	.27
		Cultural nostalgia	.11	.19	.06	.56	.58
		Childhood nostalgia	.05	.23	.02	.20	.84
		Collective nostalgia	-.50	.20	.41	-2.57	.01
		Condition	1.28	.73	-.32	1.75	.08
		Collective nostalgia × Condition	-.59	.28	-.52	-2.12	.04

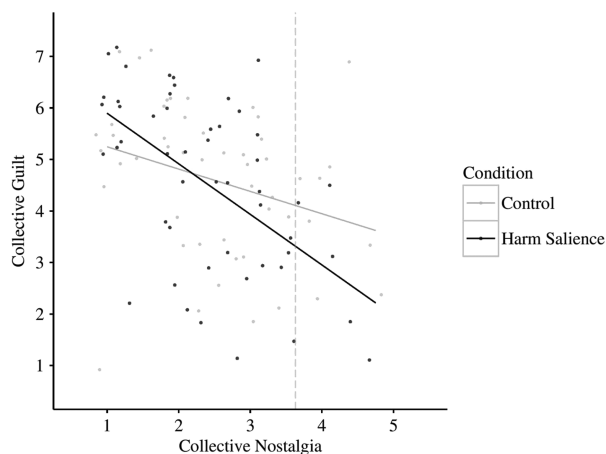


Fig. 3: Study 1: After reminders of harm doing, collective guilt is lower for participants high in collective nostalgia. *Note:* Condition effects on, and to the right of, the vertical dashed line are significant at $p \leq .05$. For display purposes, data points have been randomly “jittered” to account for overplotting. Regression lines reflect regression coefficients that take into account covariates.

These results indicate that people high in dispositional collective nostalgia are more adept at evading guilt when faced with reminders of group harm doing. This was the case controlling for other, non-collective, forms of nostalgia, which lends further support to the notion that collective nostalgia is integrally and uniquely related to social identity processes (Wildschut et al., 2014). However, we have yet to directly assess the extent to which, as a function of collective guilt, collective nostalgia is spontaneously evoked in the face of harm salience. Further, we have not tested whether individuals who are prone to glorifying the ingroup are especially likely to display this spontaneous tendency. Study 2 aims to fill these gaps.

Study 2

In Study 2, we tested whether the aversive experience of collective guilt after reminders of ingroup harm doing

evokes spontaneous, compensatory collective nostalgia. From our theoretical analysis and the results of our Pilot Study, we expected that this effect would emerge only for those who are prone to glorifying the ingroup, as high glorifiers are those most prone to collective nostalgia and those highly motivated to evade guilt feelings.

Method

Participants were 203 U.S. adults (45% female, $M_{age} = 34.32$) who participated on MTurk. Participants were predominately White (71%). After agreeing to participate, participants completed the same measure of American glorification ($\alpha = .88$) and attachment ($\alpha = .94$) as in the Pilot Study. Participants were randomly assigned to the same harm salience or control conditions as in Study 1. However, after an initial reading of the historical events we selected two in particular for participants to consider further. In the harm salience condition, participants read about two harmful events (Jim Crow laws, the use of Agent Orange during the Vietnam War); in the control condition, participants read about two negative, but non-harm events (Billy the Kid’s first murder, the assassination of Malcom X).⁶ Participants then used a 7-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*; 7 = *strongly agree*) to respond to five items assessing how guilty they felt after reading about the events (e.g., “Reading about these events makes me feel guilty”; $\alpha = .93$).

