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Nostalgia

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Nostalgia can be both beneficial and detrimental to our well being depending on the circumstance. Nostalgia is a sentimental longing or wistful affection for the past, typically for a period or place with happy personal associations. I often find myself to be nostalgic especially when attempting to cope with my mental health. I personally find that sometimes this is helpful for me. Oftentimes though, I find that using nostalgia as a coping mechanism only makes things worse. For others, nostalgia could be beneficial or detrimental depending on the person and the situation as some individuals are more cynical and some see the world as a glass half full. It essentially depends on how one views things.

First, let's talk about the detrimental effects of nostalgia. In her article, "Beware Social Nostalgia", Stephanie Coontz describes some of the dangers of nostalgia. She states that "nostalgia can distort our understanding of the world in dangerous ways, making us needlessly negative about our current situation". People will often reminisce on the good parts of the past which in turn may cause them to view the present more negatively. I personally have experienced this. I tend to reminisce about the past, the good times, a time where my mental health was better, etcetera. Unfortunately, I find this to be somewhat detrimental and it further exacerbates the declining state of my mental health. Coontz describes a few other detriments of nostalgia. She explains how "present-day nostalgia involves homesickness for a period of time or a way of life that is gone for good". This essentially means that although feeling nostalgic is okay to an extent, constantly dwelling on the past or being constantly nostalgic can be calamitous. Koh Ewe also explores some of the negative

effects of nostalgia in her article titled, "On TikTok, People are already Nostalgic for 2020". She talks about the pandemic and the effects it had on people. Many people were negatively affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. Koh Ewe's article talks about how TikTok users are already nostalgic for the 2020 era of the pandemic. She states, "the past two years have been such a whirlwind that some are already feeling nostalgic for the early days of quarantine". The past couple of years have been a rollercoaster of uncertainty, frustration, sadness, and many other complex emotions and different people have different ways of coping. For example, many turned to social media platforms such as TikTok because "in all of the chaos. . . it really felt like a safe space for people to share their stories, both traumatic and positive" (Ewe). While this is not necessarily a bad thing, some have started romanticizing "better times" in the first lockdown. This is destructive in many ways. One way is that people tend to retain the positive memories while forgetting the negative ones especially when feeling nostalgic. This is harmful because people are romanticizing unprecedented times. They're reminiscing on a time where people were suffering and everyone was isolated from each other. While I understand the sentiment of feeling nostalgic for the earlier periods of the pandemic, I am also aware of the negative effects it had on me. I tend to be a pretty introverted person so the thought of lockdown seemed great to me at first. However, I did not realize how mentally isolating it would be. I like being alone but I do not like feeling lonely, and quarantine caused me to feel extremely lonely. Not only was I unable to see my friends and some of my family members, the outlets I had when I was doing terribly mentally had also been taken away. There was a period during the beginning of quarantine where I felt completely alone and completely hopeless. Reminiscing on that time makes me a bit sad knowing that I had hit rock bottom and had essentially given up on everything. Nostalgia, in this case, is damaging to my well being because it makes me feel upset knowing what I went through and how much I struggled. It also sparks the feeling of fear that I could fall back into that place of helplessness and despair again. There is also the fear that once I do fall back into that place, I will not be able to come back out again. Melancholia is just one example of the potential dangers of nostalgia. If an individual is more cynical, nostalgia can be a detrimental thing.

On the contrary, nostalgia can also be something positive. While Stephanie Coontz describes some of the dangers of nostalgia, she also explains how nostalgia can be a good thing. She explains how there was a study done on men who had very different childhoods because of their fathers' poor parenting. It was then explained how "their unhappy memories became a guide for avoiding bad behavior rather than an excuse for it" (Coontz). This demonstrates one way nostalgia can be beneficial. The men have looked back upon their maltreatment and, instead of following in those patterns, they realized the effects and worked to overcome and change. A lot of times, people who have been abused or mistreated, especially in childhood, tend to continue the cycle. However, these men were able to break the cycle as well as develop a better course for their own parenting. Koh Ewe also shines a light on some of the positive effects of nostalgia. She demonstrates how although there are many negative aspects of the Covid-19 pandemic, there are also some positive aspects. She states, "people are still kind of processing their own trauma, while still being able to celebrate the good things that happened". This essentially means that although people are thinking about the bad things that happened, there is still gratitude for all the good things that occurred. This is something that I can relate to personally. While reminiscing about the early days of quarantine sparks negative emotions, the positive emotions still surface among them. I am grateful that I was able to come out of that extremely poor mentally state. I have gratitude that I was able to spend more time with my family and that I had a good support system when I needed it most. I am also appreciative that I was able to feel these complex emotions, better understand myself, and grow as a person.

To conclude, nostalgia can have a positive or negative impact on an individual. It all just depends on how they choose to view things.

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