

**Examining the Effects of Nostalgia on Authenticity, Empathy, and Meaning in Life
Among Counseling Students**

by

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Abstract

This study examined the effects of nostalgia, a bittersweet emotion that is felt as a person reminisces on cherished autobiographical memories on master's-level counseling students' authenticity, empathy, and perceptions of meaning in life. Previous research has shown that nostalgia has self, social, and existential capacities. In this respect, previous studies have reported that nostalgia can promote authenticity, empathy, and meaning in life. Focusing on these objectives, this online research study randomly assigned 132 master's-level counseling students from CACREP-accredited programs across the U.S. to either a nostalgia group or an ordinary memories group. To induce nostalgia, the "The Event Reflection Task" was used, in which participants in the nostalgia group were asked to reflect and briefly write about a nostalgic memory, while participants in the ordinary memories group were asked to do so in connection with an ordinary memory. Following a manipulation check, in which participants in the nostalgia group reportedly felt more nostalgic than those in the ordinary memories group, all participants were asked to complete the Authenticity Scale, the Questionnaire of Cognitive and Affective Empathy, and the Meaning in Life Questionnaire. One-way ANOVA tests showed there were no significant differences in ratings of authenticity, empathy, and meaning in life between the nostalgia and the ordinary memory groups. This study's findings contribute to the counselor education literature and provide insightful implications for future research on nostalgia within the counseling profession.

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Chapter 1. Introduction and Literature Review

Autobiographical memory reflects a unique combination of life periods and exclusive occurrences that ultimately portray a personally meaningful story detailing a person's past, present, and expected future (Fivush, 2019). Characterized by culture, autobiographical memory is influenced by a person's physical environment, perceptions of self, language, social interactions, as well as emotional and behavioral customs (Ross & Wang, 2010). Moreover, people reflect on autobiographical memories to refine their self-concept, sustain social connections, and acquire guidance for the future (Bluck, 2003; Bluck & Alea, 2009). In fact, Adler (1929, 1931) posited that a person's early memories, regardless of accuracy, are rich with meaning and offer clues about one's lifestyle, the latter of which is characterized by an individual's unique personality, interpersonal relationships, approaches (i.e., functional or dysfunctional) for navigating difficulties in life, and their distinct goal of superiority.

According to Adler (1929, 1931), memories are never randomly selected; rather, a person will recall memories that are relevant to present circumstances. Therefore, early memories offer a unique means for conceptualizing and understanding clients' experiences, thereby providing unique perspectives about a person's current life circumstances, worldview, interpersonal connections, sources of motivation, strengths and weaknesses, and coping methods (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956; Clark, 2002, 2013, 2018; Kopp, 1998; Maniaci et al., 1998; Shifron, 2020). Moreover, three types of early memories can emerge during Adlerian therapy (Kern et al., 2004): (a) *uncomfortable, traumatic, or discouraging* memories, which involve uneasiness or distress; (b) *ambiguous or confusing* memories that are characterized by misunderstandings or disappointments; and (c) *enjoyable* memories, which entail elements of happiness and comfort.

Congruently, existential psychology regards memories as signifying things (e.g., social connections, times of hardship, moments of excitement) that are unique and meaningful to individuals (May, 1953). For instance, practitioners of logotherapy maintain that people obtain meaning via constructive actions, unique social encounters, and the attitude one assumes during inevitable hardships (Frankl, 1946/2006). In this respect, memories encapsulate the meanings one associates with these experiences (May, 1953).

Nostalgia, a bittersweet emotion that is linked to reminiscences of cherished autobiographical memories (Hepper et al., 2014; Sedikides & Wildschut, 2018; Turner & Stanley, 2021; Wilson, 2005), is defined in *The New Oxford Dictionary of English* as “a sentimental longing or wistful affection for the past” (Pearsall, 1998, p. 1266). Triggered by social and sensory stimuli (Wildschut et al., 2006), nostalgia involves self-awareness, temporal consciousness (i.e., the ability to reflect on the past and articulate the future), and symbolic thinking (e.g., metaphors, abstract references) to convey personal experiences (Routledge, 2023). Experimentally induced by asking people to reflect and briefly write about either a nostalgic or an ordinary memory (Sedikides et al., 2015b), nostalgia has self, social, and existential capacities (Routledge, 2016, 2023; Wildschut & Sedikides, 2020) that are consistent across cultures (Sedikides & Wildschut, 2022). For instance, previous research has shown that nostalgia can foster self-continuity (e.g., Sedikides et al., 2015a), support authenticity (e.g., Baldwin et al., 2015; Kelley et al., 2022), bolster social connectedness and ambitions to achieve relationship goals (Abeyta et al., 2015), elevate empathy (e.g., Juhl et al., 2020; Zhou et al., 2012), and diminish prejudice (e.g., Gravani et al., 2018). Nostalgia can also boost self-esteem and optimism (Cheung et al., 2016; Cheung et al., 2013), bolster inspiration (Stephan et al., 2015), enhance creativity (van Tilburg et al., 2015; Ye et al., 2013), promote spirituality (Biskas et al.,

2022), relieve distress during bereavement (Reid et al., 2021), and support meaning in life (e.g., Abeyta & Juhl, 2023; Routledge et al., 2012; van Tilburg et al., 2019).

While social and cognitive theorists have accrued these and other findings that illuminate nostalgia's constructive effects, it appears that researchers in counselor education have yet to experimentally induce and examine how this multifaceted emotion may contribute to counseling objectives. Given that nostalgia is a profoundly social emotion, as nostalgic narratives typically revolve around meaningful interactions with close others (Wildschut et al., 2006), it will be advantageous to evaluate its effects within the context of counselor education, a profession that prioritizes healthy relationships and holistic wellness among clients and practitioners (American Counseling Association [ACA] *Code of Ethics*, 2014).

Because nostalgia can promote self-continuity (e.g., Zou et al., 2018), authenticity (e.g., Kelley et al., 2022), social connections (e.g., Abeyta et al., 2015), empathy and helpful behavior (e.g., Juhl et al., 2020), and meaning in life (e.g., van Tilburg et al., 2013), it will be advantageous to examine its effects on counseling students' authenticity, empathy, and perceptions of meaning in life. If nostalgia is found to increase counseling students' authenticity, empathy, and perceptions of meaning in life, it can be used as an experiential technique to strengthen counseling students' professional competencies. Moreover, this study will align with previous studies that have focused on the essentiality of authenticity (e.g., Ray et al., 2021; Yang et al., 2023) and empathy (e.g., Bell, 2018; Cole, 2022; Ngo et al., 2022) among counseling students. Previous studies have likewise investigated meaning in life among counselors, revealing connections between meaning in life and life satisfaction (Degges-White & Stoltz, 2015), as well as counselors' professional endeavors (Russo-Netzer et al., 2020).

This study will evaluate the effects of nostalgia on counseling students' authenticity, empathy, and meaning in life. Doing so will allow for insight to be gained about the extent to which nostalgic memories may serve as a therapeutic resource for bolstering counseling students' authenticity, empathy, and sense of meaning in life. This can be advantageous for both counselors-in-training and clients, as previous research and scholars have highlighted that increased authenticity, empathy, and meaning in life can enhance the roles and clinical procedures of counselors-in-training during counseling endeavors (e.g., Garner et al., 2017; Hurst & Prescott, 2022; Ngo et al., 2022; Ray et al., 2021; Rogers, 1957, 1961, 1980). Furthermore, findings from this study can provide insight for future studies on nostalgia in counselor education.

Experiencing Nostalgia

Originally deemed a medical disease, Swiss medical student Johannes Hofer (1688/1934, pp. 380-381) combined two Greek words – *nostos* (i.e., “return to the native land”) and *algos* (i.e., “suffering or grief”) – to coin the term *nostalgia* in his dissertation, comparing it with the German word *heimweh* and the French term *maladie du pays* that denote homesickness. Centuries later, nostalgia underwent much conceptual broadening, resulting with its transitioning from severe homesickness to the “bittersweet” emotional experience that it is generally associated with in modern times (Batcho, 2013, 2020; Routledge, 2016, 2023). For instance, lay conceptions of nostalgia include the past, memories, happiness, remembering, social relationships, and longing (Hepper et al., 2012). These lay conceptions align with those reported by Davis (1979): “warm, old times, childhood, and yearning” (p. 4).

According to Wildschut et al. (2006), nostalgic memories entail more positive than negative affect, and they characteristically focus on oneself as a protagonist involved in social

interactions and personally relevant events. Wildschut et al. also reported that nostalgic memories can incorporate elements of redemption (e.g., victories over difficulties) if negative experiences had also occurred during a recollected event. Furthermore, as people age, they more frequently engage in nostalgia, likely due to the accumulation of more life experiences (Turner & Stanley, 2021).

Triggers of nostalgia include negative and positive affect, social interactions, sensory cues (e.g., music, scents), tangible items (e.g., clothing), anniversaries, and meaningful settings like a person's hometown (Wildschut et al., 2006). In discussing how nostalgia signifies happier and more familiar times, Davis (1979) asserted that it also surfaces within "the context of present fears, discontents, anxieties, or uncertainties" (p. 34), factors of which can jeopardize the continuity of identity. In fact, empirical research has since obtained evidence that self-discontinuity can trigger nostalgia (Sedikides et al., 2015a).

To induce nostalgia, researchers generally define it before asking participants to reflect and briefly write about a nostalgic experience; meanwhile, control participants are generally asked to do similarly with ordinary memories (e.g., Layous et al., 2021). Other researchers have relied on sensory triggers to prompt nostalgia (e.g., music; Michels-Ratliff & Ennis, 2016; food labels; Zhou et al., 2019). These approaches have enabled social scientists to examine nostalgia's effects on a variety of variables, resulting with findings that have illuminated nostalgia's self, social, and existential functions (Routledge, 2016, 2023; Wildschut & Sedikides, 2020). Each of these unique functions will now be addressed.

Self-Oriented Capacities of Nostalgia

Due to our considerable capacities for self-awareness, people can engage in mental time travel, thereby enabling unique examinations of the past to inform the present, in addition to

bolstering formulations of self-relevant objectives for idealized futures (Routledge, 2016). Because nostalgia is associated with meaningful autobiographical memories, its effects significantly align with a variety of self-oriented factors (Routledge, 2016). As previous research has shown, these factors include people's psychological wellness (e.g., Baldwin & Landau, 2014; Cheung et al., 2016; Kelly et al., 2022; Zhou et al., 2022). For instance, Zhou et al. (2022) found that nostalgia alleviated loneliness during the COVID-19 pandemic by elevating happiness among participants from China, the U.S., and the United Kingdom. Zhou et al., after conducting subsequent experiments within the same study, also found that this effect instantly followed induced nostalgia and could extend approximately 2 days after some participants received a nostalgia-inducing booster (i.e., a prompt to recall the nostalgic memory they had reminisced on during the previous induction).

Additionally, research has shown that nostalgia can raise self-esteem and optimism (Cheung et al., 2016; Cheung et al., 2013), bolster creativity (Ye et al., 2013) and boost psychological growth (Baldwin & Landau, 2014). Furthermore, nostalgia can offset self-discontinuity and reestablish self-continuity (Milligan, 2003; Sedikides et al., 2015a; Wilson, 2005; Zou et al., 2018), the latter of which refers to a person's outlook of a coherent alignment between their past and present self (Davis, 1979).

According to Davis (1979), nostalgia supports self-continuity by nurturing favorable perspectives toward past selves, in addition to removing negative or dishonorable factors from memories. Lastly, Davis explained how nostalgia mends or reorients unwanted features of former selves. By allowing for comparisons to be made between former and present selves, Davis asserted that these actions serve to promote a sense of self-growth. Congruently, a study by Sedikides et al. (2015a) revealed that the more a person felt their sense of self was threatened

due to negative events (e.g., divorce), the more likely they were to reflect on nostalgic memories to offset such threats. Moreover, Sedikides et al. found that nostalgia, in comparison to ordinary autobiographical reflections, boosted self-continuity. These researchers further highlighted how nostalgia maintained this effect on self-continuity above and beyond the positive affect that stemmed from reflections on positive autobiographical memories. More recently, Zou et al. (2018) examined repatriation and nostalgia for a host culture among 782 international teachers from 41 different countries, who had completed full-time teaching placements in U.S. schools before returning home. According to Zou et al., repatriates' nostalgia for the host culture was positively related to their self-continuity, signifying a link between their past and present sense of identity. Moreover, Zou et al. reported how a positive connection between nostalgia for a host culture and psychological adjustment (i.e., job satisfaction, approach motivation, self-esteem) was mediated by self-continuity.

Hong et al.'s (2022) findings indicate that nostalgia fosters global self-continuity (GSC), or a congruent outlook of connections among a person's past, present, and future sense of identity. In this respect, Hong et al. focused on whether nostalgia could support GSC via narratives highlighting meaningful life transitions, associative links (e.g., actions, feelings, thoughts, objects), and a stable sense of self. These researchers found that meaningful life transition narratives mediated the relationship between nostalgia and GSC, while associative links intermittently mediated this relationship, and stability had no mediating impact. Lastly, a study by van Tilburg et al. (2019) showed that self-continuity elevates meaning in life, a connection that is bolstered through nostalgia's ability to nurture social connectedness, defined as the degree to which a person perceives that they share intimate and meaningful connections with others (O'Rourke & Sidani, 2017).

Compared with reflections on positive or ordinary events, nostalgia promotes a greater sense of authenticity (Stephan et al., 2012), the latter of which signifies a person's genuine sense of self and comprises four elements: *awareness*, *unbiased processing*, *behavior*, and *relational orientation* (Goldman & Kernis, 2002). In this respect, Goldman and Kernis (2002) inform that the *awareness* element consists of the extent in which one recognizes and trusts their self-oriented cognitions, feelings, personal objectives, and aspirations, while *unbiased processing* pertains to one's objective processing of their positive and negative characteristics. Moreover, Goldman and Kernis explain that the third element of authenticity, *behavior*, refers to the degree in which one's actions align with their personal values, needs, and partialities, while a person's *relational orientation* reflects their honesty and sincerity within interpersonal relationships.

Following Stephan et al.'s (2012) findings, researchers have continued to evaluate nostalgia's influence on authenticity. For instance, Lenton et al. (2013, Study 3) found that nostalgia and positive mood surfaced among participants who reminisced on experiences they deemed as aligning with their authentic selves, as compared with those who reminisced on inauthentic experiences. Lenton et al.'s research also showed that people were motivated to undergo experiences of authenticity and evade inauthenticity (Study 1), and authentic narratives tended to reflect themes such as fun, familiarity, contemplation, achievement, and sociality (Study 2). In discussing limitations of their research, Lenton et al. noted how their participants represented Western samples and recommended that future studies involve participants who represent non-Western backgrounds.

Obtaining data from U.S. and Chinese participants, Kelley et al. (2022, Study 1, $N = 611$; Study 2, $N = 777$) found that nostalgia (as examined via trait assessments and experimental induction) elevated authenticity and psychological well-being, in which authenticity mediated

the connection between nostalgia and psychological well-being. Additionally, among Western samples, Kelley et al. found that authenticity causally influenced psychological well-being (Study 3, $N = 596$, U.S. participants; Study 4, $N = 414$, U.K. participants).

Similarly, Baldwin et al. (2015) evaluated nostalgia's association with people's intrinsic self-concept. In this respect, Baldwin et al. found that state nostalgia (as evaluated via an assessment) was connected to greater authenticity and less extrinsic self-focus, or one's apprehension about meeting norms set by extrinsic principles or values (Study 1). Likewise, Baldwin et al. found that experimentally induced nostalgia (vs. reflections on ordinary life events) augmented perceptions of past self-authenticity, the latter of which mediated the association between nostalgia and lower extrinsic self-focus (Study 2). Nostalgia-induced participants in Baldwin et al.'s research also generated more intrinsic self-descriptions, and fewer everyday self-descriptions, in comparison to participants who reflected on ordinary life events (Study 3).

Additionally, Baldwin et al. (2015, Study 4) found that participants who reflected on a nostalgic event endorsed higher feelings of nostalgia and positive affect, an effect that weakened following prompts to consider external factors that affected their actions within the recalled event (e.g., adhering to the expectations of others). Baldwin et al. also found that participants who received reminders of current difficulties they encounter in expressing their intrinsic selves endorsed lower intrinsic self-expression and higher negative affect, resulting with participants experiencing a boost in nostalgia (Study 5). In fact, participants in Baldwin et al.'s research who were prompted to consider current difficulties in expressing their intrinsic selves endorsed lower subjective well-being and intrinsic self-expression when the opportunity to reflect on a nostalgic experience was not given (Study 6). Comparatively, Baldwin et al. reported that nostalgia

diminished these negative effects on subject well-being and intrinsic self-expression among participants who were given the opportunity to engage in nostalgia. Lastly, while controlling for Big Five personality dimension and mood, Baldwin et al. found that trait nostalgia, or the extent to which one typically feels nostalgic about the past, was positively associated with well-being and intrinsic self-expression (Study 7). In highlighting implications from their research findings, Baldwin et al. posited that people can use nostalgia to convey their intrinsic sense of selves, particularly when one encounters conditions or instances that hinder intrinsic self-expression.

Nostalgia's ability to reinforce self-continuity (e.g., Zou et al., 2018) and authenticity (e.g., Kelley et al., 2022) offers unique considerations for counseling, particularly among counseling students. Because counseling students are preparing to transition from graduate students to professionals, they are arguably experiencing a sense of self-continuity. In this respect, counseling students are in the process of integrating their emerging roles as professional counselors into their self-concept, thereby adding a unique dimension to their perceptions and understandings of who they are, and what constitutes a genuine sense of self. Therefore, the effects of nostalgia can be useful in reinforcing authenticity among counseling students as they progressively become professional counselors, roles that prioritize empathy, meaningfulness, and therapeutic alliances (Rogers, 1961, 1980; Yalom, 1980).

Consequently, the more a counselor embraces their genuine sense of self within counseling relationships, the more likely clients will embrace therapeutic growth (Rogers, 1957, 1961, 1980). Additionally, the more a counselor authentically demonstrates unconditional positive regard and empathy toward clients, the more a counselor can nurture therapeutic relationships that inspire clients to be their genuine selves (Rogers, 1957, 1961, 1980). In this respect, nostalgia's capacities to promote self-continuity (e.g., Sedikides et al., 2015a) and

authenticity (e.g., Baldwin et al., 2015) can influence counseling students' sense of genuineness. Enhanced genuineness, in turn, can positively affect counseling students' ability to establish a unique sense of congruency in therapeutic relationships (Rogers, 1957, 1961, 1980).

Social Capacities of Nostalgia

Given that people are social creatures, we are motivated to seek and develop unique connections with others (e.g., family, friends, colleagues, professionals) for a variety of reasons (e.g., nurturance, companionship, employment, health care). Congruently, nostalgia promotes people's needs for, and pursuits of, social bonding (Abeyta et al. 2015; Hussain & Alhabash, 2020; Routledge, 2016, 2023).

Fundamentally social (Juhl et al., 2021; Routledge, 2016, 2023; van Tilburg et al., 2019), and able to encourage social connectedness following experimental inductions (e.g., Hepper et al., 2012) or sensory prompts (e.g., scents; Reid et al., 2015), nostalgia can enhance intentions to embark on relationship goals and manage relationship difficulties (Abeyta et al., 2015). Congruently, research indicates that nostalgia can promote helpful behavior. For example, after writing about nostalgic autobiographical memories, Chinese undergraduate students were significantly more willing to help a graduate student pick up pencils they believed to have been accidentally spilled than participants who wrote about ordinary autobiographical memories (Stephen et al., 2014, Study 5). Likewise, Chinese undergraduate and graduate students who viewed nostalgia-oriented charity flyers were significantly more likely to engage in charitable behavior than participants who viewed ordinary charity flyers (Zhou et al., 2012).