Following the guilt measure, participants were told that we were interested in their own thoughts about U.S. history. Participants were asked to write about any part of U.S. history that they would like, and were told that they could write about a specific event or a general time period. They were also told that they could

⁶Although Malcom X was an African American pushing for civil rights, his assassination was at the hands of a rival Muslim group and thus reminders of this event are not likely to evoke collective guilt in our participants.

write about very recent events or very distant ones. After writing, participants used a 5-point scale (1 = *none at all*; 5 = *a great deal*) to indicate how much the event they had just written about made them feel a variety of emotions. Three items assessed nostalgia (nostalgic, sentimental, longing; $\alpha = .93$),⁷ three items assessed positive affect (warm, happy, excited; $\alpha = .93$), and three items assessed negative affect (sad, depressed, guilty; $\alpha = .78$). Participants then indicated the year that they had written about using a sliding scale from the year 1776 to 2016 and completed demographics.⁸

Results

Preliminary analyses. Participants felt more guilt in the harm salience (vs. control) condition, $t(201) = 5.42, p < .001, d = .76$. The events participants subsequently wrote about elicited slightly more nostalgia in the harm salience condition, $t(201) = 1.85, p = .07, d = .21$, but did not significantly evoke positive ($p = .31$) or negative affect ($p = .12$).

Primary analyses. We predicted that feelings of guilt would mediate spontaneous collective nostalgia for high (vs. low) glorifiers. To test this moderated mediation model, we used PROCESS for SPSS (Model 14, Hayes, 2012) and specified 5000 bootstrap samples to obtain confidence intervals of the conditional indirect effects. Harm salience condition was entered as a predictor of spontaneous nostalgia and guilt was entered as the mediator. Glorification was entered as a moderator of the association between guilt and nostalgia. National attachment was included as a covariate. The effect of condition on guilt (*a* path) was significant in the multivariate model, $b = 1.19, SE = .22, t(200) = 5.42, p < .001$. The association between guilt and nostalgia (*b* path) was not significant ($p = .20$), but was moderated by glorification as predicted, $b = .10, SE = .04, t(197) = 2.61, p = .01$. Guilt evoked higher spontaneous nostalgia for participants high in glorification (+1 *SD* from the mean), $b = .15, SE = .06, t(197) = 2.35, p = .02$ but this was not true for participants low in glorification (−1 *SD* from the mean), $b = −.09, SE = .07, t(197) = 1.34, p = .18$. However, Johnson-Neyman significance regions indicated that collective guilt was associated with increased nostalgia for participants scoring 4.68 ($z = .63$) or higher on the glorification scale and associated with *decreased* nostalgia for participants scoring 1.63 ($z = −1.91$) or below on the glorification scale.

Guilt was a significant mediator of nostalgia for participants high in glorification, $ab = .18, SE = .08, CI 95\%$

[.04, .36], but not those low in glorification, $CI 95\%$ [−.30, .04]. The index of moderated mediation was significant, $index = .12, SE = .05, CI 95\%$ [.03, .24], indicating that the indirect effect of condition on nostalgia through guilt depended on one's level of glorification. This pattern of moderated mediation did not emerge for high glorifiers when positive affect was entered as the outcome variable, $indirect\ effect\ CI\ 95\%$ [−.17, .29]. Collective guilt induced spontaneous nostalgia for America's past specifically, and not general positive feelings about America, for high glorifiers.

So far, evidence from the first three datasets supports the notion that collective nostalgia is a resource for preserving the positive standing of the ingroup in the face of group-relevant threats. Chronic collective nostalgia is associated with lower resting collective guilt (Pilot Study) and individuals high in collective nostalgia appear to leverage the emotion when ingroup harm doing is salient, leading to comparatively lower levels of collective guilt (Study 1). However, we also clarify these processes when considering the role of group identification: Individuals who glorify America express more collective nostalgia (Pilot Study), especially when experiencing guilt after reminders of America's harm doing (Study 2). Summarizing across the first two studies, in the presence of harm salience, collective nostalgia either can allow the individual to defensively avoid collective guilt (Study 1), or it can be sought in a compensatory manner to alleviate collective guilt (Study 2; see theoretical model in Figure 1).

In the remaining studies, we build on these findings by experimentally inducing collective nostalgia, and assessing whether collective nostalgia buffers guilt feelings when harm is salient (Study 3), especially for those who glorify America (Study 4).

