



Exploring the lived experience of Nostalgia as a resource for sociocultural development: A Vygotskian perspective.

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### ABSTRACT

Previous quantitative literature highlights a variety of definitions, triggers and functional outcomes of nostalgia but demonstrates noticeable divergence in their attempts to quantify the phenomenon. This research sought to address these issues using a Vygotskian framework that defines nostalgia in terms of an internalised social behaviour that serves as a platform for human development. An IPA methodology was utilised to explore the lived experience of nostalgia in six diverse participants. Three themes were identified: the variation in temporal *accessibility* of nostalgia within and beyond the lives of individuals; the *reciprocal dialogue* between personal and cultural accounts of nostalgia and the *contextual fluidity* of nostalgic experience. These findings illuminated the ways in which previously divisive understandings of nostalgia are better approached holistically and that the recursive, bilateral ontology of the phenomenon indicates that it may be inappropriate to pursue a universally defined comprehension of nostalgia. Epistemological and theoretical implications are discussed.

KEY WORDS:	NOSTALGIA	DEVELOPMENT	VYGOTSKY	IPA	CULTURE
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### **Introduction**

Modern notions of nostalgia are far from its medical conceptualisation as a disorder characterised by severe homesickness (Hofer, 1688/1934), and more akin with its linguistic and ideological origin in Homeric literature as a means to find strength in longing for one's native land (Hepper et al., 2012; Austin 2010). After a period of changed understanding, it is more widely known as a sentimental but bittersweet longing for one's past (Sedikides and Wildschut, 2018). Previous pathological conceptualisations of nostalgia have diminished in light of evidence that nostalgia is a frequently occurring experience for most (Baldwin and Landau, 2014; Wildschut et al., 2006). Contemporary literature highlights the lack of a universal definition, given the mixed emotional valence and inadequacies of layperson and scholarly conceptualisations of nostalgia (Hepper et al., 2012), although this debate moves beyond the scope of this research.

There appears to be a general consensus as to what incites feelings of nostalgia, most of which implicate some form of psychological threat (Routledge et al., 2013). Triggers of nostalgia range from broad notions such as negative mood (Wildschut et al., 2006), through more socially defined issues such as loneliness (Wildschut et al., 2006; Wildschut et al., 2010; Zhou et al., 2008; Seehusen et al., 2013), to specific existential triggers such as feelings of meaningfulness (Routledge et al., 2011) or fear of mortality (Juhl et al. 2010). These studies indicate various preservative functions of nostalgia on our wellbeing, but there is an over-arching assumption that nostalgia can only be induced through negative experience. It would appear that one can only be nostalgic if they are facing some kind of psychological angst and there is little to no acknowledgement of the potential for nostalgia to be caused by an enjoyable experience, such as being in a particularly pleasant environment. One piece of research focused on participant's written descriptions of nostalgia and indicated positive ways nostalgia can be induced through tangible objects and non-tangible experiences like music (Holak and Havlena, 1992). This suggests a more balanced interpretation of nostalgia may reside in written responses and thus qualitative enquiry may be more appropriate to gain a greater depth of understanding.

One of the more consistent functional outcomes of nostalgia is that it maintains our sense of self-continuity, in that nostalgia links our past with our present and re-affirms our life story (Sedikides et al., 2016). Although this is useful in explaining the construction of nostalgia in the present, it does little to acknowledge any impact past thinking may have on any potential future experience. There is an emerging body of literature that addresses this by exploring the potential future-oriented impact of nostalgia (Sedikides and Wildschut, 2016; Cheung et al., 2013), yet they do little to explain the mediating influence nostalgia has between the past, present and future. Therefore, such research should avoid bracketing elements of nostalgic ontology and instead acknowledge the holistic influence nostalgia has on different temporally defined experiences.