Concomitantly, nostalgia can encourage help-seeking behavior, a relationship that is nurtured by social connectedness (Juhl et al., 2021). In fact, Hussain and Alhabash's (2020) public relations study showed that depressed students who watched a nostalgia-oriented public

service announcement (PSA) highlighting a campus counseling center endorsed significantly greater positive emotions and intentions to seek help than participants who watched a non-nostalgic PSA. The nostalgic PSA featured nostalgic images and referenced aspects of familiarity, life changes, and a perspective that good times will surface again. Moreover, Hussain and Alhabash noted how both PSAs concluded in positive manners that encouraged viewers to pursue therapeutic assistance from professional counselors, and the greater positive emotions endorsed among participants who were exposed to the nostalgic PSA were significant after controlling for family or friends with mental illness, magnitude of depression, stigma, and previous counseling experience.

Nostalgia can also foster empathy toward others in need of support (Juhl & Biskas, 2023; Juhl et al., 2020; Zhou et al., 2012). For instance, among young and older adults, as well as children, nostalgia proneness has been shown to be positively associated with affective empathy, including greater likelihoods that one will engage in prosocial (i.e., charitable) behavior (Juhl et al., 2020). Additionally, Juhl et al. found that the connection between nostalgia proneness and affective empathy was mediated by attachment security, while attachment security and affective empathy serially mediated the connection between nostalgia proneness and prosocial behavior.

In evaluating nostalgia, empathy, and prejudiced reactions, Cheung et al. (2017) found that greater nostalgia proneness was positively associated with concern about acting prejudiced toward African Americans, and the connection between nostalgia proneness and prejudice expression was mediated by concern about acting prejudiced. Moreover, Cheung et al. reported that nostalgia proneness was positively related to greater ratings of empathy, and empathy mediated a connection between greater motivation to regulate prejudice and subsequent decreases in expressing prejudice. Although empathy was not addressed in Gravani et al.'s

(2018) study that involved 99 Greek participants, their findings are worth noting in highlighting nostalgia's effects on prejudiced attitudes. Compared with participants who reflected on an ordinary interaction they had with a close in-group immigrant, participants in Gravani et al.'s study who reflected on a nostalgic memory involving a close in-group immigrant endorsed stronger trust, social connectedness, inclusion, and enhanced general attitudes toward immigrants. In discussing their study's implications, Gravani et al. noted that their findings can be used to enrich psychoeducational approaches for reducing prejudice.

Focusing again on empathy, Zhou et al. (2012) examined connections among nostalgia, empathy, and prosocial actions (i.e., charitable intentions and behavior). According to Zhou et al., participants who reflected on nostalgic memories (as opposed to ordinary memories) endorsed increased intentions to engage in charitable behavior, and empathy mediated this relationship. Zhou et al. also reported that these findings were consistent across diverse samples (i.e., 26 nationalities) and various charities. Furthermore, Zhou et al. found that Chinese graduate and undergraduate participants who were exposed to a charity appeal featuring nostalgic cues donated more money than participants who were exposed to an appeal that featured future-based cues.

Given its capacity to promote empathy and prosocial behavior (Juhl et al., 2020) and social connectedness (Abeyta et al., 2015), it will be beneficial to examine the extent of which nostalgia affects counseling students' empathic understanding toward others in need. If nostalgia, as a social resource, significantly increases counseling students' empathy, then they will be better equipped to discern, process, and address clients' feelings and perspectives about presenting concerns. In this respect, enhanced empathy can promote clients' outlooks of feeling understood, thereby enhancing the quality of care, clients' willingness to engage in therapeutic

explorations, and the likelihoods that constructive outcomes will result from counseling (Rogers, 1957, 1961, 1980). Concomitantly, nostalgia's capacity as a meaningful resource (e.g., Routledge et al., 2016; Sedikides & Wildschut, 2018) offers more unique implications for counseling, which will be discussed in the following section.

Existential Capacities of Nostalgia

People yearn and strive for meaning in life (Frankl, 1946/2006; May, 1953; Yalom, 1980). These yearnings and strivings signify one's desire to obtain a unique sense of purpose in life and validate their existence. Congruently, due to its association with cherished memories, nostalgia is regarded as a meaningful resource that preserves one's fond experiences and reinforces a person's sense of identity (Davis, 1979; Wilson, 2005).

Rich with personal meaning (Davis, 1979; Routledge, 2016, 2023; Sedikides & Wildschut, 2018; Wilson, 2005), nostalgia can augment meaning in life which, subsequently, can spur one's initiative to pursue goals deemed as highly significant (Sedikides et al., 2018). Additionally, nostalgia considerably lowers the need to search for meaning, compared with thoughts about a desired future or recent positive experiences (Routledge et al., 2012). In fact, Routledge et al. (2011, Studies 3–4) found that the more a person felt their meaning was being threatened, the more they felt nostalgic and less defensive against such threats. Routledge et al. (2011, Studies 5–6) also found that nostalgia elevated vitality and alleviated stress among people experiencing meaning deficits. Nostalgia can help people experiencing disillusionment regain meaningfulness (Maher et al., 2021), as well as shield against death awareness in its capacity to serve as a terror management resource (Routledge et al., 2008). Likewise, previous research has shown that nostalgia augments meaning in life via self-continuity (van Tilburg et al., 2019, Experiment 2). In further examining these connections, van Tilburg et al. (2019, Experiments 3–

4) reported that nostalgia nurtures social connectedness, and this subsequently increases self-continuity, which afterward intensifies perceptions of meaning in life.

Given these findings, it is not surprising that researchers have encouraged the incorporation of nostalgia in therapeutic interventions (Routledge et al., 2016). An example of how this can be done was shown by Layous et al. (2021), whose study focused on a multi-week nostalgia intervention on well-being. Layous et al. reported how, after 3 weeks, participants who had reflected on nostalgic memories endorsed greater well-being than those who reflected on ordinary memories. This effect continued after 6 weeks and at 1-month follow-up, specifically among participants who were highly prone to nostalgia. Furthermore, Layous et al. informed that, across time points, nostalgia was advantageous to the extent that it supported social connectedness, self-continuity, and meaning in life.

The insight gained from these studies contributes to the rationale for conducting the current study. In this respect, nostalgia's ability to promote authenticity (e.g., Kelley et al., 2022), social connectedness (e.g., Abeyta et al., 2015), empathy (e.g., Juhl et al., 2020), and meaningfulness (e.g., Sedikides & Wildschut, 2018) may positively influence counseling students' genuine or authentic sense of self, empathic understanding, and perceptions of meaning in life. Moreover, increases in these variables can enhance counseling trainees' competencies for helping clients (e.g., Garner et al., 2017; Ngo et al., 2022; Ray et al., 2021; Rogers, 1957, 1961, 1980), matters of which will be discussed in the following sections.

Authenticity and Counseling

Authenticity refers to a person's chief or genuine sense of self (Goldman & Kernis, 2002). According to Rogers (1957, 1961, 1980), a counselor effectively demonstrates *congruence* by presenting their genuine self (i.e., sincerely embracing and showing their attitudes

and emotions) in therapeutic relationships; likewise, the more a counselor exhibits genuineness, the more likely a client will achieve therapeutic progress. In fact, from a person-centered perspective, authenticity entails uniformity between a person's fundamental experience (primary physiological, emotional, and cognitive states), their conscious awareness of these states, and their external communication and actions (Barrett-Lennard, 1998; Wood et al., 2008). Aligning with this theory, Wood et al. (2008) posited that authenticity encompasses three factors: (a) *self-alienation*, or a person's sense of feeling unfamiliar with their genuine self (i.e., incongruence between one's primary experience and conscious awareness); (b) *authentic living*, which entails expressing feelings and acting in ways that are congruent with one's conscious awareness of their beliefs and their physiological, emotional, and cognitive states; and (c) *accepting external influence*, or the incorporation of other people's outlooks and beliefs. Wood et al.'s conceptualization of authenticity will be used in this study because the researchers' assessment for evaluating this variable, the Authenticity Scale, will be utilized.

Recent studies have examined associations between authenticity and other counseling variables among clients (e.g., Kim et al., 2020) and counseling students (e.g., Ray et al., 2021). From their study that involved 46 clients, Bayliss-Conway et al. (2021) found that high ratings on a scale which evaluated Rogers' (1957) conditions for therapeutic change (i.e., Barrett-Lennard Relationship Inventory; Barrett-Lennard, 1962) was related to elevated authenticity at three intervals across 10 sessions. Similarly, in a study involving 55 participants who previously received counseling or psychotherapy, Kim et al. (2020) found that longer time spent in therapy was related to higher relational depth (i.e., moments of sincere interactions and deep communication between two people; Mearns & Cooper, 2005), and higher relational depth was related to greater unconditional positive self-regard and authenticity.

Furthermore, from an existential viewpoint, counselors can foster authenticity in clients by adopting an approach that challenges clients to perceive themselves as individuals who are developing, as opposed to mere subjects whose existence can be summed up via explanations (Miars, 2002). Additionally, according to Miars (2002), counselors can nurture existential authenticity in clients by challenging clients to accept ownership of all choices (i.e., explicit and implicit) that they make, in addition to valuing clients' autonomy and constructions of meaning, as well as understanding that modifications to meaning require clients to obtain increased understandings of their personal responsibility and choices. Miars also explained that counselors can reinforce existential authenticity by understanding that the alleviations of restrictions on one's personal meaning encourages clients to gain new perspectives of themselves. Moreover, Miars advised counselors to recognize that the change process belongs to clients, and that therapeutic outcomes may differ from clients' initial objectives for engaging in counseling.

Other research has focused on authenticity among counseling students. For instance, Yang et al. (2023) utilized a collaborative autoethnography method to examine authenticity experiences among six counseling psychology doctoral students. Among their findings, Yang et al. reported that one's ability to be authentic fluctuated among their roles as students, researchers, teachers, and therapist. In this respect, it was noted how participants were expected to be professionals who conduct research, teach courses, and provide counseling to clients – all while concomitantly engaging in roles as graduate students; therefore, students endeavored to determine which role(s) they felt aligned with their authentic selves. Likewise, Yang et al. found that students' authenticity was either hindered or promoted by marginalized or privileged social identities, hierarchical factors (e.g., being evaluated in a graduate program negatively affected students' authenticity), as well as peer and family relationships (e.g., students' connections with

parents either encouraged or discouraged authenticity, depending on parents' expectations and the quality of parental relationships).

Authenticity also surfaced as a primary theme from interviews with nine doctoral counseling students during Ray et al.'s (2021) qualitative study, which focused on a total of 10 students' experiences on learning how to foster relational depth. In this respect, Ray et al. reported that counseling students prioritized authenticity with clients, in which factors ranging from willingness to show vulnerability to difficulties associated with therapeutic relationships, identity, and attentiveness to growth facilitated counselors' progressions toward embracing authenticity – within and outside of therapeutic relationships. Participants in Ray et al.'s study also highlighted how enhanced authenticity stemmed from efforts to increase connectedness with clients, showing more immediacy, therapeutic confrontation, and increased emphasis on addressing emotions.

As previously discussed, nostalgia bolsters authenticity (Baldwin et al., 2015; Stephan et al., 2012), and authenticity appears to mediate the relationship between nostalgia and psychological well-being (Kelley et al., 2022). Moreover, authenticity is highly embraced in the counseling profession due to its capacity to establish and foster therapeutic congruency in counseling relationships, thereby elevating the likelihood that clients will experience therapeutic growth (Bayliss-Conway et al., 2021; Rogers, 1957, 1961, 1980). Therefore, it will be advantageous to examine the effects of nostalgia on counseling students' authenticity. As previous studies on nostalgia and authenticity have involved the general public or undergraduate students (e.g., Kelley et al., 2022; Stephan et al., 2012), it will be insightful to identify the extent in which nostalgic reflections affect levels of authenticity among counseling students, who become considerably familiar with the profession's emphasis on authenticity (e.g., Barrett-

Lennard, 1998; Miars, 2002; Ray et al., 2021). If nostalgia proves effective in boosting counseling students' authenticity, then they will become better equipped to establish therapeutic congruency and assist clients with achieving progress in counseling (Rogers, 1957, 1961, 1980). Furthermore, counselor educators and supervisors can use this study's empirical findings to educate and engage students in applying nostalgic reflections as a unique strategy for heightening authenticity during counseling endeavors.

Empathy and Counseling

A chief element in counseling, empathy can be defined as the process in which a person becomes intimately and sensitively familiar with another individual's unique perspective, meanings, and emotions as such pertain to personal experiences (Rogers, 1980). Empathy can also refer to a person's ability to perceive and understand matters in the same manner as another (Adler 1931; Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956), as well as the cognitions and feelings that emerge during one personality's efforts to understand another personality (May, 1989). For this study, Rogers' (1980) definition of empathy will be used, as it arguably encompasses the meanings expressed by the other theorists that are referenced.

Primarily, there are two types of empathy (Gladstein, 1983): *cognitive empathy*, or the ability to logically take on another person's perspective; and *affective empathy*, or the ability to respond with, or reciprocate, the same emotion as another person. Particularly, this study will utilize Reniers et al.'s (2011) definitions for these variables, given how this study will use the Questionnaire of Cognitive and Affective Empathy (QCAE) that was developed by these researchers. In this respect, *cognitive empathy* will refer to the capacity to conceptualize others' emotional states, while *affective empathy* will refer to the capacity to be considerate toward and experience others' feelings in vicarious manners (Reniers et al., 2011).

The effects of empathy in counseling and psychotherapy have received considerable attention. For instance, a previous meta-analysis found that higher ratings of therapist empathy were related to stronger outlooks of therapeutic alliances ($r = .50$; Nienhuis et al., 2018). Another meta-analysis involving 82 independent samples and 6,138 clients revealed that therapist empathy accounted for approximately 9% of the variance in client outcome ($d = .58$), a finding that held across various theoretical orientations and clients' presenting concerns (Elliott et al., 2018).

Empathy can be taught and fostered through training (Bayne & Jangha, 2016; Rogers, 1980), and counseling researchers have focused on identifying approaches for teaching and enhancing empathy (e.g., Bell, 2018; Bohecker & Doughty Horn, 2016; Cole, 2022). A recent study that applied pairwise meta-analysis of 30 studies found that interventions involving didactic approaches for teaching empathy to mental health trainees or practitioners (e.g., reading or listening to lectures about empathy) were more effective than interventions that did not incorporate this method ($d = .91$ vs. $d = .39$, $p = .02$; Ngo et al., 2022). This same study also applied network meta-analysis of 33 direct comparisons among intervention combinations across 37 studies (i.e., 36 samples and 1,616 participants), revealing that the most effective approaches for teaching empathy involved combining didactic, reflection, and feedback methods (i.e., 95%; Ngo et al., 2022).

The utilization of mindfulness has also been recognized as effective in promoting empathy among counselor trainees (Bell, 2018; Bohecker & Doughty Horn, 2016), as well as virtual reality (Cole, 2022), multimedia (Giordano et al., 2015), and improvisational theater strategies (Bayne & Jangha, 2016). In differentiating between cognitive and affective empathy, Bell (2018) highlighted that innovative strategies for teaching cognitive empathy consist of

experiential activities (e.g., interviewing a person whose culture, ethnicity, religion, and/or abilities differ from the counselor-in-training), role-playing (e.g., counselor–client scenarios), and mindfulness practices (e.g., guided meditation). To promote the growth of affective empathy, Bell recommended that counselor educators use movies, literature (e.g., books, poetry, short stories), and theater exercises (e.g., improvisations) to encourage close identifications with characters, including articulations and recognitions of characters’ emotions, among counselor trainees.

While these approaches have been promoted in counseling, nostalgia has yet to be examined as a strategy for promoting empathy, despite findings from empirical studies involving samples that represented the general public or undergraduate students (Cheung et al., 2017; Juhl et al., 2020; Zhou et al., 2012). As previously discussed, nostalgia can promote empathy and prosocial behavior (Juhl et al., 2020; Zhou et al., 2012), as well as decreases in prejudice (Cheung et al., 2017). This study will be the first to evaluate the effects of nostalgia among counseling students, a population that is taught to prioritize empathy and meaningful connections with clients (*ACA Code of Ethics*, 2014; Rogers, 1957, 1961, 1980; Yalom, 1980). If nostalgia bolsters counseling students’ empathy, then this will positively impact their abilities to understand clients and develop strong therapeutic alliances. Likewise, counselor educators and supervisors can develop and incorporate nostalgic activities into counseling curriculum and supervision, thereby educating students and supervisees about nostalgia’s capacity to promote empathy.

Nonetheless, previous research has examined the association between empathy and outlooks of meaningfulness. For instance, Lee and Park (2019) found that meaning of life was positively related to empathy skills, resilience, and college adjustment among 531 nursing

students from two colleges located in Gyeonggi Province in South Korea. In another study involving 285 Brazilian medical students, Damiano et al. (2017) found that previous mental health treatment and meaning of life (i.e., the extent to which one derived meaning of life by providing care to others) predicted increases in empathy. Thus, empirical evidence indicates that empathy and meaning in life share a unique and positive connection.

Meaning in Life and Counseling

Of course, counseling and psychotherapy – especially from an existential–humanistic perspective – involve explorations and pursuits of meaning in life (e.g., Frankl, 1978; Schneider & Krug, 2010; Yalom, 1980). According to Schnell (2009, 2021), *meaningfulness* refers to a person’s outlook, or the extent of their judgment, that their life is characterized by belongingness, coherence, direction, and significance. Additionally, Schnell (2009, 2021) explained that *meaning in life*, arising from a universal appraisal of life, is represented by experiences that inspire the acquisition of meaningfulness, as well as circumstances resulting in crises of meaning. Congruently, in addressing theoretical elements of logotherapy, Frankl (1946/2006) asserted that an individual’s chief objective in life is to pursue a sense of purpose or personal meaning, thereby signifying one’s *will to meaning*. Moreover, Frankl (1946/2006) maintained that people acquire meaning in life by engaging in productive and creative actions, through unique social encounters and experiences, and via one’s attitude during circumstances involving inescapable suffering.

Schnell (2009, 2021) and Frankl’s (1946/2006) theoretical perspectives align with Maslow’s (1954) theory of motivation, which places people’s basic needs into a hierarchy (i.e., *physiological, safety, belongingness and love, esteem, self-actualization*) while emphasizing how the lower needs (e.g., physiological) must be gratified before higher needs (e.g., safety;

belonginess and love) are addressed. Furthermore, Maslow explained that the highest need, *self-actualization*, signifies an individual's ambition to achieving their full potential, aspirations of which are personally meaningful and, thereby, vary across individuals (e.g., becoming an artist, a model parent, or exceptional athlete).

Counseling researchers have examined the influence of meaningfulness among practitioners and counselors-in-training. In a qualitative study that involved 46 Israeli counselors who were employed in educational settings, Russo-Netzer et al. (2020) found that these counselors derived meaning through the cultivation of their counseling skills, as well as by increasing familiarity with who they were as unique individuals, and by identifying ways in which they could use this acquired insight during counseling efforts. Congruently, in a study involving 292 counseling students, Hurst and Prescott (2022) administered assessments that inquired about perceptions of meaning in life and self-competence in counseling. As a result, Hurst and Prescott found that counseling students who endorsed higher ratings of meaning in life also felt more self-competent in their counseling studies. Hurst and Prescott likewise asked participants whether their counseling studies provided them with meaning in life, resulting in 95.9% expressing agreement.

Additionally, counseling researchers have underscored the need for counselor educators and supervisors to teach counselors-in-training how to competently address spiritual matters (e.g., Reiner & Dobmeier, 2014). In fact, Garner et al. (2017) found that counseling trainees who endorsed higher ratings of purpose in life also reported that spiritual factors were more likely to be addressed during supervision. Moreover, Garner et al. also found that the higher counseling trainees rated a sense of purpose in life, the more counseling supervisors informed that supervision time was spent addressing client concerns.

As these studies showed the positive effects of meaningfulness among counseling students, it will be beneficial to evaluate nostalgia in a similar manner, given how it is recognized as an existential outlet that fosters meaning in life (Routledge et al., 2011; Sedikides & Wildschut, 2018; Wilson, 2005). For instance, Routledge et al. (2012) found that, among participants who contemplated an anticipated future experience, those who were asked to reflect on a nostalgic memory endorsed higher presence of meaning. Additionally, Routledge et al. (2012) found that nostalgia (as compared with articulations of anticipated future events and recent positive events) significantly diminished the need to seek meaning. Furthermore, in a study involving three experiments, Routledge et al. (2008) found that nostalgia safeguards against thoughts of death, in which greater nostalgia proneness increased outlooks of meaning in life when thoughts of mortality (as compared with thoughts of dental pain) were prompted. Routledge et al. (2008) likewise found that nostalgia proneness reduced the accessibility of death thoughts when reminders of mortality were present, a finding that remained apparent when nostalgia was induced rather than simply measured, independent of variables such as social relationships, achievement, and affect. In this respect, Routledge et al. (2008) highlighted how their experiments provided considerable evidence that nostalgia is a meaningful outlet that defends against thoughts of death.