Study 3

Study 3 employed a fully experimental approach to test the prediction that collective nostalgia can buffer feelings of guilt when people are faced with reminders of group harm doing. We induced collective nostalgia (vs. a comparably recent event) and then again manipulated the salience of America's harm doing (vs. a comparably negative, but not blameworthy, event). We predicted that those reminded of America's harm doing would feel collective guilt, *unless* they had also reflected nostalgically on America's past.

Method

Participants were 205 adults (54% Female; $M_{age} = 31.18$) recruited via an Introductory Psychology subject pool and from MTurk.⁹ Fourteen participants were excluded from the dataset, leaving 191 participants in

⁷Because the target of participants' recollections was a time in America's past, the nostalgia scale can be conceptualized as collective nostalgia.

⁸On average, participants wrote about the early 1930s, although there was considerable variability around this mean ($M = 1932.91, SD = 72.15$). Participants recalled events that spanned the entire timeline, from 1776 ($n = 7$) to 2016 ($n = 12$). However, event year was not significantly associated with any variables in our model, including the condition \times glorification interaction. Thus, we do not consider event year further.

⁹Introductory Psychology students comprised 14 % of the sample. Including sample (0 = *Students*, 1 = *MTurk*) as a between-subjects factor in our primary analyses did not result in any significant interactions, and therefore our final dataset combined MTurk and student participants.

the final sample.¹⁰ Participants were predominately White (77%). After agreeing to participate, participants read a statement describing the study as focusing on people's feelings and thoughts about the United States. They were randomly assigned to conditions in a 2 (recall: collective nostalgia vs. recent) \times 2 (historical event: harm salience vs. negative) between-subjects experiment.¹¹

Recall manipulation. Participants were randomly assigned to recall either a nostalgic or recent positive event in America and to write about it. In the collective nostalgia condition, participants were asked to write about an event or episode from a past generation that makes them feel nostalgic. One participant responded to the prompt: "I listen to old radio shows from the 40's. I can imagine everybody gathered around the radio listening to these shows while they were on." In the recent event condition, participants were instructed to write about a meaningful current event that was experienced by many Americans recently. One participant responded: "The recent operation to capture or kill Osama bin Laden is typical of my generation. It shows that no one can damage America with impunity... This makes me proud to be American." After writing, participants indicated their feelings of nostalgia using a single item ("Right now I am feeling nostalgic"; 1 = *not at all*, 5 = *very much*).

Historical event manipulation. Participants were randomly assigned to read one of two passages about a period in U.S. history, ostensibly taken from a high school textbook. In the harm salience condition, participants read a passage describing how Native Americans were forcibly removed from their land by the U.S. government. The harm was attributed to Americans and presented as illegitimate—two important antecedents for collective guilt (Ferguson & Branscombe, 2014). Because highlighting contemporary privilege of the participant's ingroup increases collective guilt (Iyer, Leach, & Crosby, 2003; Powell, Branscombe, & Schmitt, 2005), the last two sentences focused on how European Americans benefited from and are still privileged by the American genocide of Native Americans.

In the negative event condition, participants read about the Great Depression. It was described as being caused by a variety of factors, making it impossible to trace blame for the event to any single source. We therefore considered it unlikely that this condition would

¹⁰Excluded participants included eight who indicated that they were not U.S. citizens and six who did not follow instructions on the memory writing tasks (e.g., explicitly stated that they do not feel nostalgic for America's past).

¹¹We expected that collective nostalgia would protect people from guilt regardless of whether it was induced before harm was made salient (i.e., a buffer) or after (i.e., an antidote), so we counterbalanced the order in which the manipulations were presented (recall first vs. historical event first). Including the manipulation order as a between-subjects variable did not result in any significant interactions.