There appears to be a notable divergence in literature surrounding the functional ontology of nostalgia. Baldwin and Landau (2014) identify that the majority of literature maintains a focus on nostalgia preserving psychological security by

fostering social connectedness (Sedikides et al., 2016; Wildschut et al., 2010) or existential meaning (Van Tilburg et al., 2018; Routledge et al., 2011). This has relational connotations, as there is an emphasis on nostalgic functions nurturing social relationships with others, whereas the research base into the impact of nostalgia on psychological growth in terms of motivated perceptions and behaviour (Baldwin and Landau, 2014), strengthening the self (Hepper et al., 2012) and seeking avenues for learning and growth (Iyer and Jetten, 2011) all maintain a focus on nostalgia being self-focused in terms of its psychological impact (Baldwin and Landau, 2014). This divergence is of particular importance as it highlights a contradiction in scholarly understandings of nostalgia and a clear division between the way in which it is categorised. Given that Sedikides et al. (2009) proposed nostalgia eases acculturative stress in immigrants and mediates their relationship with their culture, this indicates that the ontological divide between personal and relational functions of nostalgia (Baldwin and Landau, 2014) could be better understood in terms of a culturally defined relationship, which forms the core tenet of Vygotskian socio-cultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978).

Vygotsky conceptualised human development as an ongoing process in which social behaviour is selectively internalised to form the basis of what he called “higher mental processes” (Vygotsky, 1978:57). He emphasised the role of signs that exist within social interactions, language, and cultural experience, which are turned inwards in a transformation of inter-psychoic to intra-psychoic behaviour (Holland and Lachicotte Jr., 2007). This occurs using a scaffolding metaphor that represents the zone of proximal development (ZPD), which is conceptualised as the developmental potential we have with the help of more capable others (Vygotsky, 1978). The theory would posit that nostalgia, as a socially defined phenomena (Sedikides et al., 2016), involves engaging with others during salient past experiences and internalising certain interactions to form part of who we are in the present.

Compared to his other contemporaries, Vygotsky’s theorising has retained its relevance to the understanding of human development given that he acknowledged and embraced the notion that development is not linear and is consistently affected by disruption and unevenness (Marginson and Dang, 2017), nor did he attempt to reduce his theorising into one domain of development (Wertsch, 1993). This appears particularly appropriate for inquiry into nostalgic experience as it embraces the diverging ontology of nostalgia that is highlighted in the literature (Baldwin and Landau, 2014) and doesn’t presume to force it into any clearly defined category.

The scaffolding epistemology of Vygotskian development lends itself to scholarly understandings of nostalgia. Sedikides and Wildschut (2016) purported that social connectedness induced by nostalgia serves as a scaffold to bolster one’s self-esteem. Using a Vygotskian framework may be able to shed some light on how such functions are related to one another to support individual development, as these feelings of belonging are internalised and translated into increased perceptions of self-worth. Furthermore, Wildschut et al. (2014) emphasise the group-based function of shared nostalgia as having a benefit on group connectedness and individual evaluations, which is synonymous with the internalisation process and intersubjective focus of Vygotskian theory.

The wealth of quantitative literature highlighting scholarly understandings of nostalgia (e.g. Sedikides and Wildschut, 2018) is useful in establishing an ontological baseline for nostalgia to build from but does little to engage with the idiographic

nature of individual experience (Smith et al., 2009). This research base extensively highlights the mechanisms whereby nostalgia can benefit human existence (e.g. Juhl et al., 2010) but it does little to capture the way in which people draw meaning for themselves, engage with it both on momentous (Van Tilburg et al., 2018; Sedikides et al., 2018) and everyday occasions and apply it to their lives in the present. Therefore, there is a necessity to utilise a phenomenological epistemology to explore nostalgia that not only embraces the complex and idiosyncratic nature of human experience (Smith et al., 2009), but also facilitates the exploration of more commonplace sources of meaning (King et al., 2016) that may otherwise be overlooked in quantitative research.

Interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA, Smith, 1996) is an appropriate methodology to use here, given that it embraces the issues identified within the extant research base and represents a suitable accompaniment to the Vygotskian theoretical framework this research has positioned itself within. In terms of existing literature, the majority of quantitative research in the area draws conclusions based on artificially induced feelings of nostalgia (e.g. Wildschut et al., 2006). While this may be useful, such positivist notions of cognition don't capture the essence of human experience (Cole and Engestrom, 1993), and so must be considered only a partial conceptualisation of the acknowledged complexities of nostalgia. Smith (1996) argues that IPA serves to enrich phenomena that have previously only been studied quantitatively and thus a review of quantitative literature is an appropriate basis for this research as the aforementioned divergence in ontological assumptions (Baldwin and Landau, 2014) may benefit from the enriching quality of IPA. Such inconsistencies are a testament to the complexity of human experience (Smith et al., 2009), and would benefit from analyses that do not intend to provide the foundation for scholarly objects of knowledge as is the case in quantitative research (Ashworth, 2003). Therefore, by not imposing a predetermined ontology onto the phenomena, one can capture richer accounts of nostalgia that were previously unavailable.