Researchers have also examined connections between nostalgia and meaning in life with other variables. For instance, van Tilburg et al. (2019, Study 2) found that, among participants who either reflected on a nostalgic or ordinary autobiographical memory, nostalgia boosted meaning in life via self-continuity. Moreover, van Tilburg et al. (2019, Studies 3–4) also found that, among participants who listened to either a nostalgic or control (i.e., happy) song, nostalgia

promoted social connectedness, which increased self-continuity, and this subsequently bolstered meaning in life.

Sedikides et al. (2018) likewise examined nostalgia's existential effects and found that, among participants who either reflected on a nostalgic or ordinary memory, those in the nostalgia group endorsed higher ratings of meaning in life. According to Sedikides et al., heightened meaning in life subsequently inspired intentions to accomplish goals deemed as chiefly important, and these connections were consistent across two cultures (i.e., Danish and British), above and beyond the influence of positive affect.

Because nostalgia serves as an outlet for personal meaning (e.g., Routledge et al., 2011; Sedikides & Wildschut, 2018; Wilson, 2005), it will be beneficial to evaluate its effects on counseling students' perceptions of meaning in life. Doing so can provide evidence about whether nostalgia's effects can significantly elevate counseling students' sense of personal meaning. If this occurs, then nostalgia can serve as a unique self-care resource for counseling students. Likewise, increases in personal meaningfulness can increase the likelihood that counseling students will feel more self-competent in their counseling studies (Hurst & Prescott, 2022), as well as focus more on ways to address clients' concerns (Garner et al., 2017).

Significance of the Study

As previously highlighted, nostalgia promotes authenticity (e.g., Kelley et al., 2022; Stephan et al., 2012), fosters empathy (e.g., Cheung et al., 2017; Juhl et al., 2020), and enriches life with meaning (e.g., Sedikides et al., 2018; van Tilburg et al., 2019). Moreover, these variables are primary factors in the counseling profession (ACA *Code of Ethics*, 2014; Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs [CACREP], 2023; May, 1989; Rogers, 1957, 1961, 1980; Yalom, 1980). In fact, counseling researchers have highlighted

the helpfulness of experiential learning strategies for enhancing empathy (e.g., Bell, 2018; Bohecker & Doughty Horn, 2016; Cole, 2022), in addition to having examined the effects of existential factors among counseling trainees (e.g., purpose in life; Garner et al., 2017).

Noting how authenticity (i.e., one's real or genuine sense of self; Goldman & Kernis, 2002) and empathy are essential in reinforcing clients' constructive progress in counseling (Rogers, 1980), and that perceptions of meaningfulness and empathy share a positive relationship (Damiano et al., 2017; Lee & Park, 2019), this study will evaluate the effects of nostalgia on counseling students' authenticity, empathy, and perceptions of meaning in life. Findings will provide evidence toward the extent to which nostalgia may serve as a resourceful experiential technique for counselor education and supervision. Particularly, if the effects of nostalgia (as compared with ordinary autobiographical memories) significantly enhance counseling students' authenticity, empathy, and perceptions of meaning in life, then counseling students can increase their capacities for empathically understanding and competently helping clients address therapeutic concerns. For instance, greater authenticity and empathy are associated with positive client outcomes (Bayliss-Conway et al., 2021; Elliott et al., 2018; Kim et al., 2020; Rogers, 1957, 1961, 1980). Additionally, higher ratings of perceived purpose in life have corresponded with increased clinical supervision time devoted toward addressing spirituality in counseling and articulating client concerns (Garner et al., 2017). Likewise, higher meaning in life has positively correlated with self-competence in counseling among counseling students (Hurst & Prescott, 2022).

If nostalgia significantly strengthens counseling students' authenticity, empathy, and perceptions of meaning in life, then counselor educators and supervisors can develop and utilize nostalgia-oriented practices into counseling curriculum and trainings. In this respect, counselor

educators and supervisors can reference nostalgia's self, social, and existential functions (Routledge, 2016, 2023; Sedikides & Wildschut, 2022; Wildschut & Sedikides, 2020) to teach and highlight its resourcefulness to counseling students and supervisees. In turn, counseling students and supervisees can practice engaging in nostalgic reflections to increase their authenticity, empathy, and perceptions of meaning in life, thereby reinforcing positive factors on behalf of themselves (e.g., self-competence in counseling; Hurst & Prescott, 2022) and clients (Bayliss-Conway et al., 2021; Elliott et al., 2018; Nienhuis et al., 2018; Rogers, 1957, 1961, 1980). Furthermore, this study will bridge a gap in the counselor education literature, as it appears that no studies in counselor education have specifically examined nostalgia as a primary variable. Particularly, this study will be the first to evaluate the effects of nostalgia among counseling students. Therefore, findings from this study can generate insight for future studies on nostalgia in counselor education.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the effects of nostalgia on counseling students' authenticity, empathy (i.e., affective and cognitive empathy; Reniers et al., 2011), and perceptions of meaning in life. Although previous studies in social and cognitive psychology have examined these variables, the participants have represented the general public or undergraduate students (e.g., Kelley et al., 2022; Routledge et al., 2012; van Tilburg et al., 2019). Therefore, it will be advantageous to specifically examine these variables among master's-level counseling students, whose education and clinical development prioritize authenticity, empathy, and meaning-oriented objectives (ACA *Code of Ethics*, 2014; CACREP, 2023; May, 1989; Rogers, 1961, 1980; Yalom, 1980). Because counseling students arguably gain more exposure

and knowledge about these variables, their ratings of authenticity, empathy, and meaning in life may uniquely differ from those given by the general public or undergraduate students.

Data will be collected by randomly assigning participants to either (a) reflect on a nostalgic memory, or (b) reflect on an ordinary autobiographical memory. Prior to being asked to reflect on a nostalgic memory, participants in the nostalgia group will be provided a definition of nostalgia. Subsequently, participants in both groups will be asked to complete an online survey that focuses on authenticity, empathy, and meaning in life. Specifically, this study focuses on the following research questions and hypotheses:

1. Are there significant differences in authenticity ratings among counseling students who are asked to reflect on a nostalgic versus an ordinary life event?

H_A: Counseling students who reflect on a nostalgic memory will endorse higher ratings of authenticity than those who reflect on an ordinary life event.

2. Are there significant differences in empathy ratings among counseling students who are asked to reflect on a nostalgic versus an ordinary life event?

H_A: Counseling students who reflect on a nostalgic memory will endorse higher ratings of empathy than those who reflect on an ordinary life event.

3. Are there significant differences in ratings of meaning in life among counseling students who are asked to reflect on a nostalgic versus an ordinary life event?

H_A: Counseling students who reflect on a nostalgic memory will endorse higher ratings of meaning in life than those who reflect on an ordinary life event.

Summary

This chapter reviewed and synthesized previous theories on autobiographical memories (i.e., Adlerian and existential psychology) and research on nostalgia. Particularly, it was

discussed how researchers have highlighted nostalgia's self, social, and existential capacities (Routledge, 2016, 2023; Wildschut & Sedikides, 2020), including nostalgia's ability to increase empathy (e.g., Zhou et al., 2012) and perceptions of meaning in life (e.g., Sedikides et al., 2018). Furthermore, the impacts of authenticity, empathy, and meaningfulness in counseling were addressed, and objectives were established for evaluating the effects of nostalgia on counseling students' authenticity, empathy, and perceptions of meaning in life. The next chapter will address the research methods that will be utilized to conduct this study.

Definitions

Authenticity: a person's chief or genuine sense of self (Goldman & Kernis, 2002). Aligning with person-centered therapy, Wood et al. (2008) asserted that authenticity encompasses three factors: (a) *self-alienation*, or a person's sense of feeling unfamiliar with their genuine self (i.e., incongruence between one's primary experience and conscious awareness); (b) *authentic living*, which entails expressing feelings and acting in ways that are congruent with one's conscious awareness of their beliefs and their physiological, emotional, and cognitive states; and (c) *accepting external influence*, or the incorporation of other people's outlooks and beliefs.

Empathy: the process in which a person becomes intimately and sensitively familiar with another person's perceptions, meanings, and emotions as such pertain to personal experiences (Rogers, 1980).

- **Affective Empathy:** the capacity to be considerate toward and experience others' feelings in vicarious manners (Reniers et al., 2011).
- **Cognitive Empathy:** the capacity to conceptualize others' emotional states (Reniers et al., 2011).

Meaning in Life: emerging from a universal appraisal of life, is represented by experiences that

inspire the acquisition of meaningfulness, as well as circumstances resulting in crises of meaning (Schnell, 2009, 2021).

Nostalgia: a bittersweet emotion that is linked to reminiscences of cherished autobiographical memories (Batcho, 2020; Madoglou et al., 2017; Sedikides & Wildschut, 2018; Turner & Stanley, 2021; Wilson, 2005).

Chapter 2. Methodology

This study examined the effects of nostalgia on counseling students' authenticity, empathy, and perceptions of meaning in life. It applied a true experimental design, given how this approach enables comparisons to be made between the effects of independent variables on dependent variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Specifically, this study utilized a between-subjects design, during which each group of participants experienced a different independent variable condition (Shaughnessy et al., 2009). This experimental design was applied to evaluate the effects of nostalgic reflections (in comparison to reflections on ordinary life events) on counseling students' ratings of authenticity, empathy, and meaning in life.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

This study's research questions and hypotheses consisted of the following:

1. Are there significant differences in authenticity ratings among counseling students who are asked to reflect on a nostalgic versus an ordinary life event?

H_A: Counseling students who reflect on a nostalgic memory will endorse higher ratings of authenticity than those who reflect on an ordinary life event.

2. Are there significant differences in empathy ratings among counseling students who are asked to reflect on a nostalgic versus an ordinary life event?

H_A: Counseling students who reflect on a nostalgic memory will endorse higher ratings of empathy than those who reflect on an ordinary life event.

3. Are there significant differences in ratings of meaning in life among counseling students who are asked to reflect on a nostalgic versus an ordinary life event?

H_A: Counseling students who reflect on a nostalgic memory will endorse higher ratings of meaning in life than those who reflect on an ordinary life event.

Subjects

Subjects for this study were graduate students, aged 18 and older, who were enrolled in master's-level counselor education programs (e.g., clinical mental health, clinical rehabilitation, school counseling, marriage and family counseling) accredited by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) at public universities across the U.S. This study only recruited graduate students seeking master's degrees in professional counseling, as counseling students pursuing doctoral degrees would arguably have had more counseling experience pertaining to authenticity, empathy, and meaning in life, thereby posing potential risks for skewing research findings. Additionally, as the literature on nostalgia has highlighted how this bittersweet emotion relates to self-continuity (Davis, 1979; Sedikides et al., 2015a), graduate students pursuing master's degrees in counselor education were ideal for this study because they are preparing to transition into professional counseling roles. Moreover, previous studies on nostalgia have generally focused on samples representative of undergraduate students or the general public (e.g., Abeyta & Juhl, 2023; Kelley et al., 2022). Because counselor education prioritizes ethical and academic standards that promote professional care to clients (ACA *Code of Ethics*, 2014; CACREP, 2023), then it was advantageous to examine the extent of which nostalgic reflections affect counseling students' authenticity, empathy, and meaning in life. Given that counseling students gain considerable knowledge and experience with empathy and addressing factors pertaining to meaningfulness during their graduate studies, then it was likely that their ratings on these variables could differ from those endorsed by the general public or undergraduate students.

Subjects were recruited through emails addressed to program coordinators at CACREP-accredited counselor education programs within universities across the U.S. These emails (see

Appendix B) informed about the nature of the study, including how it would be conducted online, and requested that counselor education graduate students (i.e., master's-level students) be informed about the opportunity to participate. Additionally, participants were sought through Cesnet-L, a listserv for counselor educators and professional counselors (Jencius, 2019). Prospective subjects were provided with general details about the study, including its voluntariness, purpose, potential harm, benefits and risks of participation, information letter, and a link to an online survey. A priori data analysis was conducted to identify the minimum sample size for data analysis using a medium effect size ($f = .25$, $\alpha = .05$) at power $(1 - \beta) = .80$. According to a G*Power tool (Faul et al., 2007; Kang, 2021), at least 128 participants were needed. Furthermore, all participants who completed the online survey were compensated for their involvement (i.e., \$10 Amazon e-gift cards).

Instrumentation

This study used the Authenticity Scale (AS; Wood et al., 2008) to assess counseling students' levels of dispositional authenticity. Additionally, the Questionnaire of Cognitive and Affective Empathy (QCAE; Reniers et al., 2011) was used to evaluate counseling students' empathy. Concomitantly, the Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ; Steger et al., 2006) was used to examine counseling students' presence and search for meaning in life. These assessments, including a survey requesting demographic information, were formatted and administered through Qualtrics (Provo, UT, 2024).

Demographics

Demographics were collected through an online survey, which asked participants to indicate their age, gender, and ethnicity. Participants were also asked to indicate their undergraduate major(s), their current year (e.g., first or second year) in their master's degree

program in counselor education, and their counseling specialization (e.g., clinical mental health, clinical rehabilitation, school counseling). Furthermore, participants were asked to indicate their annual household income, current employment status, and their marital status. The collection of this data was analyzed in connection with other data gathered in this study, thereby offering context to findings.

Authenticity Scale (AS)

The AS (Wood et al., 2008) features 12 items that evaluate three components of authenticity (i.e., self-alienation, authentic living, accepting external influence) via a 7-point Likert scale (i.e., 1 = *Does not describe me at all*, 7 = *Describes me very well*). All three subscales have four items. Example items include “I am true to myself in most situations” (Authentic Living), “I always feel I need to do what others expect me to do” (Accepting External Influence), and “I feel out of touch with the ‘real me’” (Self-Alienation). According to Wood et al., the three subscales have relatively low intercorrelations (ranging from $r = -.16$ to $.42$). Items on each subscale are summed to yield distinct values for the three subscales, with higher scores on the Authentic Living subscale indicating that one perceives their lifestyle as congruent with their beliefs and values. Higher scores on the Accepting External Influence subscale indicate that one is strongly impacted by, and conforms to, other people and other people’s expectations. Lastly, higher scores on the Self-Alienation subscale indicate that a person feels disconnected from their genuine self.

According to Wood et al. (2008), the AS has demonstrated good test-retest reliability at 2- and 4-week intervals, ranging from $.78$ to $.91$ at the 2-week period, with correlations only differing by $r = .01$ at the 4-week period. Wood et al. also reported acceptable-to-good internal consistency reliability, with Cronbach’s alpha values ranging between $.70$ and $.84$. The AS has

also demonstrated good discriminant validity via nonsignificant correlations between social desirability and the questionnaire's subscales, while zero-order correlations between the AS and the Big Five personality traits resulted with the Big Five accounting for only 11%–13% of the variance in the subscales. Furthermore, Wood et al. reported that the AS has demonstrated convergent validity via positive correlations with assessments of self-esteem and subjective well-being.

Questionnaire of Cognitive and Affective Empathy (QCAE)

The QCAE (Reniers et al., 2011) is characterized by a two-factor structure (i.e., cognitive and affective empathy) and entails 31 items that evaluate cognitive and affective empathy across five components (i.e., *perspective taking*, *emotion contagion*, *online simulation*, *peripheral responsivity*, *proximal responsivity*). According to Reniers et al., the components that represent cognitive empathy are *perspective taking*, or one's capacity to discern another person's viewpoint (e.g., "I am quick to spot when someone in a group is feeling awkward or uncomfortable") and *online simulation*, which refers to one's efforts to consider another's feelings by cognitively placing themselves in that person's situation (e.g., "I always try to consider the other fellow's feelings before I do something"). Additionally, the researchers inform that the remaining three components represent affective empathy: *emotion contagion*, or one's capacity to instinctively reflect others' feelings (e.g., "I am happy when I am with a cheerful group and sad when the others are glum"); *proximal responsivity*, or one's capacity to react empathically (e.g., "I often get emotionally involved with my friends' problems"); and *peripheral responsivity*, or one's capacity to react empathically, although in a detached manner (e.g., "I am usually objective when I watch a film or play, and I don't often get completely caught up in it").

Items on the QCAE (Reniers et al., 2011) are rated via a 4-point Likert scale (i.e., *Strongly agree*, *Slightly agree*, *Slightly disagree*, and *Strongly disagree*), with higher scores within the cognitive and affective subscales indicating greater cognitive and/or affective empathy. Furthermore, Reniers et al. explain that a cumulative total score for empathy is obtained by summing the scores for cognitive and affective empathy. This study utilized the cumulative total score for empathy. Reniers et al. also explain that items on the QCAE stemmed from other validated assessments that assess cognitive and affective empathy: the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (Davis, 1983); the Impulsiveness-Venturesomeness-Empathy Inventory (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1978); the Hogan Empathy Scale (Hogan, 1969); and the Empathy Quotient (Baron-Cohen et al., 2003).

According to Reniers et al. (2011), Cronbach's alpha values for the raw scores of the QCAE's five components (i.e., *perspective taking*, *emotion contagion*, *online simulation*, *peripheral responsivity*, *proximal responsivity*) were .85, .72, .83, .65, and .70, respectively. Additionally, Reniers et al. inform that the QCAE demonstrated strong convergent validity with the Basic Empathy Scale (Jolliffe & Farrington, 2006): $r = .76, p < .001$ in connection with affective empathy; $r = .62, p < .001$ regarding cognitive empathy. The researchers likewise inform that the QCAE demonstrated good construct validity when correlated with assessments that evaluated Machiavellianism, psychopathy, aggression, impulsivity, and empathic anger. Particularly, Reniers et al. found that, compared with affective empathy, cognitive empathy had a significantly greater negative association with secondary psychopathy, $t(508) = -4.71, p < .001$, and dysfunctional impulsivity, $t(508) = -4.88, p < .001$. Reniers et al. also found that, compared with cognitive empathy, affective empathy had a significantly greater negative association with expressive aggression, $t(508) = -2.83, p < .01$, and empathic anger, $t(508) = -2.76, p < .05$.

Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ)

The MLQ (Steger et al., 2006) consists of 10 items across two subscales (i.e., *Presence of Meaning* or *MLQ-P*, and *Search for Meaning* or *MLQ-S*) and involves a 7-point Likert scale (i.e., 1 = *Absolutely Untrue*, 7 = *Absolutely True*). According to Steger et al., scores on each subscale range from 5 to 35, with higher scores indicating greater presence or desire to obtain meaning in life. The MLQ-P features five items such as “My life has a clear sense of purpose”, while the MLQ-S consists of five items such as “I am searching for meaning in my life.” Steger et al. also inform that the MLQ subscales demonstrated good reliability ($\alpha = .82$ for MLQ-P; $\alpha = .87$ for MLQ-S), as well as good internal consistency across two time periods, with alpha coefficients for the MLQ-P ranging between .81 and .86, while alpha coefficients for the MLQ-S ranged between .84 and .92. Additionally, test-retest stability coefficients at one-month follow-ups were .70 and .73 for the MLQ-P and MLQ-S, respectively.

Regarding convergent validity, Steger et al. (2006) found significant correlations between the MLQ-P and two other meaning assessments across two time points ranged between .58 and .74. Steger et al also inform that four heteromethod correlations between the MLQ-P and two other meaning assessments reached significance and ranged between .29 and .38. Additionally, Steger et al. inform that the other subscale of the MLQ, the MLQ-S, demonstrated good convergent validity via significant correlations between self- and informant reports across two time points (i.e., .31 and .35).

As for discriminant validity, Steger et al. found that the MLQ subscales were not correlated with social desirability and extrinsic religiosity. Translated into multiple languages, the MLQ was found to have high reliability across clinical and nonclinical samples, languages, and cultures from 232 studies, in which Cronbach’s alpha values for both subscales averaged

higher than .85 with 95% confidence intervals (Semma et al., 2019). Both subscales of the MLQ will be used for this study to identify plausible differences in scores among participants who reflect on either a nostalgic or ordinary life event.