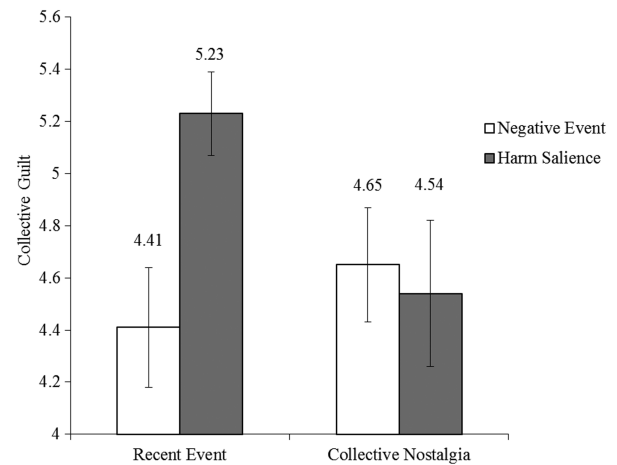


Fig. 4: Study 3: Collective guilt is lower after reminders of harm doing for participants who recalled a collective nostalgic event. *Note:* Error bars represent standard error of the mean.

elicit any guilt feelings in participants. After participants were finished writing, we assessed collective guilt with the same measure from previous studies ($\alpha = .94$).

Results

Nostalgia. We submitted participants' state nostalgia scores to a 2 (recall) \times 2 (historical event) between-subjects analysis of variance (ANOVA). As expected, participants in the nostalgia condition reported more nostalgia ($M = 3.71$, $SD = 1.01$) compared to participants in the recent event condition ($M = 2.79$, $SD = 1.04$), $F(1, 186) = 37.47$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .17$. No other main effects or interactions on state nostalgia were significant ($F_s < 1$).

Collective guilt. We submitted collective guilt scores to the same 2 \times 2 ANOVA. Only the interaction was significant, $F(1, 186) = 4.23$, $p = .04$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$ (Figure 4). To probe the interaction, we first tested the effect of harm salience (harm vs. negative) within the collective nostalgia and positive recall conditions separately. Participants in the positive recall condition felt more guilt when harm was salient compared to when it was not, $F(1, 186) = 6.89$, $p = .009$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$. However, in line with our predictions, participants in the collective nostalgia recall condition did not respond to harm salience with collective guilt ($p = .74$).¹²

We then tested the effects of recall condition (collective nostalgia vs. positive) within the harm salience and negative event conditions separately. Participants in the harm salience condition felt less guilt after reflecting nostalgically on America's past, compared to reflecting on a positive recent event, $F(1, 186) = 4.36$, $p = .038$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$. Collective guilt did not differ between

¹²The Scaled JZS Bayes Factor for the t -test comparing the harm salience vs. control conditions within the nostalgia condition did indeed favor the null hypothesis, *Bayes Factor* = 2.21. We scaled r on the harm salience vs. control effect size within the positive event condition (effect size $r = .28$). Compared to the meaningful event condition, it is probable that nostalgia eliminated the effect of harm salience on collective guilt.

the collective nostalgia and positive recall conditions in the negative event condition ($p = .44$).

Discussion

Reflecting nostalgically on America's past protected people from guilt induced by reminders of America's past harm doing, whereas reflecting on a meaningful recent event did not. Participants who recalled a meaningful current event felt more guilt after reading about the genocide of Native Americans at the hands of the U.S. government, but participants who recalled a nostalgic event from America's past did not.

An alternative explanation for these findings could be that collective nostalgia primed important personal values, which served as a self-affirmation (Sherman & Cohen, 2006; Steele, 1988), or that collective nostalgia primed social belonging, which served as a group-affirmation (Shnabel, Purdie-Vaughns, Cook, Garcia, & Cohen, 2013). These alternatives are weakened by the fact that we compared the nostalgia condition to a *meaningful recent event* condition, which did not have the same guilt-reducing effects. Simply reminding people of meaningful events occurring in their own generation (e.g., America's dominance in war, electing a Black president, technological advances) did not protect people from guilt to the same degree. This suggests that the observed pattern was due to specific aspects of collective nostalgia, rather than to general processes of self- or group-affirmation.