There is a large portion of existing research that delves into the existential function of nostalgia, more specifically how it can be used to derive meaning in one's own life (van Tilburg et al., 2018). This research lends itself to the theoretical underpinnings of IPA, in that a phenomenological approach focuses on experience, but more specifically how people make sense of and draw meaning from their experiences (Lawthom and Tindall, 2011). This is the essence of human experience according to phenomenology and could therefore enrich an exploration into the meaning making experience of nostalgia.

The fundamental components of IPA are a particularly suitable match for a Vygotskian perspective on nostalgia for a multitude of reasons. The phenomenological underpinnings of IPA suit the assumptions of Vygotskian theory, in that phenomenological enquiry acknowledges that the world of objects we reside within cannot be separated from our subjective experience of it (Lawthom and Tindall, 2011). This reflects Vygotskian theorising that a person is an inherent part of their culture (Cole and Gajdamaschko, 2007). The focus on exploring an individual's personal and social world in IPA (Smith and Osborn, 2008) also makes up the two focal points of Vygotskian internalisation, the individual and cultural world (Vygotsky, 1978), and so they share very similar foundations. Furthermore, Smith (1996) highlights how IPA has its roots in symbolic interactionism (Mead, 1934), which posits that self-making is the product of symbolic social interaction and thus shares a

core epistemology with Vygotskian internalisation (Holland and Lachicotte Jr., 2007). In addition, Vygotsky retained a central focus on language as the basis of individual development, particularly in the way that words and language become less reliant on material means and become more decontextualized and abstract (Van de Veer, 1996; Fox and Riconscente, 2008). This abstraction suits an IPA study that embraces the complexity of human experience but also lends itself to the study of nostalgia, given the extant literature is notably unclear in its ontological and epistemological assumptions (Hepper et al., 2012). Therefore, it seems appropriate and necessary for a qualitative Vygotskian study that posits the question: How do individuals experience nostalgia in terms of their sociocultural development?

## **Method**

### ***Participants***

There were no particular selection criteria for selecting participants, beyond their having previously experienced nostalgia. Wildschut et al., (2018) emphasise the potential for nostalgic themes to exist in both younger and older adults' narratives and so the author aimed for as diverse an age range as possible to enhance the richness of the data. This allowed for a broader range of perspectives that would facilitate a greater breadth of experience (Yardley, 2008). Six participants were selected through purposive sampling from an extended social network of friends and family. Demographic data was not necessary when sampling participants as experiences of nostalgia was the only criteria for a homogenous sample in this study.

### ***Data Collection***

This research utilised semi-structured interviews to maintain a fairly flexible dialogue, while being able to steer the conversation should it stray from a discussion about nostalgia. Participants could respond however they thought would best capture their experiences to avoid the researcher imposing on the participants narratives (Smith et al., 2009). Open-ended questions allowed the participants to convey what was important to them (Yardley, 2008) and set the parameters of the discussion (Hefferon and Gil-Rodriguez, 2011). The interview schedule (Appendix 1) was produced from a literature review detailing the various personal and social functions of nostalgia in a variety of contexts (e.g. Sedikides and Wildschut, 2018). The broad focus also allowed for follow up questions, to clarify any misunderstanding and encourage a richer account by engaging with the hermeneutic of questioning (Smith, 2004). Questions began broadly with introductory questions before getting more specific. Summative questions allowed the participants to review their experiences and identify any meaning making experiences that may not have been mentioned during the interview, thus adhering to the inductive, meaning driven epistemology of qualitative research (Willig, 2008).