Procedure

Following approval from Auburn University's Institutional Review Board, participants were recruited from CACREP-accredited counseling programs in universities across the U.S., in addition to Cesnet-L, a listserv devoted to professional counselors, counselor educators, and counseling supervisors (Jencius, 2019). Emails providing general information about the study were sent to program coordinators of CACREP-accredited counseling programs and counselors on the listserv, all of whom were asked to inform their students about the study and the opportunity to participate. Subsequently, reminder emails were sent to program coordinators approximately two weeks later, followed by final email reminders approximately three weeks afterward. All components of the study took place online.

After participants reviewed the study's information letter and consented to participate, they were randomly assigned to one of two study groups: (a) the nostalgia or (b) the control group (i.e., ordinary memory reflections). Participants in both groups were first asked to complete the demographics questionnaire. Consistent with previous studies on nostalgia (e.g., Routledge et al., 2012), participants in the nostalgia group were provided with a definition of "nostalgia" (i.e., "a sentimental longing for the past"; Sedikides et al., 2015b). Adhering to Sedikides et al.'s (2015b; see Appendix D) instructions for inducing nostalgia and prompting reflections, participants in the nostalgia group were asked to reflect on a nostalgic event, while participants in the ordinary memory group were asked to reflect on an ordinary event that occurred last week in their daily lives. To help participants understand the nature and content that

typically characterize nostalgic memories, general examples of nostalgia (e.g., a cherished event from childhood) were provided, based on previous research findings and scholarly insight (i.e., Hepper et al., 2012; Hepper et al., 2014; Routledge, 2023; Wildschut et al., 2006). Furthermore, the instructions for the control condition incorporated a clarifying detail that participants received during Wildschut et al.'s (2006, Study 5) research. In this respect, participants were asked to reminisce on an ordinary life event that occurred last week during their daily life. To enhance the validity of the experimental conditions, timers were implemented to ensure that participants in each group spent at least two minutes reflecting and briefly writing about either a nostalgic or an ordinary memory, thereby reinforcing their immersions in these reflection tasks.

Aligning with Sedikides et al.'s (2015b; see Appendix D) instructions, each participant in both groups was asked to type and submit four keywords that were associated with their reflection, in addition to being prompted to take a moment to articulate their recalled event and feelings about it. This enabled participants' responses to be reviewed to identify whether their reflections align with conceptual aspects of nostalgia (e.g., relationships; Hepper et al., 2012). After participants reflected on either a nostalgic or an ordinary life event, both groups were next asked to respond, via a 6-point Likert scale (1 = *Strongly disagree*, 6 = *Strongly agree*), to the following three items: "Right now, I am feeling quite nostalgic"; "Right now, I am having nostalgic feelings"; and "I feel nostalgic at the moment" (Sedikides et al., 2015b). These items were used as a manipulation check to verify the induction of nostalgia effects. See Appendix D for the specific script that was used in the experiment.

Afterward, participants in both groups were asked to complete the AS (Wood et al., 2008), the QCAE (Reniers et al., 2011) and the MLQ (Steger et al., 2006). Upon completing the

study, participants were asked to click a link that took them to a separate survey that asked them to provide their email addresses so that they could each receive a \$10 Amazon e-gift card.

Data Analysis

This study used analysis of variance (ANOVA), an inferential statistics method that is applied to identify whether there are significant effects between independent and dependent variables, in addition to detecting sources of error and identifying differences within and between groups in an experiment (Shaughnessy et al., 2009). Conducting one-way ANOVAs were appropriate for this study because it involved two independent variables (i.e., nostalgic versus ordinary memory reflections), and three dependent variables (i.e., authenticity, empathy, and meaning in life). In this respect, one-way ANOVAs were used to analyze statistical outcomes and differences between survey responses, at an alpha significance level of .05, among participants who were randomly assigned to either the nostalgia or the ordinary memory group. The data collected through the Qualtrics survey was exported to the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences version 29.0 (SPSS Statistics, IBM Corporation, NY, USA) for data analysis.

Limitations

Limitations within this study included social desirability, as the participants were graduate students pursuing master's degrees in CACREP-accredited counselor education programs at universities across the U.S. In this respect, it may be asserted that counseling students who access this counseling-oriented study may endorse ratings on assessments for authenticity, empathy, and meaning in life that they regard as favorable to, or in alignment with, the counseling profession. For example, counseling students may purposely endorse high ratings of empathy, as opposed to ratings that genuinely reflect their outlooks and experiences, so that their responses align strongly with their pursuits to become professional counselors. Another

limitation was this study used self-report measures to collect data. Furthermore, this experiment utilized a brief nostalgic induction that was conducted within an online context. Therefore, it can be argued that a more intensive approach for inducing nostalgia may have been ideal. However, this study replicated the same, or similar, induction procedures as previous experiments that have focused on nostalgia (e.g., Sedikides et al., 2015b; Wildschut et al., 2006).

Summary

This chapter addressed how this study utilized a true experimental design (i.e., between-subjects design) and ANOVA to analyze data. After consenting to participate and completing a demographics questionnaire, participants were randomly assigned to either the nostalgia or control group. Depending on which group they were randomly assigned, participants were asked to reflect and briefly write about either a nostalgic or an ordinary life event (Sedikides et al., 2015b). Following a manipulation check, participants were asked to complete the 12-item AS (Wood et al., 2008) to evaluate their authenticity, as well as the 31-item QCAE (Reniers et al., 2011) to assess their empathy, and the 10-item MLQ (Steger et al., 2006) to examine their outlooks of presence of, and desires to seek, meaning in life. It was anticipated that participants in the nostalgia group would endorse higher scores of authenticity, empathy, and meaning in life.

Chapter 3. Results

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of nostalgia on master's-level counseling students' authenticity, empathy, and perceptions of meaning in life. In this respect, counseling students who agreed to participate in this online research study were randomly assigned to reflect and briefly write about either a nostalgic memory or an ordinary memory that occurred last week during their daily lives. Following a manipulation check, participants' authenticity was evaluated via the AS (Wood et al., 2008), and their empathy was assessed through the QCAE (Reniers et al., 2011). Lastly, participants' perceptions of meaning in life were examined via the MLQ (Steger et al., 2006). It was hypothesized that participants who underwent the nostalgia condition would endorse higher authenticity, empathy, and meaning in life scores than those who were assigned to the ordinary memory condition. Furthermore, this study focused on identifying whether nostalgia can serve as an experiential resource to enhance counseling students' authenticity, empathy, and outlooks of meaning in life, thereby providing implications for future academic and clinical trainings of counseling students in counselor education and supervision.

Demographics

Among 168 participants who accessed the online survey, 132 completed all three assessments (i.e., authenticity, empathy, meaning in life), resulting in their data being used for analyses. In this respect, 12 participants provided demographics but did not participate in the remainder of the survey; one participant only accessed the study but did not provide any information; two participants accessed the study, informed that they were enrolled in a CACREP-accredited program, but did not proceed any further; two participants reported that they were not enrolled in a CACREP-accredited program; seven provided demographics and

reflected on a nostalgic memory but did not complete the AS (Wood et al., 2008), QCAE (Reniers et al., 2011), or the MLQ (Steger et al., 2006); five completed demographics and reflected on an ordinary memory but did not complete the AS, QCAE, or the MLQ; three completed the nostalgia manipulation check but did not proceed forward; two completed the AS portion but did not proceed forward; one completed the AS and around two-thirds of the QCAE; one completed the AS and approximately one-third of the QCAE. Therefore, data from these 36 participants were not used in this study's final analyses. Data from these 36 participants were not used in this study's final analyses. Within the total sample of 132 participants whose data were used, one participant did not respond to one item on the MLQ, resulting with a single missing value. As a result, a series mean method was applied in SPSS to calculate a replacement for the missing value. Given there was only a single missing value, single imputation was an acceptable approach for addressing the matter, as opposed to deleting the case (Schafer & Graham, 2002).

Participants' mean age was 31.63 ($SD = 10.43$), and most were female ($n = 117$, 88.6%) and White ($n = 102$, 77.3%). Other participants were male ($n = 10$, 7.6%) or identified as non-binary ($n = 5$, 3.8%), and they described themselves as Black or African American ($n = 13$, 9.8%); Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish Origin ($n = 6$, 4.5%); Asian ($n = 4$, 3%); American Indian or Alaska Native ($n = 2$, 1.5%); or as "other" (e.g., multiracial; $n = 5$, 3.8%). Additionally, 30 participants (22.7%) identified as a member of the LGBTQ+ community, 36 (27.3%) identified as an ally to the LGBTQ+ community, and two (1.5%) preferred not to say if they identified as a member of the LGBTQ+ community. Furthermore, a few participants identified as transgender ($n = 3$, 2.3%) or preferred not to say in this respect ($n = 2$, 1.5%).

The majority of participants' undergraduate majors were in the social sciences ($n = 84$, 63.6%), followed by undergraduate majors (e.g., interdisciplinary) that were categorized as

“other” ($n = 22$, 16.7%). Five (3.8%) participants majored in arts and humanities; five (3.8%) in communication; five (3.8%) in education; five (3.8%) in science, technology, engineering or mathematics (STEM); four (3%) in linguistics; three (2.3%) in business; three (2.3%) health sciences; and one (0.8%) in humanities. Most participants were in their first year of their counseling program ($n = 68$, 51.5%), while 45 (34.1%) were in their second year, and 19 (14.4%) were in their third or later year in their counseling program. Additionally, most participants were pursuing counseling specializations in clinical mental health counseling ($n = 55$, 41.7%), followed by school counseling ($n = 20$, 15.2%), and rehabilitation counseling ($n = 13$, 9.8%). Eight participants (6.1%) were specializing in marriage, couple, and family counseling, while seven (5.3%) were pursuing multiple specializations (e.g., clinical mental health and rehabilitation); 15 (11.4%) did not identify a counseling specialization but, rather, a client population within which they planned to specialize (e.g., trauma, eating disorders, etc.); and eight (6.1%) did not respond and were categorized as “other.” Most participants’ household income was either under \$20,000 ($n = 31$, 23.5%), over \$100,000 ($n = 27$, 20.5%), or \$20,000 to \$34,999 ($n = 24$, 18.2%). Other participants’ household incomes were \$50,000 to \$74,999 ($n = 18$, 13.6%); \$35,000 to \$49,999 ($n = 17$, 12.9%); \$75,000 to \$99,999 ($n = 14$, 10.6%); and one participant (0.8%) did not provide any information in this respect.

Over two-thirds of participants either had full-time employment ($n = 43$, 32.6%) or identified as a student ($n = 39$, 29.5%), while 33 (25%) participants were employed part-time. Five (3.8%) participants were self-employed, four (3%) were unemployed, and eight (6.1%) described their employment status as “other” and provided specified information (e.g., graduate assistant). Furthermore, the majority of participants were single ($n = 78$, 59.1%), followed by those who were married or in a domestic partnership ($n = 34.8\%$). Six (4.5%) participants were

divorced, one (0.8%) described their marital status as separated, and one (0.8%) did not specify.

Detailed demographic information is provided in Table 1.

Table 1. *Demographics*

	Characteristics	<i>N</i>	%
Age	19–25	59	44.7%
	26–35	33	25.0%
	36–45	23	17.4%
	46–55	13	9.9%
	56 or older	4	3.0%
Gender	Female	117	88.6%
	Male	10	7.6%
	Non-binary	5	3.8%
Identify as Transgender	Yes	3	2.3%
	No	127	96.2%
	Prefer not to say	2	1.5%
Identify as LGBTQ+	Yes	30	22.7%
	No	64	48.5%
	No, but I identify as an Ally	36	27.3%
	Prefer not to say	2	1.5%
Ethnicity	American Indian or Alaska Native	2	1.5%
	Asian	4	3.0%
	Black or African American	13	9.8%
	Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish Origin	6	4.5%
	White	102	77.3%
	Other (e.g., multiracial)	5	3.8%
Undergraduate Majors	Arts and Humanities	5	3.8%
	Business	3	2.3%
	Communication	5	3.8%
	Education	5	3.8%

(table continues)

Table 1 (Continued)

	Characteristics	<i>N</i>	%
Undergraduate Majors	Health Sciences	3	2.3%
	STEM	5	3.8%
	Social Science	84	63.6%
	Other (e.g., interdisciplinary)	22	16.7%
Current Year in Program	First year	68	51.5%
	Second Year	45	34.1%
	Other (e.g., third year or later)	19	14.4%
Counseling Specialization	Addiction	5	3.8%
	Career	1	0.8%
	Clinical Mental Health	55	41.7%
	Marriage, Couple, and Family	8	6.1%
	Rehabilitation	13	9.8%
	School	20	15.2%
	Multiple Specializations	7	5.3%
	Other	15	11.4%
	Did not respond	8	6.1%
Annual Household Income	< \$20,000	31	23.5%
	\$20,000 – \$34,999	24	18.2%
	\$35,000 – \$49,999	17	12.9%
	\$50,000 – \$74,999	18	13.6%
	\$75,000 – \$99,999	14	10.6%
	> \$100,000	27	20.5%
Employment Status	Full-time	43	32.6%
	Part-time	33	25.0%
	Unemployed	4	3.0%
	Student	39	29.5%
	Self-employed	5	3.8%
	Other	8	6.1%
Marital Status	Single	78	59.1%
	Married, or in a domestic partnership	46	34.8%

(table continues)

Table 1 (Continued)

	Characteristics	<i>N</i>	%
Marital Status	Divorced	6	4.5%
	Separated	1	0.8%
	Other	1	0.8%

Manipulation Check

Seventy (53%) participants reflected on a nostalgic memory, and 62 (47%) reflected on an ordinary memory. In analyzing the manipulation check, findings from an independent samples *t*-test showed that participants in the nostalgia condition ($M = 14.37$, $SD = 3.88$) significantly endorsed greater feelings of nostalgia than participants in the ordinary memory condition ($M = 11.48$, $SD = 4.19$), $t(130) = 4.11$, $p < .001$, $d = .72$. The effect size for this analysis indicates a medium-to-large effect (i.e., .20 = small, .50 = medium, .80 = large; Cohen, 1969). Regarding the duration (in seconds) of time spent completing the survey, an independent samples *t*-test revealed that there were no significant differences between the nostalgia group ($M = 3713$, $SD = 21197.53$) and the ordinary memory group ($M = 3992$, $SD = 15445.85$), $t(130) = -.09$, $p = .466$, $d = -.02$. In this respect, participants in the nostalgia group spent an average of 61.88 minutes completing the survey, while those in the ordinary memory group spent an average of 66.53 minutes.

Nostalgic Memory Reflections

Congruent with the manipulation check, a review of participants' responses showed differences between those who reflected on a nostalgic vs. an ordinary memory. Particularly, nostalgic memories were more distant (i.e., having occurred during childhood) and characterized by keywords ranging from "joyful" and "comfort" to "yearning" and "melancholy," thereby aligning with previous conceptualizations of nostalgia as a bittersweet emotional experience

(e.g., Sedikides & Wildschut, 2018; Routledge, 2023; Turner & Stanley, 2021; Wildschut et al., 2006; Wilson, 2005). For example, one participant in the nostalgia group compared the innocence of childhood with the daunting preoccupations of adulthood:

When I think of nostalgia I think of my childhood summer days of running around as a young kid in the 90s. This was before major tech and internet. I can picture riding my bike and hazy purple and pink sunsets. Waiting for the streetlights to dim green as a warning that it was almost time to come home. I can remember feeling happy and full of joy. I felt like the world was light and peaceful and that there was only good things and happy times ahead of me. The only day that mattered was that day and there was no worry of the past or the future. I remember feeling light and full of something I truly can't recall other than bliss. Pure childhood and innocence before the world became darker, scarier, full of bad things and stress that come to awareness as an adult.

Similarly, another participant shared about a carefree childhood memory that left them feeling a sense of longing:

My grandma had a huge back yard with lots of big rocks; I would pretend that each rock was a different place to visit and the biggest rock was my house. My brother and I would play in the back yard on the rocks every time we went to my grandmas. I can remember how the grass felt on my feet, the breeze blowing, the sun on my skin. I would smell my grandma cooking fried chicken from the open kitchen windows. I remember feeling so at peace, life felt so different and looking back now I feel sad and yearn to go back to those times knowing I never can.

The majority of nostalgic memories, like the previous one that was highlighted, featured participants' connections with family and friends. In fact, a few participants highlighted how they cherished loved ones who had passed away. For example, a participant wrote the following about a mentor:

I am so grateful for a particular person that I had in my life. I learned so much about myself, my passion, and what it feels like to lose someone I loved and respected very much. I have pursued [sic] my degree for myself and in his memory.

Additionally, many nostalgic memories referenced familiar sensory factors (e.g., scents, sights, music). For example, one participant wrote:

Watching “The Young and The Restless” at my grandmothers [sic] house; the song brings nostalgia as well as the smell or sight of magnolia flowers that were in her backyard; McDonald’s happy meals she would buy us; and the smell of her makeup foundation L’Oréal watermelon kids shampoo; PINK perfume; spice girls and Backstreet Boys music; Disney Channel original shows

Similarly, another participant highlighted the feelings and sounds associated with their nostalgic memory of vacationing with a friend:

I was a senior in high school, on vacation with a friend. I remember the warmth of the sun, the smell of sunscreen on my skin. The loud music playing in the background outside. sitting by the window, eating breakfast for the day, enjoying the moment.

While most nostalgic memories that participants highlighted were referenced as having occurred during childhood, some occurred later in life. For example, one participant shared about a nostalgic memory involving their child:

Thinking about the birth of my only child, my son, makes me particularly nostalgic. I had some medical issues surrounding his birth, which were frightening, yet, when I think back on it, I still feel mostly overwhelmed with happiness. I also feel a sense of longing for how small he was and how new every moment was for him. Now that he's a bit older, I find myself thinking back on these moments a lot with such fondness.

Another participant described how the memory of their marriage made them feel nostalgic:

Thinking about getting married I am reminded by the love and commitment my partner and I shared. We were able to declare in front of others for accountability that we would be "for" one another and truly for a team and partnership. Trusting one another is something we knew was necessary for the partnership to work but we have learned more and more about that throughout the marriage.

Overall, the contents of these examples align with findings from previous research that has highlighted how nostalgic memories are generally characterized by positive affect, feature oneself as the protagonist, and involve social connections during meaningful events (Wildschut et al., 2006). The contents of participants' ordinary life memories will be addressed in the following section.

Ordinary Memory Reflections

Participants in the control condition were asked to reflect on an ordinary event that occurred last week. In this respect, participants' ordinary memories were characterized by descriptions that ranged from keywords such as "mundane," "tedious," and "routine," in addition to "exhausting" and "stressful," as well as "relaxing" and "calming." Therefore, participants who reflected on ordinary memories expressed a broader range of descriptions and emotional content.

Most participants reflected on having completed routine weekly tasks (e.g., grocery shopping). For example, one participant wrote:

My ordinary event was doing laundry. I do laundry more often than any other household chore. It's not the worst chore to do, dishes are, so I feel relieved that I'm doing laundry rather than doing dishes. But once I get into folding the second load, I start getting frustrated. My shoulders and back are beginning to hurt, I don't want to keep picking up my arms, they feel heavier, I'm ready to be done, and I'm feeling anxious about all of the other things that still have to be done along with these endless loads of laundry.

Similarly, another participant shared about a routine involving their child:

The ordinary event that I was thinking of was putting my toddler to sleep at night. This involves a routine that can be boring and tiring, but also can be a time for closeness and bonding with my child. First this usually begins with bathtime. Often I join my son in the bath and it is generally relaxing and peaceful for both of us. He plays with toys and I help him wash up. Afterwards we dry off, and I help him get dressed in pajamas and brush his teeth. Then he picks 3 books, and we read together in his bed. Then he turns off his light, and we lay together and snuggle- usually until he falls asleep (or is close). I enjoy cuddling with him, it feels like nice bonding. Sometimes I fall asleep also, and it can be exhausting to get back up- usually to finish up school work or basic chores.