According to our theoretical account, the unique contribution of collective nostalgia lies in how it paints past society as a "golden age" and thus portrays the group in morally pure terms. Thus, collective nostalgia may be a path to a relatively "blind" group identity—one that focuses only on the redeeming aspects of the group and disengages from immoral aspects of the group (Schatz, Staub, & Lavine, 1999). In this way, collective nostalgia is linked to national glorification, a form of national identification that elevates the nation's moral standing and values loyalty to the nation. If collective nostalgia serves to legitimize (or downplay) harm doing committed by Americans toward other groups, then it should be especially powerful for individuals who already have the tendency to elevate America's moral standing and who are motivated to preserve their collective identity when facing threats to America's moral standing. The next final study tests this moderating role of national glorification for nostalgia's effect on buffering collective guilt.

Study 4

We hypothesize that collective nostalgia and national glorification interact in a process that serves to regulate and preserve a positive collective identity. High glorifiers may be more adept at using collective nostalgia to buffer guilt feelings in the face of reminders of group harm doing, when compared to low glorifiers. Here we test the hypothesis that the effect of collective nostalgia on

collective guilt depends on participants' degree of national glorification. We also assessed personal nostalgia and national attachment to isolate the interaction of collective nostalgia and national glorification on collective guilt specifically.

Method

Participants were 120 U.S. adults (46% female, $M_{\text{age}} = 33.38$) who participated on MTurk. Participants were predominately White (73%). After agreeing to participate, participants completed demographics and then the same measure of American glorification ($\alpha = .87$) and attachment ($\alpha = .91$) as in previous studies. Next, participants were randomly assigned to either a collective nostalgia or control condition. In the nostalgia condition, they were asked to write about an event or episode in America's past that "gives you warm, sentimental, and nostalgic feelings." In the control condition they were asked to write about a recent event or episode in America today that "gives you positive feelings." We then assessed social and personal nostalgia using the same measures as in the Pilot Study and Study 1 (α s = .82 and .83 respectively).

Following the nostalgia measure, America's harm doing was made salient by presenting all participants with the passage from Study 3 describing how Native Americans were forcibly removed from their land by the U.S. government. Participants then indicated their feelings of guilt using the same measure as in previous studies ($\alpha = .95$).

Results

We first tested the effectiveness of the nostalgia manipulation. Participants in the nostalgia (vs. control) condition reported higher collective nostalgia, $M = 3.07$, $SD = .94$ vs. $M = 2.61$, $SD = .93$, $t(118) = 2.73$, $p = .007$, $d = .49$, but not higher personal nostalgia ($p = .84$).

We then regressed participants' guilt scores on glorification, condition (coded 0 = control, 1 = collective nostalgia), and the glorification \times condition interaction. National attachment was entered as a covariate. As expected, the glorification \times condition interaction was significant, $b = -.55$, $SE = .24$, $t(114) = 2.32$, $p = .02$. We probed this interaction using the PROCESS macro for SPSS (Model 1; Hayes, 2012), utilizing both simple slopes analyses and Johnson-Neyman significance regions. Glorification was not significantly associated with guilt in the control condition, $b = .14$, $SE = .20$, $p = .50$, whereas glorification was associated with lower guilt in the nostalgia condition, $b = -.41$, $SE = .20$, $t(114) = 2.07$, $p = .04$. As predicted, collective nostalgia (vs. control) was associated with lower guilt for participants high in glorification (+1 SD from the mean), $b = -.78$, $SE = .36$, $t(114) = 2.17$, $p = .03$. The opposite was true for those low in glorification (-1 SD from the mean), although the effect was not statistically significant, $b = .40$, $p = .30$. Johnson-Neyman significance regions indicated that collective nostalgia (vs. control)

decreased collective guilt for participants scoring 4.94 ($z = .74$) or higher on the glorification scale (Figure 5).

Discussion

Participants high in national glorification reported less guilt following reminders of past harm doing when they were given the opportunity to reflect nostalgically on America's past, compared to when they reflected positively on America today. This interaction effect held when controlling for variation in national attachment, suggesting that it is unique to a form of national identification that views America as morally superior to other groups.