Prior to the interview, participants were given an information sheet (Appendix 2) that covered the details of the study, the obligation of the researcher to the participant and all necessary contact information should they need to ask any questions or withdraw themselves and their data from the study at any point. They were asked to select a pseudonym to protect their anonymity during the interview and analysis. Any potentially identifying information was removed during the transcription process. After they had selected a pseudonym, they were presented with a consent form (Appendix 3) to sign that confirmed their willingness to participate and the use of their data verbatim in the report.

The interview was recorded on a password protected device that used voice recording software and was anonymised using the provided pseudonyms. Each interview recording was transcribed as accurately as possible and included intonations to best capture the tone of each participant. Recordings were stored securely and confidentially until they were destroyed after the report submission date.

### ***Data Analysis***

An IPA was chosen as the form of analysis for this research for a number of reasons. Given the varied ontology of nostalgia (e.g. Hepper et al., 2012), it would be suitable to utilise the idiographic methodology of an effective IPA (Hefferon and Gil-Rodriguez, 2011). Second, the focus on time in definitions of and research into nostalgia (e.g. Austin 2010) lends itself to the temporality component of the phenomenological lifeworld (Husserl, 1936), other aspects of which may prove useful in making sense of the participants experiences during analysis. Third, context and personal meanings are instrumental to individual experience (Smith and Osborn, 2008) in IPA and one can assume that the context and personal meaning of nostalgia will be critical in the way in which they draw meaning from their experiences.

The first stage of analysis involved becoming familiar with data by conducting initial readings of each transcript with and without the audio playing alongside. This allowed the author to better capture the tone of the responses and identify any particularly emotive or uncertain accounts. Initial codes were generated that captured certain feelings or thoughts of each participant by looking through the transcript line by line (Appendix 4). More detailed notes were made alongside each reading to capture any thoughts or interpretations about the data (Appendix 5). By making extensive notes the author was able to capture the transcript as comprehensively as possible to facilitate an analytical shift from the transcript to the interpretive and descriptive notes in order to begin to generate emergent themes (Smith et al., 2009), without losing the voice of the participant as the active interpreter of their subjective world (Wagstaff et al., 2014). Each transcript was approached individually, as to maintain evaluative rigor (Smith, 2004) and the idiographic focus that is fundamental in IPA research (Smith and Osborn, 2008; Wagstaff et al., 2014).

The next stage involved re-grouping the data into emergent themes. It was important to maintain an awareness of the text as a whole when disassembling the transcripts to stay true to the voice of the participant and adhere to the hermeneutic circle of IPA practice (Smith et al., 2009), that emphasises the importance of each theme as part of a cohesive whole and vice versa. Initial themes were compared and developed into over-arching themes that were more representative of each transcript and thematic tables showing the themes, sense-making and relevant quotes were made to ensure the maximum methodological transparency (Yardley, 2008) and acknowledge that the researcher and participant can look at the same phenomena from different angles (Wagstaff et al., 2014) (Appendices 6,7,8,9,10,11). Once each case had been reviewed, themes were compared across all six participants and a master thematic table was created to generate three over-arching themes that best captured the transcripts (Appendix 12).

### ***Ethical considerations***



This research adhered to the BPS ethical guidelines with the provision of an extensive information sheet and accompanying consent form. The research was approved by the MMU ethics committee using the Ethos ethics portal in the form of a digital signature (Appendix 13, 14) before any data was collected.

## **Results**

Three over-arching superordinate themes were identified by participants: The *accessibility of* nostalgia both within and beyond the lifespan; the *reciprocity* of nostalgia between personal and cultural experiences and the *contextual fluidity* of nostalgia and its impact both on the past and the present. Each theme is representative of the data collected and serves to highlight the abstract nature of nostalgia and the complexity of its impact on the participants.

### ***Accessibility of nostalgia***

Multiple participants referred to nostalgia as being a product of the past and how their experiences existed in the time in which they occurred. This had a number of implications on the participants experiences of nostalgia. Firstly, they highlighted how nostalgia was more than a way for them to access their own memories, but for them to share in nostalgic experience through others' accounts of a time before their lives and construct an idea of what it must have been like.