Although previous research (e.g., Wildschut et al., 2006) did not provide specific examples of participants' ordinary memories, it is still worth noting that many participants in the current study (i.e., master's-level counseling students) tended to identify positive factors in

discussing their routine – and sometimes stressful – factors associated with ordinary memories.

For example, one participant wrote:

I attended a normal class. There was nothing new or exciting but I enjoy the people in my class and they bring a level of happiness to my day. I sat in the same spot that I normally do and spoke to the same people while we discussed different micro-aggressions [sic]

Congruently, another student highlighted both the happiness and exhaustion they felt while engaging in their role as an elementary school staff:

I am working in my Behavioral K-2 classroom with very challenging students. It is morning time and the students are coming into class one at a time as they are dropped off by bus or car. I am excited to see them, say good morning, and give them big hugs. Some students unpack and start working on their morning binders. Other students start running around the classroom, kicking over chairs, and knocking things off shelves right to start off the day. This makes me wonder what happened at home, or what is this child feeling that makes him want to make these choices. One student will start to be aggressive toward another student and have to be put in the safety hold and taken down the hall to the Zen Zone to calm down. This makes me exhausted from doing it several times a day.

It is also important to note how most ordinary memories, like nostalgic memories, also referenced participants' social connections. For example, one participant shared an ordinary memory involving their child:

I feel happy watching my daughters play with the neighbor girls. I feel peace knowing these children are all safe and loved. I like keeping my daughters close

and in my care. We are on spring break, but we didn't travel anywhere this year. It feels good to be home, relaxing together, instead of racing around to school and school activities. I feel a sense of relief that the weather is finally warm, sunny, and nice. I love the way sunshine feels on my face. Breathing in fresh spring air feels cathartic to me, and I am grateful for our home and our relatively large yard. Relaxing doesn't always come easy to me, but in these moments, I feel relaxed.

Another participant shared about an ordinary memory involving their partner:

Made dinner with my partner. I made frozen pizza for myself and offered him options and he chose leftovers. I helped him gather the containers and started the oven. We were helping each other and catching up on the day's events while preparing our food. It was great to just be with him as I had a super stressful day and his presence is a comfort to me. I began to relax as I didn't have anything else to focus on at the moment but him and food preparation. Once the food was ready we took it to the living room and enjoyed our meal.

As previously highlighted, participants' ordinary memories emphasized a broader range of feelings (e.g., mundane to calming) than nostalgic memories. However, participants tended to reference meaningful social connections in both ordinary and nostalgic memories. Still, according to the manipulation check, participants in the nostalgia group felt more nostalgic than those in the ordinary memory group.

Preliminary Analyses

Table 2 provides the means, standard deviations, and Cronbach's alphas for this study's variables. For the three subscales of the AS (Wood et al., 2008) in the current study, Cronbach's alpha was .74, .87, and .84 for Authentic Living ($M = 23.4$, $SD = 3.22$), Accepting External

Influence ($M = 13.86$, $SD = 5.25$), and Self-Alienation ($M = 9.92$, $SD = 4.96$), respectively. On average, participants' Likert ratings were between 5 and 6 on the Authentic Living subscale, indicating that they leaned toward perceiving their lifestyle as aligning with their beliefs and values. Additionally, participants' average score on the Accepting External Influence subscale indicated that their Likert ratings were between 3 and 4, thereby informing that participants perceived themselves as moderately influenced by others and other people's expectations. On the Self-Alienation subscale, participants' average score indicated that their Likert ratings were between 2 and 3, thereby indicating that they perceived themselves as least disconnected from their genuine self. Altogether, these average scores and Likert ratings on the three subscales of the AS indicate that participants mostly perceived themselves as authentic, though moderately impacted by the outlooks and expectations of others.

In the current study, Cronbach's alpha was .84 for the QCAE (Reniers et al., 2011). Moreover, participants' mean score was 54.06 ($SD = 9.57$), thereby indicating that their Likert ratings, on average, were between 1 and 2. Based on this information, participants perceived themselves as being less likely to inherently consider other's perspectives, reflect other's feelings, and affectively respond to other's feelings. In this respect, these findings indicate that participants were less likely to be empathic.

Finally, Cronbach's alpha for the subscales on the MLQ (Steger et al., 2006) was .85 for Presence of Meaning ($M = 28.52$, $SD = 4.62$) and .89 for Search for Meaning ($M = 25.89$, $SD = 7.04$). On average, participants' Likert ratings on the Presence of Meaning subscale were between 5 and 6, while their Likert ratings on the Search for Meaning subscale were between 4 and 5. In this respect, participants perceived their lives as having meaning slightly more so than lacking meaning.

Table 2. Reliability Statistics

	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Cronbach's Alpha
AS				
Authentic Living (Subscale)	4	23.4	3.22	.74
Accepting External Influence (Subscale)	4	13.86	5.25	.87
Self-Alienation (Subscale)	4	9.92	4.96	.84
QCAE	31	54.06	9.57	.84
MLQ				
Presence of Meaning (Subscale)	5	28.52	4.62	.85
Search for Meaning (Subscale)	5	25.89	7.04	.89

Note. AS = Authenticity Scale; QCAE = Questionnaire of Cognitive and Affective Empathy;

MLQ = Meaning in Life Questionnaire

Table 3 provides the means and standard deviations of scores between participants who reflected on a nostalgic memory and those who reflected on an ordinary memory. Regarding the AS (Wood et al., 2008) the nostalgia group ($M = 23.06$, $SD = 3.27$) scored slightly lower on the Authentic Living subscale than the ordinary memories group ($M = 23.79$, $SD = 3.15$). On the Accepting External Influence subscale, participants in the nostalgia group ($M = 14.24$, $SD = 5.37$) scored slightly higher than the ordinary memories group ($M = 13.32$, $SD = 5.10$) as well. Likewise, on the Self-Alienation subscale, the nostalgia group ($M = 10.228$, $SD = 5.00$) scored only slightly higher than the ordinary memories group ($M = 9.56$, $SD = 4.93$).

On the QCAE (Reniers et al., 2011), participants who reflected on a nostalgic memory ($M = 54.11$, $SD = 10.16$) scored slightly higher than participants who reflected on an ordinary memory ($M = 54.00$, $SD = 8.95$). On the MLQ (Steger et al., 2006), participants who reflected on a nostalgic memory ($M = 28.20$, $SD = 4.86$) scored only slightly lower than participants who

reflected on an ordinary memory ($M = 28.87$, $SD = 4.33$) on the Presence of Meaning subscale. However, on the MLQ's Search for Meaning subscale, the nostalgia group ($M = 26.76$, $SD = 6.71$) scored higher than the ordinary memory group ($M = 24.90$, $SD = 7.32$). These scores indicate that participants who reflected on a nostalgic memory perceived slightly less presence of meaning in their life, and reportedly were more so searching for meaning in life, than participants who reflected on an ordinary memory.

Table 3. Means and Standard Deviations of Scores Between Nostalgia and Ordinary Memory Groups

	Nostalgia ($N = 70$)	M	SD	Ordinary ($N = 62$)	M	SD
AS						
Authentic Living (Subscale)		23.06	3.27		23.79	3.15
Accepting External Influence (Subscale)		14.24	5.37		13.32	5.10
Self-Alienation (Subscale)		10.23	5.00		9.56	4.93
QCAE		54.11	10.16		54.00	8.95
MLQ						
Presence of Meaning (Subscale)		28.20	4.86		28.87	4.33
Search for Meaning (Subscale)		26.76	6.71		24.90	7.32

Note. AS = Authenticity Scale; QCAE = Questionnaire of Cognitive and Affective Empathy; MLQ =

Meaning in Life Questionnaire

Preliminary findings from Pearson correlations showed that participants' scores on the Authentic Living subscale of the AS (Wood et al., 2008) had significant negative correlations with the Accepting External Influence subscale of the AS, $r = -.45$, $p < .001$, and the Self-Alienation subscale of the AS, $r = -.31$, $p < .001$. Moreover, the Accepting External Influence shared a significant positive correlation with the Self-Alienation subscale, $r = .42$, $p < .001$.

Findings from Pearson correlations also revealed that authenticity significantly correlated with meaning in life. Particularly, participants' scores on the Authentic Living subscale of the AS shared a significant positive correlation with scores on the Presence of Meaning subscale of the MLQ (Steger et al., 2006), $r = .30, p < .001$. Additionally, participants' scores on the Accepting External Influence subscale of the AS shared a significant negative correlation with the MLQ's Presence of Meaning subscale, $r = -.31, p < .001$. Participants' responses on the Self-Alienation subscale of the AS shared a significant negative correlation with responses on the MLQ's Presence of Meaning subscale as well, $r = -.57, p < .001$. Furthermore, participants' scores on the Self-Alienation subscale of the AS shared a significant positive correlation with scores on the Search for Meaning subscale of the MLQ, $r = .20, p = .021$. There were no other statistically significant correlations among this study's variables. For instance, participants' empathy scores via the QCAE (Reniers et al., 2011) positively correlated with the Authentic Living subscale, $r = .03, p = .74$; negatively correlated with the Accepting External Influence subscale, $r = -.03, p = .702$; and positively correlated with the Self-Alienation subscale of the AS, $r = .15, p = .098$. QCAE scores negatively correlated with the Presence of Meaning subscale, $r = -.12, p = .171$, and the Search for Meaning subscale of the MLQ, $r = -.14, p = .114$. The Search for Meaning subscale of the MLQ negatively correlated with the Authentic Living subscale, $r = -.16, p = .068$, and positively correlated with the Accepting External Influence of the AS, $r = .16, p = .062$. Lastly, the MLQ subscales negatively correlated with one another, $r = -.11, p = .195$. Pearson correlation findings are reported in Table 4.

Table 4. *Correlations Among Authenticity, Empathy, and Meaning in Life*

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. AS – Authentic Living	-					
2. AS – Accepting External Influence	-.45*	-				
3. AS – Self-Alienation	-.31*	.42*	-			
4. QCAE (Full Scale)	.03	-.03	.15	-		
5. MLQ – Presence	.30*	-.31*	-.57*	-.12	-	
6. MLQ – Search	-.16	.16	.20**	-.14	-.11	-

Note. * $p < .01$. ** $p < .05$. AS = Authenticity Scale; QCAE = Questionnaire of Cognitive and Affective Empathy; MLQ = Meaning in Life Questionnaire

Main Analyses

Research Question 1: Are there significant differences in authenticity ratings among counseling students who are asked to reflect on a nostalgic versus an ordinary life event?

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to analyze data to determine if there were any significant differences in scores for authenticity among counseling students who reflected on either a nostalgic or an ordinary memory. According to statistical analyses, there were no significant differences for scores on authentic living between the nostalgia condition ($M = 23.06$, $SD = 3.27$) and the ordinary memory condition ($M = 23.79$, $SD = 3.15$), $F(1, 17.67) = 1.712$, $p = .193$. There were also no significant differences in scores for accepting external influence between the nostalgia ($M = 14.33$, $SD = 5.37$) and the ordinary memory condition ($M = 13.32$, $SD = 5.10$), $F(1, 33.27) = 1.21$, $p = .273$. Furthermore, there were no significant differences in scores for self-alienation between participants who reflected on a nostalgic memory ($M = 10.23$,

$SD = 5.00$) and those who reflected on an ordinary memory ($M = 9.56$, $SD = 4.93$), $F(1, 14.49) = .587$, $p = .445$. These findings are reported in Table 5.

Table 5. *ANOVA of Authenticity Scores Between Nostalgia and Ordinary Memory Groups*

AS		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Authentic Living (Subscale)	Between Groups	17.674	1	17.674	1.712	.193
	Within Groups	1342.046	130	10.323		
	Total	1359.720	131			
Accepting External Influence (Subscale)	Between Groups	33.274	1	33.274	1.210	.273
	Within Groups	3574.991	130	27.500		
	Total	3608.265	131			
Self-Alienation (Subscale)	Between Groups	14.499	1	14.499	.587	.445
	Within Groups	3209.585	130	24.689		
	Total	3224.083	131			

Research Question 2: Are there significant differences in empathy ratings among counseling students who are asked to reflect on a nostalgic versus an ordinary life event?

A one-way ANOVA was also conducted to analyze data pertaining to whether there were significant differences in empathy scores among counseling students who reflected on a nostalgic or an ordinary memory. Statistical findings revealed that there were no significant findings between the nostalgia ($M = 54.11$, $SD = 10.16$) and the ordinary memory condition ($M = 54.00$, $SD = 8.95$), $F(1, .429) = .005$, $p = .946$. Table 6 provides the statistics for these findings.

Table 6. *ANOVA of Empathy Scores Between Nostalgia and Ordinary Memory Groups*

QCAE		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
	Between Groups	.429	1	.429	.005	.946
	Within Groups	12003.086	130	92.331		
	Total	12003.515	131			

Research Question 3: Are there significant differences in ratings of meaning in life among counseling students who are asked to reflect on a nostalgic versus an ordinary life event?

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to address this study's third and final research question that addressed whether there were significant differences in scores pertaining to meaning in life between the nostalgia and ordinary memory groups. Regarding perceptions of presence of meaning in life, statistical results showed that there were no significant differences between the nostalgia ($M = 28.20$, $SD = 4.86$) and the ordinary memory condition ($M = 28.87$, $SD = 4.33$), $F(1, 14.802) = .693$, $p = .407$. Furthermore, concerning the search for meaning in life, there were no significant differences between participants who reflected on a nostalgic memory ($M = 26.76$, $SD = 6.71$) or an ordinary memory ($M = 24.90$, $SD = 7.32$), $F(1, 113.005) = 2.304$, $p = .131$. The statistics for these findings are presented in Table 7.

Table 7. *ANOVA of Meaning in Life Scores Between Nostalgia and Ordinary Memory Groups*

MLQ		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Presence (Subscale)	Between Groups	14.802	1	14.802	.693	.407
	Within Groups	2776.168	130	21.355		
	Total	2790.970	131			
Search (Subscale)	Between Groups	113.005	1	113.005	2.304	.131
	Within Groups	6376.291	130	49.048		
	Total	6489.295	131			

Summary

This study examined the effects of nostalgic versus ordinary memory reflections on master's-level counseling students' ratings of authenticity, empathy, and meaning in life. Statistical analysis for the manipulation check revealed that participants who reflected on a nostalgic memory felt more nostalgic than participants who reflected on an ordinary memory. Additionally, preliminary findings from Pearson correlations showed that participants' scores on all three subscales of the AS (i.e., Authentic Living, Accepting External Influence, Self-Alienation; Wood et al., 2008) significantly correlated with scores on the Presence of Meaning subscale for the MLQ (Steger et al., 2006). Additionally, participants' scores on the Self-Alienation subscale of the AS also significantly correlated with the Search for Meaning subscale of the MLQ. Furthermore, findings from one-way ANOVAs showed that there were no significant differences between the nostalgia and the ordinary memory groups on ratings of authenticity, empathy, and meaning in life. These findings will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 4. Discussion

This study examined the effects of nostalgic versus ordinary memory reflections on master's-level counseling students' ratings of authenticity, empathy, and perceived meaning in life. Specifically, this study was conducted online via Qualtrics, during which participants were randomly assigned to two groups and asked to reflect, as well as briefly write about, either a nostalgic or an ordinary memory that occurred last week during their daily life. After a manipulation check to verify whether participants in the nostalgia group endorsed feeling more nostalgic than participants in the ordinary memory group, all participants' perceptions of authenticity were assessed via the AS (Wood et al., 2008). Additionally, participants' empathy was evaluated via the QCAE (Reniers et al., 2011), and perceptions of meaning in life were examined via the MLQ (Steger et al., 2006). This study's findings will be discussed in the following chapter, in addition to implications for counselor education and supervision. Lastly, this study's limitations will be addressed, as well as recommendations for future research.

Overview

A bittersweet emotion that is experienced during reflections on cherished autobiographical memories (Hepper et al., 2014; Wildschut & Sedikides, 2020; Wilson, 2005), nostalgia possesses self, social, and existential capacities (Routledge, 2016, 2023; Sedikides & Wildschut, 2022). For instance, previous research has shown that nostalgia can promote authenticity (e.g., Kelley et al., 2022), empathy (Juhl et al., 2020), and meaning in life (e.g., Sedikides et al., 2018). Congruently, the counseling profession values counseling students' authenticity (e.g., Ray et al., 2021), empathy (e.g., Cole, 2022), and meaning in life (e.g., Hurst and Prescott, 2022).

Because researchers in counselor education and supervision have yet to experimentally induce and examine the effects of nostalgia among counseling students, the current study endeavored to do so while specifically focusing on counseling students' ratings of authenticity, empathy, and meaning in life. In this respect, if nostalgic reflections (as compared with ordinary memory reflections) increased counseling students' authenticity, empathy, and perceptions of meaning in life, then nostalgia could be identified as an experiential resource for counselor educators and supervisors to use during the trainings of counseling students.

The current study served to bridge an empirical gap on nostalgia in counselor education and supervision research. Previously, the general public or undergraduate students have primarily served as participants during studies on nostalgia (e.g., Juhl et al., 2020; Kelley et al., 2022; Routledge et al., 2012; van Tilburg et al., 2019). Therefore, this study specifically focused on the effects of nostalgia on counseling students, who gain considerable exposure to concepts such as authenticity, empathy, and existential meaning during their education and trainings in professional counseling (e.g., Bell, 2018; Garner et al., 2017; Ray et al., 2021; Rogers, 1980; Yalom, 1980).

Discussion of Findings

The current study's manipulation check was successful, as evidenced by results from an independent samples *t*-test, which showed that participants who reflected on a nostalgic memory felt more nostalgic than participants who reflected on an ordinary memory. This manipulation effect aligns with previous research that also used this approach to induce nostalgia (e.g., Baldwin et al., 2015; Sedikides et al., 2015a; Wildschut et al., 2019). Additionally, preliminary findings highlighted significant correlations between factors of authenticity (i.e., authentic living, accepting external influence, self-alienation) and scores pertaining to presence of meaning in life.

Moreover, participants' scores for self-alienation negatively correlated with their outlooks of searching for meaning in life as well. These findings indicate that the more participants perceived their behavioral and emotional expressions as congruent with their conscious awareness of their cognitions, beliefs, emotions and physiological states (i.e., authentic living), the more they perceived their lives as meaningful (i.e., presence of meaning). Secondly, the more participants felt they were influenced by the outlooks of others (i.e., accepting external influence), the less they discerned the presence of meaning in their lives. Furthermore, the more participants perceived that their conscious awareness was incongruent with their lived experience (i.e., self-alienation), the less they perceived their life as having meaning, and the more they indicated they were seeking meaning in life (i.e., search for meaning). These correlational findings are congruent with other studies that have reported similar connections between authenticity and meaning in life (Bayram & Artan, 2024; Lutz et al., 2022; Wilt et al., 2021).

Regarding this study's three research questions, all null hypotheses were accepted, based on evidence from multiple one-way ANOVA tests. The first research question asked whether there would be significant differences in scores for authenticity between participants who either reflected on a nostalgic or an ordinary memory. In this respect, ANOVA results showed that there were no significant differences. These findings contrast with previous research that has reported greater authenticity among participants who reflected on nostalgic memories (Baldwin et al., 2015; Kelley et al., 2022; Stephan et al., 2012). Of course, it is important to note that participants in previous experiments represented undergraduate students or the general public, while the current study specifically involved master's-level counseling students. Moreover, counseling students may gain more exposure to insight pertaining to authenticity during their studies (e.g., Ray et al., 2021), which may help explain why there were no significant differences

among counseling students' ratings of authenticity between the study groups. In fact, Rogers (1980) highlighted that it is through genuineness, or congruence, that one is able to convey the state of their emotional well-being. Additionally, genuineness is a crucial component in the therapeutic relationship, as it enables counselors to effectively connect with clients (Rogers, 1961). Therefore, counseling students must understand and strive to be an authentic presence throughout counseling endeavors. Due to the emphasis that is devoted to authenticity in the counseling profession, it is likely that a brief, single experiment like the current study may not have been sufficient to influence the outcomes between the two study groups.