An interesting additional effect that was unanticipated but found some support in these data is that those high in glorification feel *more* guilty after reflecting positively on America today, perhaps due to the stark contrast between the positive standard primed by recalling a positive recent event and the negative standard evoked by reminders of past harm doing. This interpretation could indicate that the negative association between glorification and guilt found in ours and others' research (e.g., Roccas *et al.*, 2006) may be due to high glorifiers' dispositional tendency to evoke a nostalgic past standard when evaluating their country's actions. Thus one interpretation of the current findings is that glorifiers' dispositional tendency to evoke a nostalgic past standard was facilitated in the nostalgia condition, leading to lower guilt, but inhibited in the positive recent event condition, leading to higher guilt.

General Discussion

Focusing on U.S. participants' attitudes about America, five studies provided novel evidence for the role of collective nostalgia in the experience of collective guilt after salience of ingroup harm doing, as explicated in

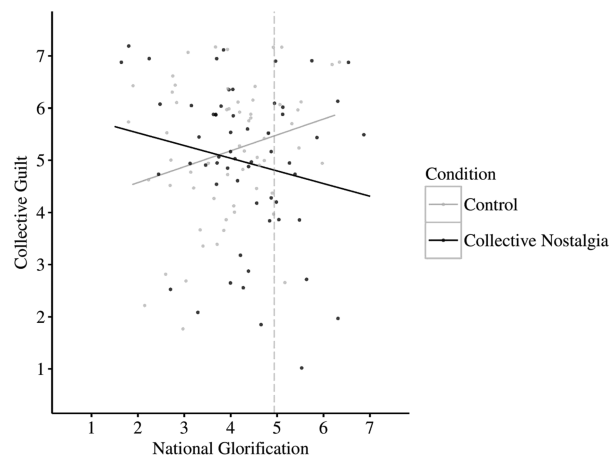


Fig. 5: Study 4: After reminders of harm doing, collective guilt is lower after recalling a collective nostalgic event for participants high in national glorification. *Note:* Condition effects on, and to the right of, the vertical dashed line are significant at $p \leq .05$. For display purposes, data points have been randomly "jittered" to account for overplotting. Regression lines reflect regression coefficients that take into account covariates, and extend only the range of observed data.

our theoretical model (Figure 1). Our Pilot Study provided initial evidence that national glorification is more strongly associated with collective nostalgia than is national attachment, and that collective nostalgia is uniquely associated with lower collective guilt when compared to other forms of nostalgia.

The first two experimental studies tested our hypothesis that individuals are motivated to engage in collective nostalgia as a means of avoiding or alleviating collective guilt after reminders of past ingroup harm doing. Study 1 showed that Americans who tend to feel nostalgic for past society also express lower guilt about America's past harm doing, especially when guilt-inducing events are made salient, suggesting that these individuals are marshaling collective nostalgia to protect the threatened positive standing of the group. This notion gained further support in Study 2, as feelings of collective guilt evoked spontaneous collective nostalgia for high (but not low) glorifiers. In other words, individuals can either avoid collective guilt after harm salience if they are prone to collective nostalgia (Study 1), or will engage in collective nostalgia to alleviate collective guilt if they are highly motivated to do so (Study 2).

The last two studies directly and experimentally tested our contention that the opportunity to engage in collective nostalgia buffers the effect of a reminder of ingroup harm doing on collective guilt. Specifically, collective guilt for America's past harm doing is buffered when people are given the opportunity to reflect nostalgically about America's past (Study 3). Furthermore, in line with our theoretical model, this effect that is more pronounced among individuals who glorify America (Study 4).

Marshaling Collective Nostalgia

The current research focused primarily on whether induced nostalgia has consequences for experienced guilt. However, our research demonstrates that individuals will not only avoid collective guilt after a reminder of ingroup harm doing by marshaling collective nostalgia; they will also compensatorily engage in this emotion to alleviate collective guilt (Study 2), particularly if they are high in national glorification. Future research could build on Study 2 and further explore collective nostalgia as a response variable.