“I mean that people can be nostalgic about events in which they did not participate. You can have a thought about how your parents or grandparents used to see things...because of those stories, you then have a picture of those times...you then share in that cultural nostalgic perspective even though you may not have been in that particular environment” (Cedric, 34-39)

This indicates that nostalgia acts as a tool to access periods of time beyond his lifespan, thus the temporal potential of Cedric's lifeworld becomes significantly larger as a result of an internalised cultural dialogue between himself and his older peers. However, one could argue that this expansion of time by nostalgia is only limited to the lives of those around him and that, given the use of the word 'picture', there is an implication that those narratives are an unchanging snapshot of the time that is only available through their accounts.

Some participants appear not to have the same interpretation of nostalgia as being a means to gain a greater temporal understanding of the world around them. For some, positive nostalgic memories were inaccessible in the present and had a detrimental impact on the participants reflections on nostalgia.

“Yeah, well almost the opposite of therapeutic really...I was looking at that in a very self-critical way, like I would at my past self and be like why can't I be like that anymore, what's changed?” (Burial, 111-113)

“These things could be a really false friend, or a trap, if you feel like something, that the only thing you can relate to at that time that makes you feel good has passed, then I guess it must be very easy to find yourself in a situation where the prospect of moving forward through time and anything else is really daunting” (James, 112-115)

It would seem that nostalgia also has the capacity to create temporal distance between positive memories and their present nostalgic experience. This indicates

that there is the potential for nostalgia to romanticise experiences in the past that cannot be fully re-lived in the present. James also highlights the impact this has on “the prospect of moving forward” and indicates that this temporal inaccessibility can impede subsequent experiences and therefore extends his perception of nostalgia into the future. Burial’s reference to an inaccessible “past self” also suggests that there is an intersubjective component involved in his nostalgic lifeworld as he is internalising meaning from a social comparison with himself. It is important to note that the negative implications highlighted do not fully account for the data as the majority of accounts retain a positive interpretation of nostalgia. This interpretation is not entirely representative of accessibility, as other accounts emphasise the role of others in reducing this temporal isolation and making positive histories more available through cultural experience. The comparison to a ‘past self’ and reference to a ‘false friend’, combined with Cedric’s temporally defined “shared cultural perspective”, indicates there is some intersubjective consideration when they are drawing meaning from their experiences.

### ***A reciprocal dialogue between the personal and the cultural***

The majority of participants make some reference to nostalgia as having personal and cultural value. What is more notable is the way in which they communicate to influence the participants reflections on their experiences. There appears to be a bilateral relationship whereby nostalgic experience involves a cultural interaction becoming a personal experience and vice versa. There is a strong focus on nostalgia being a means to reinforce participants’ relationships with one another.

“That thing in itself you don’t care about...but something that you can all relate to that reinforces to you that you’re all part of this shared experience, whether that’s a shared experience of a family or a culture or I guess a time that feels really important” (James, 252-255)

This really emphasises the intersubjective component of James’ lifeworld and how it is reinforced by an internalisation of the cultural value of “shared experience”. Furthermore, the dismissive language suggests that nostalgia for him transcends specific cultural markers and is a more ongoing salient experience. Participants take these culturally prescribed experiences and internalise the positive elements into their own worldview.

“The more I think of it , the more useful a method of assessing how you relate to your own environment, your life, you have to look back on it with fondness to realise what things you like to do...using a bit of nostalgia might better guide you...you say you like this because you think you ought to like it, rather than having a proper reflection on what you have liked in the past” (Cedric, 134-142)

This captures how some participants apply their nostalgic experiences to their own conduct and suggests that being nostalgic becomes a learning opportunity where they can internalise positive experiences to shape their values that make up their identity and how they relate to their environment. Therefore, their intersubjective lifeworld’s facilitate the impact nostalgia has on their experiences, as socially defined interactions become intrapersonal lessons that are a precursor to some form of introspective development. The analytical tone indicates that he is able to be selective when reflecting on these experiences, and thus nostalgia does not necessarily always operate in the same way in terms of participants’ intersubjective interactions.

Nostalgia appears to also be an internally oriented experience, as some participants project elements of themselves onto nostalgic experience and use their own perceptions to draw meaning from their engagement with nostalgia.