Additionally, the current study's second research question asked whether there would be significant differences in empathy scores between the nostalgia and ordinary memory groups. A one-way ANOVA test revealed there were no significant differences. This finding also contrasts with previous research that reported connections between nostalgia and empathy (Cheung et al., 2017; Juhl et al., 2020; Zhou et al., 2012). In addition to authenticity, counseling students also gain considerable insight and experience in being empathic (e.g., Cole, 2022), which may be why there were no significant differences in empathy scores among participants in this study. Along with authenticity, or a sense of congruence or genuineness, empathy is a critical factor in therapeutic relationships, as it promotes unity, personal value, unbiased acceptance, and constructive aftereffects (Rogers, 1980). Counseling students acquire knowledge and clinical experience in applying empathy during their academic and professional trainings, which may explain why the brief experiment that was used in the current study did not yield significant differences between the two study groups.

Finally, this study's third research question asked whether any significant differences in ratings for meaning in life would be present between the nostalgia and the ordinary memory

groups. Contrary to previous research that has reported how nostalgia can augment meaning in life (Maher et al., 2021; Routledge et al., 2012; Sedikides et al., 2018; van Tilburg et al., 2019), a one-way ANOVA test showed there were no significant differences regarding meaning in life ratings between the nostalgia and the ordinary memory groups. Just as authenticity and empathy are highly emphasized in the counseling profession, perceptions of meaning in life are also prioritized (e.g., Hurst & Prescott, 2022; Rogers, 1961, 1980; Yalom, 1980). For example, counselors who apply logotherapy must recognize that meaning in life can be acquired via creative or constructive actions, personal or social experiences, and the attitude one assumes during times of distress (Frankl, 1946/2006). During their professional trainings, counseling students gain insight pertaining to existential therapy, which can be applied to assist clients with discerning personal meaning in life (e.g., Yalom, 1980). Moreover, by pursuing trainings to become professional counselors, counseling students arguably are engaged in pursuits of personal meaning. This arguably provides a rationale for the lack of significant differences in perceptions of meaning in life between this study's two groups that involved counseling students, as compared with findings from previous studies that involved the general public, who may not share the same extent of familiarity with concepts such as meaning in life, empathy, or authenticity.

Implications

In contrast to previous studies that involved undergraduate students or the general public, there were no significant differences in ratings of authenticity, empathy, and meaning in life among master's-level counseling students who either reflected on a nostalgic or an ordinary memory. Still, the following study added to the counselor education and supervision literature by experimentally inducing and evaluating nostalgia effects among master's-level counseling

students at CACREP-accredited programs across the U.S. By successfully incorporating an established experimental approach for inducing nostalgia (Sedikides et al., 2015b), this study offers a reference point for future researchers in counselor education and supervision to consider if their aim is to evaluate the effects of nostalgia.

Despite this study's findings of no significant differences among ratings of authenticity, empathy, and meaning in life between the nostalgia and the ordinary memory groups, it is premature to conclude that nostalgia is either ineffective or effective in counselor education. Based on findings from previous research (e.g., Juhl et al., 2020; Kelley et al., 2022; van Tilburg et al., 2019), there is arguably potential for nostalgia to be utilized in counselor education and supervision. However, it must be noted that experimental research on nostalgia in counselor education is in its infancy; therefore, more empirical studies are needed to obtain evidence about its effects in relation to counselor education objectives (e.g., preparation and clinical supervision of counseling students) before it can be implemented in counselor education curriculum and clinical practices.

Limitations

This study had multiple limitations, including the study's small sample size ($n = 132$). Additionally, most participants were White, a factor that reflects the ethnic majority of the counseling profession in general (e.g., Gleeson, 2023). It would be beneficial to identify ways to conduct studies on nostalgia in counselor education and supervision that involve more balanced quantities of participants who represent a broader range of ethnic backgrounds. Another limitation in this study was social desirability, given how all participants were master's-level counseling students from CACREP-accredited counselor education programs across the U.S. Moreover, because participants were graduate students in counseling, it can be argued that they

had more academic exposure and understanding of the dependent variables (i.e., authenticity, empathy, meaning in life) than participants who represented the general public or undergraduate students in previous research on nostalgia. Of course, the current study did not control for counseling students' individual and academic factors (e.g., completion of specific graduate-level counseling courses, practicum and internship experience, etc.). However, this may explain why there were no significant differences in dependent variables ratings between this study's two groups, whereas previous research has reported significant findings (e.g., Routledge et al., 2011). Therefore, future studies on nostalgia in counselor education and supervision may focus on other participant populations (e.g., clients) while examining the effects of nostalgia on a variety of variables, including those that were examined in this study. Furthermore, data was collected via self-report through an online Qualtrics survey, and nostalgia was induced via a brief – though empirically established – method (i.e., Sedikides et al., 2015b). Future researchers in counselor education and supervision may consider exploring nostalgia via more extensive qualitative methods, as well as through more extensive quantitative approaches, during which experiments can be conducted in a more controlled environment, and data can be collected multiple times rather than during a single event.

Recommendations for Future Research

Although there were no significant differences in ratings of authenticity, empathy, and meaning in life among counseling students who either reflected on a nostalgic or an ordinary memory, the effects of nostalgia (i.e., self, social, and existential capacities; Routledge, 2016, 2023; Wildschut & Sedikides, 2020) still warrant empirical investigation in counselor education and supervision. However, researchers must proceed with caution while acquiring findings that either highlight nostalgia's effectiveness or ineffectiveness in counselor education. For instance,

future studies can develop and evaluate a pedagogical approach for addressing nostalgia among counseling students. Additionally, future research may experimentally induce nostalgia and include assessments like Batcho's (1995, 1998) Nostalgia Inventory and the Southampton Nostalgia Survey (Routledge et al., 2008) to obtain more data. For instance, Batcho's Nostalgia Inventory asks participants to rate their feelings of nostalgia, or longing, for 20 factors from their youth (e.g., family, places, music) on a 5-point Likert scale (i.e., 1 = *Not at all*, 5 = *Very much*). The Nostalgia Inventory also asks participants to rate their outlooks regarding the condition of the world from past (i.e., 1 = *A lot worse*, 5 = *A lot better*), present (i.e., 1 = *Pretty bad*, 5 = *Great*), and future contexts (i.e., 1 = *A lot worse*, 5 = *A lot better*). The Southampton Nostalgia Inventory is a brief questionnaire that evaluates nostalgia proneness (e.g., "How prone are you to feeling nostalgic?"), in which most items are rated via a 7-point Likert scale (i.e., 1 = *Very rarely*, 7 = *Very frequently*). By incorporating these assessments into future studies, researchers in counselor education and supervision can acquire more quantitative insight about nostalgia and identify the extent of which it correlates with authenticity, empathy, and meaning in life among counseling students. Likewise, future studies may employ qualitative approaches to further examine nostalgia in connection with the variables that were quantitatively examined in the current study. Such endeavors may offer insight into counseling students' perceptions of their authenticity, empathy, and meaning in life in association with nostalgia, in addition to potentially identifying other variables of interest for future quantitative and qualitative explorations.

Once researchers in counselor education obtain more empirical evidence about whether it is beneficial to utilize nostalgia among counseling students, future investigations may also involve other participant populations (e.g., clients, professional counselors, clinical supervisors) to further identify ways in which nostalgia may influence academic, supervisory, and clinical

approaches within the counseling profession. For example, future research may involve qualitative interviews with professional counselors and clinical supervisors that focus on their thoughts about the general use of nostalgia in counseling, in addition to its connections with authenticity, empathy, and meaning in life. This would provide professional counselors the opportunity to share their insight and experience in relation to nostalgia and these variables, which could enrich therapeutic approaches. Likewise, in addition to further examining variables such as authenticity, empathy, and meaning in life, researchers in counselor education and supervision may also consider other variables of interest that align with the counseling profession. Moreover, such studies may focus on the positive and negative effects of nostalgia. For example, in recent research that involved participants who were in recovery from a gambling disorder or an alcohol use disorder, Dowson and Wohl (2024) found that addiction-related nostalgia was associated with greater ambivalence toward recovery. Likewise, Dowson and Wohl found that participants who endorsed more optimism toward their future and less nostalgia for addictive behaviors were the least ambivalent toward recovery. However, Dowson and Wohl further noted that participants who endorsed high optimism toward overcoming addiction still reported more ambivalence if they endorsed high addiction-related nostalgia. In this respect, the researchers posited that addiction-related nostalgia may hinder recovery from addiction. Dowson and Wohl recommend that future studies incorporate longitudinal methods to further examine this subject matter, and it is also worth noting that the researchers did not experimentally induce nostalgia but, rather, solely relied on instrumentation to gather data about nostalgia. Congruently, future researchers in counselor education and supervision may apply longitudinal approaches to examine the effects of nostalgia on authenticity, empathy, and meaning in life among not only counseling students but other populations as well (e.g., people in recovery from addiction). In

addition to focusing on factors such as addiction-related nostalgia, researchers may also prompt participants to reflect on cherished memories that occurred prior to addiction (e.g., Wohl et al., 2018), which may yield insightful findings about multiple variables of interest. These are examples of ways in which researchers in counselor education may obtain evidence about the effects of nostalgia within multiple contexts.

Another example involving other variables that may be replicated with clients is Mallory et al.'s (2018) study, which focused on couples (i.e., undergraduate students in human development and sociology courses). Rather than experimentally inducing nostalgia, Mallory et al. (2018) modified Batcho's (1995, 1998) Nostalgia Inventory to examine the effects of relationship nostalgia, as well as used the Southampton Nostalgia Scale (Routledge et al, 2008) to evaluate nostalgia proneness. Mallory et al. found that, while relationship nostalgia did not heighten positive affect, it was related to advancement toward emotional equilibrium. Moreover, Mallory et al. also found that relationship nostalgia shared a positive connection with relationship satisfaction at the time of assessment, although this connection turned negative and vanished in the short-term (i.e., 6 weeks) and long-term (i.e., 12 weeks), respectively. In this respect, Mallory et al. cited the briefness of their study's use of nostalgia (i.e., via instrumentation) and recommended that future studies apply an experimental approach to induce nostalgia among couples who are married or have been in long-term relationships. Researchers in counselor education and supervision may use Mallory et al.'s study, findings, and recommendations as a reference point for further examining the effects of nostalgia within a couples or relationship context. For instance, it would be beneficial to examine the effects of relationship nostalgia on authenticity, empathy, and meaning in life, as well as other variables of interest. Doing so may provide valuable insight about how cherished memories of intimate

relationships may affect these variables, which can be useful as counselors therapeutically assist couples or families with recognizing genuine and meaningful aspects about their relationships. Such explorations could be conducted as quantitative or qualitative endeavors.

Because nostalgia has self, social, and existential capacities (e.g., Routledge, 2016, 2023), it will be advantageous for researchers in counselor education and supervision to conduct both quantitative and qualitative studies to evaluate its effects within a professional counseling context. Insight gained from such examinations can further help bridge a gap in the counselor education and supervision literature, given how more evidence is needed before any assertions can be made about the effectiveness of utilizing nostalgia in counselor education.

Summary

This study examined the effects of nostalgia on master's-level counseling students' ratings of authenticity, empathy, and meaning in life. Participants were randomly assigned to reflect on either a nostalgic memory or an ordinary memory, after which a manipulation check was conducted, which showed that participants in the nostalgia group felt more nostalgic than those in the ordinary memory group. Results from this investigation showed that there were no significant differences in ratings of the dependent variables among participants who either reflected on a nostalgic or an ordinary memory. This study contributed to the counselor education and supervision literature by utilizing and evaluating an experimental means for inducing nostalgia among counseling students. Limitations included the study's small sample size and majority of White participants, potential social desirability, and counseling students' likely familiarity with the variables of authenticity, empathy, and meaning in life, as compared with undergraduate students and the general public who participated in previous studies on nostalgia. Furthermore, it is recommended that more empirical studies be conducted to acquire

more evidence about the effectiveness of nostalgia in counselor education. Furthermore, researchers in counselor education and supervision can use other research approaches (e.g., qualitative methods) to examine nostalgia in association with authenticity, empathy, and meaning in life, in addition to other variables of interest within the counseling profession.

Chapter 5. Manuscript

Abstract

This study examined the effects of nostalgia on counseling students' authenticity, empathy, and perceptions of meaning in life. Conducted via an online research survey, this study involved 132 master's-level counseling students from CACREP-accredited programs across the U.S., who were randomly assigned to either a nostalgia group or an ordinary memories group. Based on protocol from previous research, nostalgia was experimentally induced by asking participants in the nostalgia group to reflect and briefly write about a nostalgic memory, while participants in the ordinary memories group were asked to do so in connection with an ordinary memory. Following a manipulation check, participants completed assessments for authenticity, empathy, and meaning in life. Contrary to findings from previous research in social and cognitive psychology that involved undergraduate students or the general public, one-way ANOVA tests showed that there were no significant differences in ratings of authenticity, empathy, and meaning in life between participants who reflected on a nostalgic versus an ordinary memory. This study's findings contribute to the counselor education literature and provide insightful implications for future research on nostalgia within the counseling profession, including the need for longitudinal and qualitative methodologies, plus the inclusion of other populations (e.g., clients, professional counselors, clinical supervisors).

Keywords: Nostalgia, authenticity, empathy, meaning in life, counseling students

Introduction and Literature Review

Nostalgia, a bittersweet emotion that is linked to reminiscences of cherished autobiographical memories (Hepper et al., 2014; Sedikides & Wildschut, 2018; Turner & Stanley, 2021; Wilson, 2005), is defined in *The New Oxford Dictionary of English* as “a

sentimental longing or wistful affection for the past” (Pearsall, 1998, p. 1266). Triggered by social and sensory stimuli (Wildschut et al., 2006), nostalgia involves self-awareness, temporal consciousness (i.e., the ability to reflect on the past and articulate the future), and symbolic thinking (e.g., metaphors, abstract references) to convey personal experiences (Routledge, 2023). Experimentally induced by asking people to reflect and briefly write about either a nostalgic or an ordinary memory (Sedikides et al., 2015b), nostalgia has self, social, and existential capacities (Routledge, 2023; Wildschut & Sedikides, 2020) that are consistent across cultures (Sedikides & Wildschut, 2022). For instance, previous research has shown that nostalgia can foster self-continuity (e.g., Sedikides et al., 2015a), support authenticity (e.g., Baldwin et al., 2015; Kelley et al., 2022), bolster social connectedness and ambitions to achieve relationship goals (Abeyta et al., 2015), and elevate empathy (e.g., Juhl et al., 2020; Zhou et al., 2012). Furthermore, nostalgia can support meaning in life (e.g., Abeyta & Juhl, 2023; Routledge et al., 2011).

While social and cognitive theorists have accrued these and other findings that illuminate nostalgia’s effects, it appears that researchers in counselor education have yet to experimentally induce and examine how this multifaceted emotion may contribute to counseling objectives. Given that nostalgia is a profoundly social emotion, as nostalgic narratives typically revolve around meaningful interactions with close others (Wildschut et al., 2006), it will be advantageous to evaluate its effects within the context of counselor education, a profession that prioritizes healthy relationships and holistic wellness among clients and practitioners (American Counseling Association [ACA] *Code of Ethics*, 2014). Because nostalgia can promote authenticity (e.g., Kelley et al., 2022), social connections (e.g., Abeyta et al., 2015), empathy and helpful behavior (e.g., Juhl et al., 2020), and meaning in life (e.g., Routledge et al., 2011), it will be advantageous to examine its effects on counseling students’ authenticity, empathy, and perceptions of meaning

in life. In this respect, nostalgia may be used as an experiential technique to strengthen counseling students' professional competencies.

Authenticity

Authenticity refers to a person's chief or genuine sense of self (Goldman & Kernis, 2002). According to Rogers (1957, 1961, 1980), a counselor effectively demonstrates *congruence* by presenting their genuine self (i.e., sincerely embracing and showing their attitudes and emotions) in therapeutic relationships; likewise, the more a counselor exhibits genuineness, the more likely a client will achieve therapeutic progress. Previous research has focused on authenticity among counseling students. For instance, authenticity also surfaced as a primary theme from interviews with nine doctoral counseling students during Ray et al.'s (2021) qualitative study, which focused on 10 students' experiences on learning how to foster relational depth. Ray et al. reported that counseling students prioritized authenticity with clients, in which factors ranging from willingness to show vulnerability to difficulties associated with therapeutic relationships, identity, and attentiveness to growth facilitated counselors' progressions toward embracing authenticity – within and outside of therapeutic relationships. Participants in Ray et al.'s study also highlighted how enhanced authenticity stemmed from efforts to increase connectedness with clients, showing more immediacy, therapeutic confrontation, and increased emphasis on addressing emotions.

Nostalgia bolsters authenticity (e.g., Baldwin et al., 2015; Stephan et al., 2012), and authenticity appears to mediate the relationship between nostalgia and psychological well-being (Kelley et al., 2022). Moreover, authenticity is highly embraced in the counseling profession due to its capacity to establish and foster therapeutic congruency in counseling relationships, thereby elevating the likelihood that clients will experience therapeutic growth (Bayliss-Conway et al.,

2021; Rogers, 1957, 1961, 1980). Therefore, it will be advantageous to examine the effects of nostalgia on counseling students' authenticity. As previous studies on nostalgia and authenticity have involved the general public or undergraduate students (e.g., Stephan et al., 2012), it will be insightful to identify the extent in which nostalgic reflections affect levels of authenticity among counseling students, who become considerably familiar with the profession's emphasis on authenticity (e.g., Miars, 2002; Ray et al., 2021). If nostalgia effectively boosts counseling students' authenticity, then they will become better equipped to establish therapeutic congruency and assist clients with achieving progress in counseling (Rogers, 1957, 1961, 1980).

Empathy

A chief element in counseling, empathy can be defined as the process in which a person becomes intimately and sensitively familiar with another individual's unique perspective, meanings, and emotions as such pertain to personal experiences (Rogers, 1980). Empathy can be taught and fostered through training (Bayne & Jangha, 2016; Rogers, 1980), and researchers have focused on identifying approaches for teaching and enhancing empathy (e.g., Bell, 2018; Bohecker & Doughty Horn, 2016; Cole, 2022). A recent study that applied pairwise meta-analysis of 30 studies found that interventions involving didactic approaches for teaching empathy to mental health trainees or practitioners (e.g., reading or listening to lectures about empathy) were more effective than interventions that did not incorporate this method ($d = .91$ vs. $d = .39$, $p = .02$; Ngo et al., 2022). This same study also applied network meta-analysis of 33 direct comparisons among intervention combinations across 37 studies (i.e., 36 samples and 1,616 participants), revealing that the most effective approaches for teaching empathy involved combining didactic, reflection, and feedback methods (i.e., 95%; Ngo et al., 2022). Furthermore, the utilization of mindfulness can be effective in promoting empathy (Bell, 2018; Bohecker &

Doughty Horn, 2016), as well as virtual reality (Cole, 2022), and improvisational theater strategies (Bayne & Jangha, 2016).

Nostalgia can promote empathy and prosocial behavior (Juhl et al., 2020; Zhou et al., 2012). This study will be the first to evaluate the effects of nostalgia among counseling students, a population that is taught to prioritize empathy and meaningful connections with clients (ACA *Code of Ethics*, 2014; Rogers, 1957, 1961, 1980; Yalom, 1980). If nostalgia bolsters counseling students' empathy, then this will positively impact their abilities to understand clients and develop strong therapeutic alliances.

Meaning in Life

Of course, counseling and psychotherapy – especially from an existential–humanistic perspective – involve explorations and pursuits of meaning in life (e.g., Rogers, 1980; Yalom, 1980). According to Schnell (2009, 2021), *meaningfulness* refers to a person's outlook, or the extent of their judgment, that their life is characterized by belongingness, coherence, direction, and significance. Additionally, Schnell (2009, 2021) explained that *meaning in life*, arising from a universal appraisal of life, is represented by experiences that inspire the acquisition of meaningfulness, as well as circumstances resulting in crises of meaning.

Counseling researchers have examined the influence of meaningfulness among counselors-in-training. In a study involving 292 counseling students, Hurst and Prescott (2022) administered assessments that inquired about perceptions of meaning in life and self-competence in counseling. As a result, Hurst and Prescott found that counseling students who endorsed higher ratings of meaning in life also felt more self-competent in their counseling studies. Hurst and Prescott likewise asked participants whether their counseling studies provided them with meaning in life, resulting in 95.9% expressing agreement. Additionally, Garner et al. (2017)

found that the higher counseling trainees rated a sense of purpose in life, the more counseling supervisors informed that supervision time was spent addressing client concerns.