For instance, it is unclear whether threats that trigger collective nostalgia differ from those that trigger personal nostalgia, such as threats to personal meaning or self-esteem (see Routledge, Wildschut, Sedikides, & Juhl, 2013; Sedikides *et al.*, 2015). We suspect that collective nostalgia would be most likely triggered by threats which undermine the integrity of one's valued ingroups, for instance, threats to perceived morality, status, or temporal continuity of the group identity, but not by threats to aspects of oneself that are not a part of one's group identity. However, one could imagine this general effect to be modulated by the extent to which individuals vary in level of self-construal. For instance, highly interdependent individuals might respond to personal

threats (e.g., mortality salience) with collective nostalgia, as these individuals tend to derive meaning from their group memberships when threatened (Routledge, Juhl, Vess, Cathey, & Liao, 2013).

Personal Nostalgia as a Buffer?

The current research cannot definitively address whether the demonstrated effects are due to collective nostalgia specifically or nostalgia in general. Although we find it unlikely that nostalgic recollections of one's personal past (e.g., one's first date in high school) would similarly buffer against collective guilt, an intriguing possibility is that personal nostalgia might sometimes trigger collective nostalgia, and thereby have similar effects. Construing a personally nostalgic memory at an abstract level might translate into nostalgia for the past in general (i.e., "the good old days"), which might spur nostalgic recollections of ingroup history. Our correlational data, however, suggest that only collective nostalgia has a robust association with collective guilt. In general, our investigations point to the critical importance of distinguishing between various levels and modes of nostalgia, and exploring their combinatorial or divergent influence on phenomena of social and personal identity.

Collective Nostalgia and Group Affirmation

One might speculate that the protective effects of collective nostalgia occur through a straightforward process of group affirmation—thinking nostalgically about the group affirms its value (see Wildschut *et al.* 2014) and may induce a sense of collective pride, which buffers the individual from any information about potential wrongdoing by the group. However, our studies ruled out this possibility in several ways. In Studies 3 and 4, we compared the effect of contemplating a nostalgic event to that of contemplating a recent meaningful (Study 3) or positive (Study 4) ingroup event. If a global affirmation process drove our effects, we would not expect these two conditions to differ. Furthermore, our harm doing manipulation in Study 2 led high glorifiers to experience more nostalgia but not more globally positive feelings; this suggests that participants are not seeking general affirmation—but nostalgic feelings specifically—after the threat.

A comparison of the present findings to prior research suggests that the effects of group affirmations are divergent from those of collective nostalgia. For example, Gunn and Wilson (2011) found that affirmation of the group—induced using a modified self-affirmation paradigm—increased, rather than decreased, acknowledgment of collective guilt in response to ingroup wrongdoing. These prior findings are to some extent corroborated by the opposing conditional patterns observed in Study 4. For high glorifiers, experiencing collective nostalgia was associated with less guilt after contemplating ingroup harming doing. However, high glorifiers who contemplated a recent positive event

(i.e., who experienced a general group affirmation) tended to report *more* guilt.

Why would group affirmations lead to heightened collective guilt, while collective nostalgia seems to protect individuals from experiencing this emotion? Although our data cannot yet definitively speak to this issue, we propose the answer may have to do with the *standards* people are using to evaluate an immoral act from the ingroup's history. When participants affirm their group membership, they subsequently set lower standards for an act to qualify as unjust, and thus report higher collective guilt when reminded of blameworthy group actions (Miron, Branscombe, & Biernat, 2010). This could occur, in part, because people are judging their group's past actions relative to a high present standard, and hence are willing to acknowledge that the group has not always behaved in an admirable way. This possibility is supported by the fact that people are less likely to show increased collective guilt after a group affirmation in the context of ongoing or recent intergroup conflicts (Čehajić-Clancy, Effron, Halperin, Liberman, & Ross, 2011), which would not be judged in contrast to a present standard.