“I suppose how people see it [Nostalgia] is going to be different for people with different value systems...I think it's gonna be flavoured a bit by what makes you tick yourself. I don't think talking about nostalgia is going to be the same for everybody” (JonQuil, 279-282)

This observation indicates that nostalgia moves from being a force that acts upon him in the form of internalised cultural experiences, to one that is interpreted based on his sense of self. This suggests that nostalgia can also become an outwardly oriented experience driven by his sense of identity in what appears to be a bilateral transaction of nostalgic experience. This begins to point towards the presence of factors that could influence participants' engagement with nostalgia.

### ***Contextual fluidity of nostalgia***

There was an overarching consensus in the data that the way participants engaged with nostalgia was mediated by their present or past context and this drove how meaning was derived from nostalgic experiences. Participants would reflect on their nostalgic experiences and how these may alter the reality of their memories.

“you remember things differently don't you, to how they might be. I can say oh my 20's were great...but actually the whole time I felt insecure, so I suppose if you're unhappy now maybe, you might look back and think it was better, but whether it was or not actually you don't know.” (Louise, 126-130)

“At the moment I don't feel particularly nostalgic in my day to day life...but when I'm going through worse phases in my life, the tendency for me is to look back to happier times where I guess I deflect from the present state” (Chemical, 294-297)

The participants emphasise how nostalgia is not truly representative of objective reality, in that they are viewing each experience from the contextual lifeworld they reside within at that given moment. They appear to judge their nostalgic experience on the criteria of their present circumstances and assess which elements of the nostalgic experience will be internalised in the present. There is also an indication in Chemical's account, that while his present context influences his nostalgic perceptions, the positive experiences of the past influence how he “deflects” from his circumstances in the present, thus suggesting a degree of reciprocal dependence whereby nostalgia depends on his interpretation from the present but also depends on it to improve his experience within in his present lifeworld. Therefore, it is difficult to be able to understand the ontology of nostalgia here as it shifts depending on the idiographic circumstances of the observer.

### **Discussion**

Participants in the current research experienced three main themes in their accounts, namely the accessibility, reciprocity and contextual fluidity of nostalgic experience. Participants either felt a sense of loss for a past that was inaccessible or they felt empowered by the shared acquisition of cultural histories through the transaction of nostalgic narratives between people. In terms of reciprocity, participants felt that nostalgic experience was both influenced by their core values and had an impact on how they constructed themselves based on internalisation of

cultural experiences. Third, participants highlighted how nostalgic experience was never a perfectly accurate representation of a particular memory, as it was influenced by their changing circumstances when constructing it in the present.

The findings of this research shed light on the self-continuity function of nostalgia. The extant research highlights the role nostalgia has in mediating ones past and present (Sedikides et al., 2016) or one's present with their future (e.g. Cheung et al., 2013). The role of reciprocity highlights how nostalgia can mediate these temporal relationships. Participants indicated how nostalgic experience shapes who they are and guides their worldview. These internalised values offer guidance for how they will engage with their environment in the future and thus the internally oriented function of nostalgia draws meaning from their past and is internalised in the present, and the outwardly oriented projection of these values are taken forward from the present. This is significant as it suggests that nostalgia transcends the temporal divide highlighted in the extant literature (e.g. Sedikides and Wildschut, 2016).

The reciprocity component of nostalgia in particular has really engaged with the diverging literature between relational (Sedikides et al., 2016; Wildschut et al., 2010; van Tilburg et al., 2018; Routledge et al., 2011) and personal (Hepper et al., 2012; Iyer and Jetten, 2011) functions of nostalgia (Baldwin and Landau, 2014). While they retain a notable ontological distinction, the data highlights how there is a bidirectional relationship between personally and culturally defined experiences of nostalgia, in that intersubjective interactions are interpreted and internalised individually and that each participant brought their own sense of self to socially defined nostalgic experience. This serves to synthesise these debates, by acknowledging that both categories of functions have individual value, but are better considered as being ontologically entangled as part of a more holistic and fluid conceptualisation of nostalgic experience.

