

Nostalgia could be linked to feeling left out

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Sometimes you just want to watch a rerun of your favorite old TV show or eat a favorite childhood treat. Well, a new study led by two researchers from the W. P. Carey School of Business at Arizona State University shows that deep down, you may be making those nostalgic choices because you're really trying to fulfill a temporary need to belong.

“Through five experiments we showed that a big motivation to choose nostalgic, rather than contemporary, products is the need to belong,” explains W. P. Carey School of Business marketing graduate student Katherine Loveland, the study's primary author. “Whenever a situation arises in which people feel a heightened need to belong to a group or to feel socially connected, they will show a similar higher preference for nostalgic products.”

Loveland worked with Associate Professor Naomi Mandel of the W. P. Carey School of Business and Associate Professor Dirk Smeesters of Erasmus University in the Netherlands on this study. Their findings are detailed in the *Journal of Consumer Research*.

In one of the experiments, more than 100 college students were asked to play an animated ball-tossing game. Students who felt they had been excluded during the ball-tossing game subsequently felt a greater need to belong. Then, the students were able to choose between nostalgic and non-nostalgic brands of various products, including cookies, crackers, shower gel, soup and candy. Those who had been excluded chose significantly more nostalgic products than the others.

Another experiment showed similar results with older participants, as well. However, simply choosing the nostalgic products didn't necessarily fulfill the excluded participants' need to belong. Therefore, in one of the final experiments, the researchers actually gave the participants nostalgic cookies to eat.

“Once the previously excluded participants ate a nostalgic cookie, their need to belong was reduced back to the same level as those who had not been excluded,” says Loveland. “Overall, we found study participants continued to pursue the goal to belong both after feeling excluded and even after making hypothetical nostalgic-product choices, but individuals must actually consume a nostalgic product to satisfy the belongingness goal.”

The researchers may conduct future studies to determine whether this only applies to true nostalgic products or also to the retro-styled products that are so popular now – from newly redesigned car models like the Ford Mustang and Dodge Challenger, to new movies and TV shows based on earlier versions of “The A-Team,” “Hawaii Five-O” and even nostalgic toys like Transformers.

More information: To read the full journal article on the study, go to www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/full/10.1086/653043

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