On the other hand, when people are being nostalgic about their group's history, they have temporarily committed themselves to a vision of the group as having been better in the past than it is now. This commitment could (1) make them more resistant to information suggesting that the group's history was in fact not so positive, and (2) prompt them to evaluate past harm doing not in terms of perceived contemporary, but rather in terms of historical standards for group conduct. Since group members often perceive their national group to have made progress over history toward more universally acceptable modes of conduct (e.g., embracing diversity; Condor, 2006), this could mean that the historical standard for blameworthiness induced by collective nostalgia is lower than a contemporary standard would be (Spoor & Schmitt, 2011).

This potential explanation for the opposing effects of group affirmation and collective nostalgia warrants further research. In particular, it suggests that the effects of collective nostalgia on collective guilt may be limited to instances of reminders of *past* ingroup harm doing, and that they might not operate as potently when individuals are contemplating *current* ingroup harm doing.

Can Collective Nostalgia Have a Positive Impact?

An open question from our current studies is whether collective nostalgia can ever have more positive impact on intergroup relations and reconciliation after violence. Writing at the beginning of the modern era, Nietzsche (1874/1997) recognized the importance of attitudes toward history for people living in times of growing individualism and rapid technological and social change. He distinguished between two attitudes toward history, namely, *antiquarian* and *critical* attitudes. Those who practice antiquarian history

selectively interpret their group's history with the aim of glorification, expunging any events from the record which might tarnish the group's image. Group members who engage in critical history, however, are interested in exploring all aspects of their group's history, in order to better learn how to live in the present by avoiding past errors. More recently, Boym (2001) distinguished between two types of collective nostalgia that map on to Nietzsche's distinction. Specifically, *restorative nostalgia* is rooted in the desire to return the ingroup to a mythic point of origin, to prevent social change in favor of an idealized image of what the group "once was in the good old days." By contrast, *reflective nostalgia* centers on the more critical attempt to forge a relationship between individual and collective memory through understanding how the present can be improved by knowledge of the past.

People engaging in both types of collective nostalgia can experience strong affective reactions, combining positive and negative valence. But the consequences of the differing content of these types can be quite different. Those who engage in restorative nostalgia will be oriented toward a more exclusionary and glorified, rigid image of their group's authentic identity. By contrast, experiencing reflective nostalgia may orient individuals toward an image of when their group has achieved its ideals in the past, and a critical quest to preserve those ideals and improve on them in the present and future. It is possible that restorative and reflective nostalgia are strong emotional underpinnings of the "blind" and "constructive" forms of patriotism that have been recognized in the literature on national identification (Schatz et al., 1999). Theoretically, reflective nostalgia should be associated with a less exclusionary conception of the ingroup identity, greater critical awareness of group history, greater acknowledgment of past guiltworthy acts, and more support for positive social change. These possibilities have yet to receive experimental scrutiny and we believe that our current research can pave the way for fruitful research directions along these lines. In particular, it may be both difficult and crucial to determine how to assess more reflective forms of collective nostalgia, and how to elicit them from individuals who are prone to restorative, defensive collective nostalgia.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there are no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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Appendix:

Items from the Nostalgia Scale used in the Pilot Study

Instructions: This scale is about your feelings toward the past. How affectionate, sentimental, and nostalgic do you feel for each of the following aspects of the past?

- Certain vacations or trips you took.
 - Certain places you went.
 - Certain experiences with nature.
 - Certain events you experienced or participated in.
 - Certain foods or drinks.
 - Certain TV shows you watched.
 - Certain toys and games you had.
 - Certain movies you watched.
 - The way society was.
 - Morals and values society had.
 - The way people were.
 - The way the social system worked.
 - Your time in primary school (kindergarten through 8th grade).
 - The process of growing up.
 - Your time in high school (9th–12th grade).
 - Youthfulness and childhood.
- Note. Personal experiences: items 1–4; Popular culture: items 5–8; Social (collective): items 9–12; Childhood: items 13–16.