The participants accounts of the shifting contexts in which they experience nostalgia sheds light on the epistemological assumptions of IPA research. Ashworth (2003) asserts that the components of an individual's lifeworld constitute fractions of the universal lifeworld, that is they represent different sources of meaning, but are part of an interrelated whole. This is a significant observation to justify the contextual fluidity of participants experiences. Although they outlined how they view nostalgic recollections through the lens of the present, one cannot assume that the temporal lens through which they draw meaning from their experiences is without other lifeworld components that make up the context they reside within when they experience these recollections. In other words, the context of these individuals is not adequately captured by a single temporal source of meaning, but it is a combination of the time, space and intersubjective, culturally defined environment they occupy that determines how they interpret each nostalgic experience. This highlights how one must exercise caution when using IPA, not to presuppose that individuals' experiences in their lifeworld's can only be understood and interpreted in terms of a divided epistemology of sub-components, but rather to view the person as the centre of their inter-related environment of meaning.

Moreover, literature advocates the position that there is no definitive way of performing qualitative research along rigid guidelines (Smith et al., 2009; Braun and Clarke, 2006), and thus this interpretation turns to a more abstract view of the lifeworld in terms of contextual fluidity. While it is apparent that an individual's context cannot be reduced down to one sub-component of the lifeworld, the

constantly changing circumstances of these individuals suggests that the context of the participant at any given time is a lifeworld in its own right, rather than only influencing the pre-existing one, given that participants changing contexts in their accounts rarely involve a single exclusive element of their lifeworld. If one is to assume that IPA has a more gestalt epistemology, then it would be important to consider this in terms of the scaffolding component of socio-cultural development. If an individual's zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978) facilitates growth with the help of others, future research should consider how the lifeworld (Husserl, 1936), both as separate fractions and as a cohesive whole, could substantiate the mechanics of cultural development using a lifeworld epistemology in different situations.

The fluctuating context of individuals accounts lends itself to Vygotsky's embracing of the non-linear and disruptive nature of human development (Vygotsky, 1978), as the shifting elements of nostalgic experience cannot be defined in terms of a straightforward ontology. The reciprocity of nostalgic experience engages with the core tenet of Vygotskian theorising, as the role of culture is pivotal in shaping the internalised self-perceptions from their experiences. In terms of accessibility, particularly how participants recalled the potential to access a past beyond their lives, highlights how a social experience, the communication of nostalgic narratives, is internalised to shape the participants cultural understanding of that particular nostalgic memory. Furthermore, this research goes one step further and highlights how it is not just particular memories and momentous events that are the focus of nostalgic experience (van Tilburg et al., 2018), but how participants felt that their past had shaped who they are in the present. This is of considerable importance as it demonstrates how individuals are reflecting on and incorporating their nostalgic experiences into their own identities, much like the internalisation of social behaviour outlined in Vygotsky's socio-cultural approach.

Given the often culturally defined experiences and intersubjective components of participant recollections, the conceptual scope of this study does not allow for any meticulous consideration of the specific elements of cultural experience and how they interact with individuals. Therefore, it may be appropriate to maintain a Vygotskian framework but adopt a more discursive methodology, as a more fine-grained approach would perhaps uncover some of the mechanisms that are operating in participants intersubjective experiences and may suitably address the culturally bound experiences in a more situated epistemology (Wiggins and Potter, 2007). An ethnographic methodology may further enhance this by adopting a more insider approach, as ethnography aims to understand the culture of a group or individual from the perspective of its members (Tedlock, 2000). This may facilitate a more immersive understanding of how nostalgia operates within a particular cultural environment, which was unachievable in the current research given the culturally and demographically diverse sample.

The findings of this research bring to light some significant theoretical implications. The bilateral implications of the themes and fluidity of participants experiences appear to indicate that nostalgia is a recursive experience, which goes a step beyond Vygotskian conceptualisations of development. Nostalgia involves a constantly changing, bidirectional experience between the past and the present that is regularly updated by the consistently altered state of being of individuals in their daily lives. The way in which nostalgia has manifested itself in the data as having

such an evasive ontology suggests that it may be appropriate to use the phenomena as a lens through which, one can assess the credibility of lifespan developmental theories in understanding the role of nostalgia in our development.