As these studies showed the positive effects of meaningfulness among counseling students, it will be beneficial to evaluate nostalgia in a similar manner, given how it is recognized as an existential outlet that fosters meaning in life (Routledge et al., 2011; Sedikides & Wildschut, 2018; Wilson, 2005). Doing so can provide evidence about whether nostalgia's effects can significantly elevate counseling students' sense of personal meaning. If this occurs, then increases in personal meaningfulness may increase the likelihood that counseling students will feel more self-competent in their counseling studies (Hurst & Prescott, 2022), as well as influence them to focus more on ways to address clients' concerns (Garner et al., 2017).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the effects of nostalgia on counseling students' authenticity, empathy, and perceptions of meaning in life. Although previous studies in social and cognitive psychology have examined these variables, the participants have represented the general public or undergraduate students (e.g., Kelley et al., 2022; Routledge et al., 2012; van Tilburg et al., 2019). Therefore, it will be advantageous to specifically examine these variables among master's-level counseling students, whose education and clinical development prioritize authenticity, empathy, and meaning-oriented objectives (ACA *Code of Ethics*, 2014; CACREP, 2023; Rogers, 1961, 1980; Yalom, 1980). Because counseling students gain considerable knowledge about these variables, their ratings of authenticity, empathy, and meaning in life may uniquely differ from those given by previous study samples. Specifically, this study focuses on the following research questions:

- 1) Are there significant differences in authenticity ratings among counseling students who are asked to reflect on a nostalgic versus an ordinary life event?
- 2) Are there significant differences in empathy ratings among counseling students who are asked to reflect on a nostalgic versus an ordinary life event?
- 3) Are there significant differences in ratings of meaning in life among counseling students who are asked to reflect on a nostalgic versus an ordinary life event?

Method

Participants

Participants for this study were graduate students, aged 18 and older, who were enrolled in master's-level counselor education programs (e.g., clinical mental health, clinical rehabilitation, school counseling, marriage and family counseling) accredited by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) at public universities across the U.S. This study only recruited graduate students seeking master's degrees in professional counseling, as counseling students pursuing doctoral degrees would arguably have had more counseling experience pertaining to authenticity, empathy, and meaning in life, thereby posing potential risks for skewing research findings. A priori data analysis was conducted to identify the minimum sample size for data analysis using a medium effect size ($f = .25$, $\alpha = .05$) at power $(1 - \beta) = .80$. According to a G*Power tool (Faul et al., 2007; Kang, 2021), at least 128 participants were needed.

Among 168 participants who accessed the online survey, 132 completed all three assessments (i.e., authenticity, empathy, meaning in life), resulting in their data being used for analyses. Within this total sample, one participant did not respond to one item on the MLQ, resulting with a single missing value. As a result, a series mean method was applied in SPSS to

calculate a replacement for the missing value. Given there was only a single missing value, single imputation was an acceptable approach for addressing the matter, as opposed to deleting the case (Schafer & Graham, 2002).

Detailed demographic information is provided in Table 1. Participants' mean age was 31.63 ($SD = 10.43$), and most were female ($n = 117$, 88.6%) and White ($n = 102$, 77.3%). Other participants were male ($n = 10$, 7.6%) or identified as non-binary ($n = 5$, 3.8%), and they described themselves as Black or African American ($n = 13$, 9.8%); Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish Origin ($n = 6$, 4.5%); Asian ($n = 4$, 3%); American Indian or Alaska Native ($n = 2$, 1.5%); or as "other" (e.g., multiracial; $n = 5$, 3.8%). Additionally, 30 participants (22.7%) identified as a member of the LGBTQ+ community, 36 (27.3%) identified as an ally to the LGBTQ+ community, and two (1.5%) preferred not to say if they identified as a member of the LGBTQ+ community. Furthermore, a few participants identified as transgender ($n = 3$, 2.3%) or preferred not to say in this respect ($n = 2$, 1.5%).

The majority of participants' undergraduate majors were in the social sciences ($n = 84$, 63.6%), followed by undergraduate majors (e.g., interdisciplinary) that were categorized as "other" ($n = 22$, 16.7%). Five (3.8%) participants majored in arts and humanities; five (3.8%) in communication; five (3.8%) in education; five (3.8%) in science, technology, engineering or mathematics (STEM); four (3%) in linguistics; three (2.3%) in business; three (2.3%) health sciences; and one (0.8%) in humanities. Most participants were in their first year of their counseling program ($n = 68$, 51.5%), while 45 (34.1%) were in their second year, and 19 (14.4%) were in their third or later year in their counseling program. Additionally, most participants were pursuing counseling specializations in clinical mental health counseling ($n = 55$, 41.7%), followed by school counseling ($n = 20$, 15.2%), and rehabilitation counseling ($n = 13$, 9.8%).

Most participants' household income was under \$20,000 ($n = 31$, 23.5%), over \$100,000 ($n = 27$, 20.5%), or \$20,000 to \$34,999 ($n = 24$, 18.2%). Over two-thirds of participants either had full-time employment ($n = 43$, 32.6%) or identified as a student ($n = 39$, 29.5%), while 33 (25%) participants were employed part-time. Furthermore, the majority of participants were single ($n = 78$, 59.1%), followed by those who were married or in a domestic partnership ($n = 34.8\%$).

Table 1. *Demographics*

	Characteristics	<i>N</i>	%
Age	19–25	59	44.7%
	26–35	33	25.0%
	36–45	23	17.4%
	46–55	13	9.9%
	56 or older	4	3.0%
Gender	Female	117	88.6%
	Male	10	7.6%
	Non-binary	5	3.8%
Identify as Transgender	Yes	3	2.3%
	No	127	96.2%
	Prefer not to say	2	1.5%
Identify as LGBTQ+	Yes	30	22.7%
	No	64	48.5%
	No, but I identify as an Ally	36	27.3%
	Prefer not to say	2	1.5%
Ethnicity	American Indian or Alaska Native	2	1.5%
	Asian	4	3.0%
	Black or African American	13	9.8%
	Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish Origin	6	4.5%
	White	102	77.3%
	Other (e.g., multiracial)	5	3.8%

(table continues)

Table 1 (Continued)

	Characteristics	<i>N</i>	%
Undergraduate Majors	Arts and Humanities	5	3.8%
	Business	3	2.3%
	Communication	5	3.8%
	Education	5	3.8%
	Health Sciences	3	2.3%
	STEM	5	3.8%
	Social Science	84	63.6%
	Other (e.g., interdisciplinary)	22	16.7%
Current Year in Program	First year	68	51.5%
	Second Year	45	34.1%
	Other (e.g., third year or later)	19	14.4%
Counseling Specialization	Addiction	5	3.8%
	Career	1	0.8%
	Clinical Mental Health	55	41.7%
	Marriage, Couple, and Family	8	6.1%
	Rehabilitation	13	9.8%
	School	20	15.2%
	Multiple Specializations	7	5.3%
	Other	15	11.4%
	Did not respond	8	6.1%
Annual Household Income	< \$20,000	31	23.5%
	\$20,000 – \$34,999	24	18.2%
	\$35,000 – \$49,999	17	12.9%
	\$50,000 – \$74,999	18	13.6%
	\$75,000 – \$99,999	14	10.6%
	> \$100,000	27	20.5%
Employment Status	Full-time	43	32.6%
	Part-time	33	25.0%
	Unemployed	4	3.0%
	Student	39	29.5%

(table continues)

Table 1 (Continued)

	Characteristics	<i>N</i>	%
Employment Status	Self-employed	5	3.8%
	Other	8	6.1%
Marital Status	Single	78	59.1%
	Married, or in a domestic partnership	46	34.8%
	Divorced	6	4.5%
	Separated	1	0.8%
	Other	1	0.8%

Instrumentation

This study used the Authenticity Scale (AS; Wood et al., 2008) to assess counseling students' levels of dispositional authenticity. Additionally, the Questionnaire of Cognitive and Affective Empathy (QCAE; Reniers et al., 2011) was used to evaluate counseling students' empathy. Concomitantly, the Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ; Steger et al., 2006) was used to examine counseling students' presence and search for meaning in life. These assessments, including a survey requesting demographic information, were formatted and administered through Qualtrics (Provo, UT, 2024).

Authenticity Scale (AS)

The AS (Wood et al., 2008) features 12 items that evaluate three components of authenticity (i.e., self-alienation, authentic living, accepting external influence) via a 7-point Likert scale (i.e., 1 = *Does not describe me at all*, 7 = *Describes me very well*). All three subscales have four items. Example items include “I am true to myself in most situations” (Authentic Living), “I always feel I need to do what others expect me to do” (Accepting External Influence), and “I feel out of touch with the ‘real me’” (Self-Alienation). According to Wood et al., the three subscales have relatively low intercorrelations (ranging from $r = -.16$ to $.42$), and

items on each subscale are summed to yield distinct values for the three subscales. Higher scores on the Authentic Living subscale indicate that one perceives their lifestyle as congruent with their beliefs and values. Additionally, higher scores on the Accepting External Influence subscale indicate that one is strongly impacted by, and conforms to, other people and other people's expectations. Lastly, higher scores on the Self-Alienation subscale indicate that a person feels disconnected from their genuine self. Furthermore, Wood et al. reported that the AS has demonstrated good discriminant validity, good test-retest reliability, and acceptable-to-good internal consistency reliability, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging between .70 and .84. In the current study, Cronbach's alphas for Authentic Living, Accepting External Influence, and Self-Alienation were .74, .87, and .84, respectively.

Questionnaire of Cognitive and Affective Empathy (QCAE)

The QCAE (Reniers et al., 2011) is characterized by a two-factor structure (i.e., cognitive and affective empathy) and entails 31 items that evaluate cognitive and affective empathy across five components (i.e., *perspective taking*, *emotion contagion*, *online simulation*, *peripheral responsivity*, *proximal responsivity*). According to Reniers et al., the components that represent cognitive empathy are *perspective taking*, or one's capacity to discern another person's viewpoint (e.g., "I am quick to spot when someone in a group is feeling awkward or uncomfortable") and *online simulation*, which refers to one's efforts to consider another's feelings by cognitively placing themselves in that person's situation (e.g., "I always try to consider the other fellow's feelings before I do something"). Additionally, the researchers inform that the remaining three components represent affective empathy: *emotion contagion*, or one's capacity to instinctively reflect others' feelings (e.g., "I am happy when I am with a cheerful group and sad when the others are glum"); *proximal responsivity*, or one's capacity to react

empathically (e.g., “I often get emotionally involved with my friends’ problems”); and *peripheral responsivity*, or one’s capacity to react empathically, although in a detached manner (e.g., “I am usually objective when I watch a film or play, and I don’t often get completely caught up in it”).

According to Reniers et al. (2011), items on the QCAE are rated via a 4-point Likert scale (i.e., *Strongly agree*, *Slightly agree*, *Slightly disagree*, and *Strongly disagree*), with higher scores within the cognitive and affective subscales indicating greater cognitive and/or affective empathy. Moreover, a cumulative total score for empathy is obtained by summing the scores for cognitive and affective empathy. Furthermore, the QCAE has reportedly demonstrated strong convergent validity and good construct validity, and Cronbach’s alpha values for the raw scores of the QCAE’s five components (i.e., *perspective taking*, *emotion contagion*, *online simulation*, *peripheral responsivity*, *proximal responsivity*) were .85, .72, .83, .65, and .70, respectively. The current study used the cumulative total score for empathy, and Cronbach’s alpha was .84.

Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ)

The MLQ (Steger et al., 2006) consists of 10 items across two subscales (i.e., *Presence of Meaning* or *MLQ-P*, and *Search for Meaning* or *MLQ-S*) and involves a 7-point Likert scale (i.e., 1 = *Absolutely Untrue*, 7 = *Absolutely True*). According to Steger et al., scores on each subscale range from 5 to 35, with higher scores indicating greater presence or desire to obtain meaning in life. The MLQ-P features five items such as “My life has a clear sense of purpose”, while the MLQ-S consists of five items, such as “I am searching for meaning in my life.” In addition to good convergent and discriminant validity, Steger et al. inform that the MLQ subscales demonstrated good reliability ($\alpha = .82$ for MLQ-P; $\alpha = .87$ for MLQ-S) and internal consistency.

In the current study, Cronbach's alpha for the subscales on the MLQ was .85 for Presence of Meaning and .89 for Search for Meaning.

Procedure

Following approval from Auburn University's Institutional Review Board, participants were recruited from CACREP-accredited counseling programs in universities across the U.S., in addition to Cesnet-L, a listserv devoted to professional counselors, counselor educators, and counseling supervisors (Jencius, 2019). Emails providing general information about the study were sent to program coordinators of CACREP-accredited counseling programs and counselors on the listserv, all of whom were asked to inform their students about the study and the opportunity to participate. Subsequently, reminder emails were sent to program coordinators approximately two weeks later, followed by final email reminders approximately three weeks afterward. All components of the study took place online.

After participants reviewed the study's information letter and consented to participate, they were randomly assigned to one of two study groups: (a) the nostalgia or (b) the control group (i.e., ordinary memory reflections). Participants in both groups were first asked to complete the demographics questionnaire. Consistent with previous studies on nostalgia (e.g., Routledge et al., 2012), participants in the nostalgia group were provided with a definition of "nostalgia" (i.e., "a sentimental longing for the past"; Sedikides et al., 2015b). Adhering to Sedikides et al.'s (2015b) instructions for inducing nostalgia and prompting reflections, participants in the nostalgia group were asked to reflect on a nostalgic event, while participants in the ordinary memory group were asked to reflect on an ordinary event that occurred last week in their daily lives. To help participants understand the nature and content that typically characterize nostalgic memories, general examples of nostalgia (e.g., a cherished event from

childhood) were provided, based on previous research findings and scholarly insight (i.e., Hepper et al., 2012; Hepper et al., 2014; Routledge, 2023; Wildschut et al., 2006). Furthermore, the instructions for the control condition incorporated a clarifying detail that participants received during Wildschut et al.'s (2006, Study 5) research. In this respect, participants were asked to reminisce on an ordinary life event that occurred last week during their daily life. To enhance the validity of the experimental conditions, timers were implemented to ensure that participants in each group spent at least two minutes reflecting and briefly writing about either a nostalgic or an ordinary memory, thereby reinforcing their immersions in these reflection tasks.

Aligning with Sedikides et al.'s (2015b) instructions, each participant in both groups was asked to type and submit four keywords that were associated with their reflection, in addition to being prompted to take a moment to articulate their recalled event and feelings about it. After participants reflected and briefly wrote about a nostalgic or an ordinary memory, a manipulation check was conducted, in which both groups were next asked to respond, via a 6-point Likert scale (1 = *Strongly disagree*, 6 = *Strongly agree*), to the following three items: "Right now, I am feeling quite nostalgic"; "Right now, I am having nostalgic feelings"; and "I feel nostalgic at the moment" (Sedikides et al., 2015b). Subsequently, participants in both groups were asked to complete the AS (Wood et al., 2008), the QCAE (Reniers et al., 2011) and the MLQ (Steger et al., 2006). Upon completing the study, participants were asked to click a link that took them to a separate survey that asked them to provide their email addresses so that they could each receive a \$10 Amazon e-gift card.

Data Analysis

This study used analysis of variance (ANOVA), an inferential statistics method that is applied to identify whether there are significant effects between independent and dependent

variables, in addition to detecting sources of error and identifying differences within and between groups in an experiment (Shaughnessy et al., 2009). One-way ANOVAs were conducted to analyze statistical outcomes and differences between survey responses among participants who were randomly assigned to either the nostalgia or the ordinary memory group. The data collected through the Qualtrics survey was exported to the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences version 29.0 (SPSS Statistics, IBM Corporation, NY, USA) for data analysis.

Results

Manipulation Check

Seventy (53%) participants reflected on a nostalgic memory, and 62 (47%) reflected on an ordinary memory. In analyzing the manipulation check, findings from an independent samples *t*-test showed that participants in the nostalgia condition ($M = 14.37$, $SD = 3.88$) significantly endorsed greater feelings of nostalgia than participants in the ordinary memory condition ($M = 11.48$, $SD = 4.19$), $t(130) = 4.11$, $p < .001$, $d = .72$. The effect size for this analysis indicates a medium-to-large effect (Cohen, 1969).

Preliminary Analyses

Table 2 provides the means, standard deviations, and Cronbach's alphas for this study's variables. For the three subscales of the AS (Wood et al., 2008), participants' mean score was 23.4 ($SD = 3.22$) for Authentic Living, 13.86 ($SD = 5.25$) for Accepting External Influence, and 9.92 ($SD = 4.96$) for Self-Alienation. On the QCAE (Reniers et al., 2011), participants' mean score was 54.06 ($SD = 9.57$). Finally, for the two subscales of the MLQ (Steger et al., 2006), participants' mean score was 28.52 ($SD = 4.62$) for Presence of Meaning, and 25.89 ($SD = 7.04$) for Search for Meaning.

Table 2. *Reliability Statistics*

	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Cronbach's Alpha
AS				
Authentic Living (Subscale)	4	23.4	3.22	.74
Accepting External Influence (Subscale)	4	13.86	5.25	.87
Self-Alienation (Subscale)	4	9.92	4.96	.84
QCAE	31	54.06	9.57	.84
MLQ				
Presence of Meaning (Subscale)	5	28.52	4.62	.85
Search for Meaning (Subscale)	5	25.89	7.04	.89

Note. AS = Authenticity Scale; QCAE = Questionnaire of Cognitive and Affective Empathy;

MLQ = Meaning in Life Questionnaire

Table 3 provides the means and standard deviations of scores between participants who reflected on a nostalgic memory and those who reflected on an ordinary memory. In this respect, the nostalgia group ($M = 23.06$, $SD = 3.27$) scored slightly lower on the Authentic Living subscale than the ordinary memories group ($M = 23.79$, $SD = 3.15$). On the Accepting External Influence subscale, participants in the nostalgia group ($M = 14.24$, $SD = 5.37$) scored slightly higher than the ordinary memories group ($M = 13.32$, $SD = 5.10$) as well. Likewise, on the Self-Alienation subscale, the nostalgia group ($M = 10.228$, $SD = 5.00$) scored only slightly higher than the ordinary memories group ($M = 9.56$, $SD = 4.93$).

On the QCAE (Reniers et al., 2011), participants who reflected on a nostalgic memory ($M = 54.11$, $SD = 10.16$) scored slightly higher than participants who reflected on an ordinary memory ($M = 54.00$, $SD = 8.95$). On the MLQ (Steger et al., 2006), participants who reflected on a nostalgic memory ($M = 28.20$, $SD = 4.86$) scored only slightly lower than participants who reflected on an ordinary memory ($M = 28.87$, $SD = 4.33$) on the Presence of Meaning subscale.

However, on the MLQ's Search for Meaning subscale, the nostalgia group ($M = 26.76$, $SD = 6.71$) scored higher than the ordinary memory group ($M = 24.90$, $SD = 7.32$). These scores indicate that participants who reflected on a nostalgic memory perceived slightly less presence of meaning in their life, and reportedly were more so searching for meaning in life, than participants who reflected on an ordinary memory.

Table 3. Means and Standard Deviations of Scores Between Nostalgia and Ordinary Memory Groups

	Nostalgia ($N = 70$)	M	SD	Ordinary ($N = 62$)	M	SD
AS						
Authentic Living (Subscale)		23.06	3.27		23.79	3.15
Accepting External Influence (Subscale)		14.24	5.37		13.32	5.10
Self-Alienation (Subscale)		10.23	5.00		9.56	4.93
QCAE		54.11	10.16		54.00	8.95
MLQ						
Presence of Meaning (Subscale)		28.20	4.86		28.87	4.33
Search for Meaning (Subscale)		26.76	6.71		24.90	7.32

Note. AS = Authenticity Scale; QCAE = Questionnaire of Cognitive and Affective Empathy; MLQ = Meaning in Life Questionnaire

Preliminary findings from Pearson correlations showed that participants' scores on the Authentic Living subscale of the AS (Wood et al., 2008) had significant negative correlations with the Accepting External Influence subscale of the AS, $r = -.45$, $p < .001$, and the Self-Alienation subscale of the AS, $r = -.31$, $p < .001$. Moreover, the Accepting External Influence shared a significant positive correlation with the Self-Alienation subscale, $r = .42$, $p < .001$.