Given the recursive nature of nostalgia, one can begin to understand nostalgia as an ongoing process of small repeated stages of individual nostalgic experience. This implicates the role of Eriksonian stage theory (Erikson, 1950) as there is some indication that nostalgia occurs in micro-stages of individual experience. However, it is important to only consider such a theory at its most basic level of acknowledging the potential existence of stages, as the diversity of nostalgic experience does not fit with the universally defined, absolute stages of Erikson's approach to development. Nor does it fit with Eriksonian stages as having a start point and an end point, as nostalgia is recursive and fits with Vygotskian theory as being an ongoing process and not confined to sealed stages (Marginson and Dang, 2016).

While the ambiguity of nostalgia can be accounted for by Vygotsky and can explain the internally oriented function of cultural nostalgic experience, it only captures one direction that nostalgia can operate. Vygotsky emphasised the function of culture as a source of socially prescribed behaviour that is internalised into personal conduct (Vygotsky, 1978), but does little more than acknowledge the way in which development can be influenced by the identity and value system of the individual. This is a crucial component of nostalgic experience according to the recollections in this data, that is nostalgia serves to influence how we facilitate our own development, and highlights a gap in Vygotskian theorising as being recursive but only in one, inwardly oriented direction and does not therefore, fully capture the bidirectional essence of nostalgic experience.

One must turn to other theories of development to address this gap in understanding. While Piagetian theory (Piaget, 1952) does little to encapsulate nostalgic experience on as holistic a level as Vygotsky, in its focus on cognitive development and commitment to the transition through stages as opposed to the ongoing acquisition of skills and knowledge (Piaget, 1964; Fox and Riconscente, 2008), there is one component that serves to fill the gap in the Vygotskian perspective. Piaget emphasises the role we play in acting upon our world and interpreting the response as a means to develop our relationship with our environment. This reflects participants' accounts of being driven by their value systems and points towards an outwardly oriented direction of nostalgia as being influenced by our inner identity. This is important to consider, as it highlights how some components of nostalgia can be understood in terms of particular theories but to consider the impact of nostalgia as a cohesive whole, it may only be appropriate to navigate between different theoretical understandings than attempt to force nostalgia into one ontological position. Having considered this in light of the current research and in relation to the extant literature, one cannot truly advocate for the adequacy of lifespan developmental theory in conceptualising a holistic ontology of nostalgia. This is an important conclusion to make as it suggests that nostalgia as an object of study is akin to William James' (1890) metaphor of the 'stream of consciousness', in that nostalgia is fluid and meanders through an ontological river and attaches in part to the theories of knowledge it encounters along the way. This is a staunch reminder that psychological enquiry should refrain from understanding phenomena in terms of separate brackets of thought and instead celebrate the overlapping and complex nature of human experience.

## **Reflexivity**

It was important to acknowledge my own position in relation to a study of nostalgia and be able to bracket off any experiences that could influence my interpretations (Husserl, 1931). However, it is not fully possible to do this as it would hinder my ability to adopt a curious and reflective perspective (LeVasseur, 2003). I was aware of my pre-existing knowledge as part of a wider prototypical understanding of nostalgia as a psychological construct, in that my understanding makes up a broader view containing elements that are more or less representative of nostalgia (Hepper et al., 2012). This prototype would have an impact on the way I engaged with and interpreted the data (Mervis and Rosch, 1981), that maintained scientific rigour and still facilitated a rich understanding of my participants narratives. By including a question asking participants to express their understanding of nostalgia, I was better able to adopt their prototypical understanding of their experiences.

In terms of epistemological reflexivity (Mauthner and Doucet, 2003), Wagstaff et al. (2014) highlight a necessity to be reflective about how themes are developed and I found myself struggling to ignore some of the emergent themes that did not contribute to the final report. Although they may not have been appropriate given the focus of the research, there was data that was of value to some participants and it raised concerns that I would not be justifying their experiences if I did not acknowledge them in the research. My position as a researcher felt conflicted, given that the idiographic focus of IPA (Smith and Osborn, 2008) contradicts the more generalising feel of developing themes to represent all six participants and so I was careful to not feel like I was forcing their accounts into themes that would suit the scope of this research.

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