Findings from Pearson correlations also revealed that authenticity significantly correlated with

meaning in life. Particularly, participants' scores on the Authentic Living subscale of the AS shared a significant positive correlation with scores on the Presence of Meaning subscale of the MLQ (Steger et al., 2006), $r = .30, p < .001$. Additionally, participants' scores on the Accepting External Influence subscale of the AS shared a significant negative correlation with the MLQ's Presence of Meaning subscale, $r = -.31, p < .001$. Participants' responses on the Self-Alienation subscale of the AS shared a significant negative correlation with responses on the MLQ's Presence of Meaning subscale as well, $r = -.57, p < .001$. Furthermore, participants' scores on the Self-Alienation subscale of the AS shared a significant positive correlation with scores on the Search for Meaning subscale of the MLQ, $r = .20, p = .021$. Pearson correlation findings are reported in Table 4.

Table 4. *Correlations Among Authenticity, Empathy, and Meaning in Life*

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. AS – Authentic Living	-					
2. AS – Accepting External Influence	-.45*	-				
3. AS – Self-Alienation	-.31*	.42*	-			
4. QCAE (Full Scale)	.03	-.03	.15	-		
5. MLQ – Presence	.30*	-.31*	-.57*	-.12	-	
6. MLQ – Search	-.16	.16	.20**	-.14	-.11	-

Note. * $p < .01$. ** $p < .05$. AS = Authenticity Scale; QCAE = Questionnaire of Cognitive and Affective Empathy; MLQ = Meaning in Life Questionnaire

Main Analyses

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to analyze data to determine if there were any significant differences in scores for authenticity among counseling students who reflected on either a nostalgic or an ordinary memory. According to statistical analyses, there were no significant differences for scores on authentic living between the nostalgia condition ($M = 23.06$, $SD = 3.27$) and the ordinary memory condition ($M = 23.79$, $SD = 3.15$), $F(1, 17.67) = 1.712$, $p = .193$. There were also no significant differences in scores for accepting external influence between the nostalgia ($M = 14.33$, $SD = 5.37$) and the ordinary memory condition ($M = 13.32$, $SD = 5.10$), $F(1, 33.27) = 1.21$, $p = .273$. Furthermore, there were no significant differences in scores for self-alienation between participants who reflected on a nostalgic memory ($M = 10.23$, $SD = 5.00$) and those who reflected on an ordinary memory ($M = 9.56$, $SD = 4.93$), $F(1, 14.49) = .587$, $p = .445$. These findings are reported in Table 5.

Table 5. *ANOVA of Authenticity Scores Between Nostalgia and Ordinary Memory Groups*

AS		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Authentic Living (Subscale)	Between Groups	17.674	1	17.674	1.712	.193
	Within Groups	1342.046	130	10.323		
	Total	1359.720	131			
Accepting External Influence (Subscale)	Between Groups	33.274	1	33.274	1.210	.273
	Within Groups	3574.991	130	27.500		
	Total	3608.265	131			
Self-Alienation (Subscale)	Between Groups	14.499	1	14.499	.587	.445
	Within Groups	3209.585	130	24.689		
	Total	3224.083	131			

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to analyze data pertaining to whether there were significant differences in empathy scores among counseling students who reflected on a nostalgic or an ordinary memory. Statistical findings revealed that there were no significant findings between the nostalgia ($M = 54.11$, $SD = 10.16$) and the ordinary memory condition ($M = 54.00$, $SD = 8.95$), $F(1, 429) = .005$, $p = .946$. Table 6 provides the statistics for these findings.

Table 6. *ANOVA of Empathy Scores Between Nostalgia and Ordinary Memory Groups*

QCAE	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	.429	1	.429	.005	.946
Within Groups	12003.086	130	92.331		
Total	12003.515	131			

Finally, a one-way ANOVA was conducted to address this study's third and final research question that addressed whether there were significant differences in scores pertaining to meaning in life between the nostalgia and ordinary memory groups. Regarding perceptions of presence of meaning in life, statistical results showed that there were no significant differences between the nostalgia ($M = 28.20$, $SD = 4.86$) and the ordinary memory condition ($M = 28.87$, $SD = 4.33$), $F(1, 14.802) = .693$, $p = .407$. Furthermore, concerning the search for meaning in life, there were no significant differences between participants who reflected on a nostalgic memory ($M = 26.76$, $SD = 6.71$) or an ordinary memory ($M = 24.90$, $SD = 7.32$), $F(1, 113.005) = 2.304$, $p = .131$. The statistics for these findings are presented in Table 7.

Table 7. *ANOVA of Meaning in Life Scores Between Nostalgia and Ordinary Memory Groups*

MLQ		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Presence (Subscale)	Between Groups	14.802	1	14.802	.693	.407
	Within Groups	2776.168	130	21.355		
	Total	2790.970	131			
Search (Subscale)	Between Groups	113.005	1	113.005	2.304	.131
	Within Groups	6376.291	130	49.048		
	Total	6489.295	131			

Discussion

This study examined the effects of nostalgic versus ordinary memory reflections on master's-level counseling students' ratings of authenticity, empathy, and perceived meaning in life. All null hypotheses were accepted, based on evidence from multiple one-way ANOVA tests. The first research question asked whether there would be significant differences in scores for authenticity between participants who either reflected on a nostalgic or an ordinary memory. In this respect, ANOVA results showed that there were no significant differences. This finding contrasts with previous research that has reported greater authenticity among participants who reflected on nostalgic memories (e.g., Baldwin et al., 2015; Kelley et al., 2022; Stephan et al., 2012). Of course, it is important to note that participants in previous experiments represented undergraduate students or the general public, while the current study specifically involved master's-level counseling students, who may gain more exposure to insight pertaining to authenticity during their studies (e.g., Ray et al., 2021).

The current study's second research question asked whether there would be significant differences in empathy scores between the nostalgia and ordinary memory groups. A one-way ANOVA test revealed there were no significant differences. This finding also contrasts with

previous research that reported connections between nostalgia and empathy (Juhl et al., 2020; Zhou et al., 2012). In addition to authenticity, counseling students also gain considerable insight and experience in being empathic (e.g., Cole, 2022), which may be why there were no significant differences in empathy scores among participants in this study. Finally, this study's third research question asked whether any significant differences in ratings for meaning in life would be present between the nostalgia and the ordinary memory groups. Contrary to previous research that has reported how nostalgia can augment meaning in life (Routledge et al., 2012; Sedikides et al., 2018; van Tilburg et al., 2019), a one-way ANOVA test showed there were no significant differences regarding meaning in life ratings between the nostalgia and the ordinary memory groups. During their professional trainings, counseling students gain insight pertaining to existential therapy, which can be applied to assist clients with discerning personal meaning in life (e.g., Yalom, 1980). Moreover, by pursuing trainings to become professional counselors, counseling students arguably are engaged in pursuits of personal meaning.

Implications

By successfully incorporating an established experimental approach for inducing nostalgia (Sedikides et al., 2015b), this study offers a reference point for future researchers in counselor education and supervision to consider if their aim is to evaluate the effects of nostalgia. Despite this study's findings of no significant differences among ratings of authenticity, empathy, and meaning in life between the nostalgia and the ordinary memory groups, it is premature to conclude that nostalgia is either ineffective or effective in counselor education. Based on findings from previous research (e.g., Juhl et al., 2020; Kelley et al., 2022; van Tilburg et al., 2019), there is arguably potential for nostalgia to be utilized in counselor education and supervision. However, it must be noted that experimental research on nostalgia in

counselor education is in its infancy; therefore, more empirical studies are needed to obtain evidence about its effects in relation to counselor education objectives (e.g., preparation and clinical supervision of counseling students) before it can be implemented in counselor education curriculum and clinical practices.

Limitations

This study had multiple limitations, including the study's small sample size ($n = 132$). Additionally, most participants were White, a factor that reflects the ethnic majority of the counseling profession in general (e.g., Gleeson, 2023). It would be beneficial to identify ways to conduct studies on nostalgia in counselor education and supervision that involve more balanced quantities of participants who represent a broader range of ethnic backgrounds. Another limitation in this study was social desirability, given how all participants were master's-level counseling students from CACREP-accredited counselor education programs across the U.S. Because participants were graduate students in counseling, it can be argued that they had more academic exposure and understanding of the dependent variables (i.e., authenticity, empathy, meaning in life) than participants who represented the general public or undergraduate students in previous research on nostalgia. Of course, the current study did not control for counseling students' individual and academic factors (e.g., completion of specific graduate-level counseling courses, practicum and internship experience, etc.). However, this may explain why there were no significant differences in dependent variables ratings between this study's two groups, whereas previous research has reported significant findings (e.g., Routledge et al., 2011). Furthermore, data was collected via self-report through an online Qualtrics survey, and nostalgia was induced via a brief – though empirically established – method (i.e., Sedikides et al., 2015b).

Recommendations for Future Research

More empirical evidence is needed before any assertions can be made about the effectiveness of utilizing nostalgia in counselor education. For instance, future studies can develop and evaluate the effectiveness of a pedagogical approach for addressing nostalgia among counseling students. Additionally, future research may experimentally induce nostalgia and include assessments like the Southampton Nostalgia Survey (Routledge et al., 2008) to obtain more data. For instance, the Southampton Nostalgia Inventory is a brief questionnaire that evaluates nostalgia proneness (e.g., “How prone are you to feeling nostalgic?”), in which most items are rated via a 7-point Likert scale (i.e., 1 = *Very rarely*, 7 = *Very frequently*). By incorporating this and similar assessments into future studies, researchers in counselor education and supervision can acquire more quantitative insight about nostalgia and identify the extent of which it correlates with authenticity, empathy, and meaning in life among counseling students. Future researchers in counselor education and supervision may also examine nostalgia via more extensive qualitative methods, including more extensive quantitative approaches. In this respect, future experiments can be conducted in a more controlled environment, and data can be collected multiple times rather than during a single event. Furthermore, as researchers in counselor education obtain more evidence about the effects of nostalgia within a counseling context, it may be beneficial to focus on other participant populations (e.g., clients, professional counselors, clinical supervisors).

Conclusion

This study examined the effects of nostalgia on master’s-level counseling students’ ratings of authenticity, empathy, and meaning in life. Participants were randomly assigned to reflect on either a nostalgic memory or an ordinary memory, after which a manipulation check

was conducted, which showed that participants in the nostalgia group felt more nostalgic than those in the ordinary memory group. Results from this investigation showed that there were no significant differences in ratings of the dependent variables among participants who either reflected on a nostalgic or an ordinary memory. It is recommended that researchers in counselor education and supervision use other research approaches (e.g., qualitative methods) to further examine nostalgia within the counseling profession.

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Appendix A. Information Letter



COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF
SPECIAL EDUCATION, REHABILITATION, AND COUNSELING

INFORMATION LETTER

Examining the Effects of Nostalgia on Authenticity, Empathy, and Meaning in Life Among Counseling Students

You are invited to participate in a research study to examine the effects of nostalgia on authenticity, empathy, and perceptions of meaning in life. The study is being conducted by Keith Huffman, MA, LPC, a doctoral candidate in Counselor Education who serves as the Principal Investigator, while under the direction of Jinhee Park, PhD, Research Supervisor in the Auburn University Department of Special Education, Rehabilitation, and Counseling (SERC). This study seeks to recruit a total of 150 participants. You are invited to participate because you are a counseling student enrolled in a CACREP-accredited counseling program, and you are a graduate student who is 18 years old or older.

What will be involved if you participate? If you decide to participate in this research study, you will be asked to complete the online survey by first being asked to reflect and briefly write about a nostalgic or ordinary life event. The study will be conducted online via Qualtrics. We encourage you to respond to the research survey items to the best of your ability. However, you may skip any question that you are unwilling to answer or stop taking the survey at any time. Your total time commitment will be approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour.

Are there any risks or discomforts? Possible risks associated with participating in this study would be a loss of confidentiality. To minimize this risk, the research survey items will not include any identifying information. Additionally, 150 participants who fully complete the research survey will be asked to click on a link separate from the survey to provide their email information so they can each be sent a \$10 Amazon e-gift card. Your email address will be saved in a different database, separate from the research survey. Immediately after the Amazon gift card is provided, your email address will be deleted. You are encouraged to answer the items as much as possible. However, you may skip any items if you do not wish to answer, and you will still receive compensation when you reach the end of the survey. You also have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. You may close the browser any time (at the beginning or in the middle of your participation) if you wish to withdraw from the study.

Are there any benefits to yourself or others? There are no immediate or direct benefits for you taking the research survey. However, your participation in the current study may help obtain data that provides insight about the effects of nostalgia on counseling students' empathy and

perceptions of meaning in life. This will contribute to the professional counseling literature and provide considerations for counselor educators and supervisors to consider while preparing future counselors for the counseling profession. We cannot promise you that you will receive any or all of the benefits described.

Will you receive compensation for participating? The 150 participants who complete the research survey are eligible to receive a \$10 Amazon e-gift card.

Additional or Incurred Costs. You will not incur any costs for participating in this study. Any data obtained in connection with this study will remain anonymous. We will protect your privacy and the data you provide by securely storing the data on the researcher's personal computer, which is locked and password-protected. Information obtained through your participation may be published in professional journals or presented at professional conferences, but the identities of all research participants will remain anonymous.

If you have questions about this study, please contact Keith Huffman via email at kmh0160@auburn.edu, or Dr. Jinhee Park at 334-844-7620 or by email at jzp0095@auburn.edu. Also, please keep a copy of this document or save a copy on your computer for your information.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Auburn University Office of Research Compliance or the Institutional Review Board by phone (334)-844-5966 or email at IRBadmin@auburn.edu.

"The Auburn University Institutional Review Board has approved this document for use from ----- to -----, Protocol #."

HAVING READ THE INFORMATION ABOVE, YOU MUST DECIDE IF YOU WANT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH PROJECT. IF YOU DECIDE TO PARTICIPATE, PLEASE SELECT "YES" BELOW.

I have read the above and agree to participate in this survey. Yes/No

Appendix B. Sample Recruitment Email

Greetings,

I am reaching out to you on behalf of a current research study, *Examining the Effects of Nostalgia on Authenticity, Empathy, and Meaning in Life Among Counseling Students* (IRB# 24-700 EX 2402). This study will be conducted by Keith Huffman, a doctoral candidate in Counselor Education at Auburn University, while under the supervision of Dr. Jinhee Park at Auburn University. I am asking for your assistance in distributing information regarding this study and the survey link to your students who might meet eligibility criteria: (1) graduate students enrolled in your master's program or your master's-level course, and (2) ages 18 years or older. This study seeks to recruit a total of 150 participants, each of whom will each receive a \$10 Amazon e-gift card if they complete the research survey.

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the effects of nostalgic and ordinary memories on counseling students' authenticity, empathy, and perceptions of meaning in life. Participants will be asked to reflect and briefly write about either a nostalgic or ordinary life event prior to completing a research survey. The study will be conducted online via Qualtrics. It is estimated that approximately 1 hour or less will be needed to reflect on a memory and complete the subsequent survey. Participation is completely voluntary, and participants' responses will be kept completely confidential.

If students decide to participate in this research study, they will be asked to complete the online research survey by first reflecting on and briefly writing about either a nostalgic or ordinary life event before answering the survey items. The 150 participants who complete the research survey will each be eligible to receive a \$10 Amazon e-gift card, if they provide their email address to receive the gift card.

Please forward this email to your students so that those who are interested may participate in this study by following the information link below:
Information [link](#)

Please see the attached information letter, which provides detailed information about the purpose of this study, the voluntary nature of participation, confidentiality, incentives, and potential harm. This information will also be presented when students follow the information link.

Please let me know if you have any question about this research. Furthermore, I would really appreciate your support in this endeavor!

Best,

Principal Investigator: Keith Huffman, MA, LPC, Auburn University

Supervising Faculty: Jinhee Park, Ph.D., CRC, Auburn University

Appendix C. Instrumentation

Demographics

What is your age? _____

Are you enrolled in a CACREP-accredited master's-level counseling program? _____

What is your gender?

- ☐ Female
- ☐ Male
- ☐ Non-binary
- ☐ Prefer not to say

Do you identify as transgender?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Prefer not to say

Do you identify as a member of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and/or Transgender (LGBTQ+) community?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ No, but I identify as an Ally
- ☐ Prefer not to say

How would you describe yourself (choose all that apply)?

- ☐ American Indian or Alaska Native
- ☐ Asian
- ☐ Black or African American
- ☐ Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish Origin
- ☐ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- ☐ White
- ☐ Other (please specify): _____

Highest level of education:

_____ Less than high school; _____ High school; _____ Associate degree;
_____ Bachelor degree; _____ Master's degree; _____ Doctoral degree (PhD/JD/MD)

What was/were your undergraduate major(s): _____

What is your current year in your counseling program?

- ☐ First year
- ☐ Second year
- ☐ Other (please specify): _____

Which specialization are you pursuing in counseling? _____

What is your household income per year?

- (a) Under \$20,000 (b) \$20,000 to \$34,999
(c) \$35,000 to \$49,999 (d) \$50,000 to \$74,999
(e) \$75,000 to \$99,999 (f) over \$100,000

What is your current employment status?

- ☐ Employed full-time
☐ Employed part-time
☐ Unemployed
☐ Student
☐ Retired
☐ Homemaker
☐ Self-employed
☐ Other (please specify): _____

What is your marital status?

- ☐ Single
☐ Married, or in a domestic partnership
☐ Divorced
☐ Separated
☐ Other (please specify): _____

Authenticity Scale (Wood et al., 2008, p. 399)

Please review and provide a rating to each of the following statements as accurately as you can.
Please provide a rating based on the scale below:

<i>Does not describe me at all</i>						<i>Describes me very well</i>
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

1. ____ “I think it is better to be yourself, than to be popular.”
2. ____ “I don’t know how I really feel inside.”
3. ____ “I am strongly influenced by the opinions of others.”
4. ____ “I usually do what other people tell me to do.”
5. ____ “I always feel I need to do what others expect me to do.”
6. ____ “Other people influence me greatly.”
7. ____ “I feel as if I don’t know myself very well.”
8. ____ “I always stand by what I believe in.”
9. ____ “I am true to myself in most situations.”
10. ____ “I feel out of touch with the ‘real me.’”
11. ____ “I live in accordance with my values and beliefs.”
12. ____ “I feel alienated from myself.”

Questionnaire of Cognitive and Affective Empathy (QCAE; Reniers et al., 2011)

Subject code: _____

Date: _____

People differ in the way they feel in different situations. Below you are presented with a number of characteristics that may or may not apply to you. Read each characteristic and indicate how much you agree or disagree with the item by ticking the appropriate box. Answer quickly and honestly.		Strongly agree	Slightly agree	Slightly disagree	Strongly disagree
1.	I sometimes find it difficult to see things from the 'other guy's' point of view.				
2.	I am usually objective when I watch a film or play, and I don't often get completely caught up in it.				
3.	I try to look at everybody's side of a disagreement before I make a decision.				
4.	I sometimes try to understand my friends better by imagining how things look from their perspective.				
5.	When I am upset at someone, I usually try to 'put myself in his shoes' for a while.				
6.	Before criticizing somebody, I try to imagine how I would feel if I was in their place.				
7.	I often get emotionally involved with my friends' problems.				
8.	I am inclined to get nervous when others around me seem to be nervous.				
9.	People I am with have a strong influence on my mood.				
10.	It affects me very much when one of my friends seems upset.				
11.	I often get deeply involved with the feelings of a character in a film, play or novel.				
12.	I get very upset when I see someone cry.				
13.	I am happy when I am with a cheerful group and sad when the others are glum.				
14.	It worries me when others are worrying and panicky.				

		Strongly agree	Slightly agree	Slightly disagree	Strongly disagree
15.	I can easily tell if someone else wants to enter a conversation.				
16.	I can pick up quickly if someone says one thing but means another.				
17.	It is hard for me to see why some things upset people too much.				
18.	I find it easy to put myself in somebody else's shoes.				
19.	I am good at predicting how someone will feel.				
20.	I am quick to spot when someone in a group is feeling awkward or uncomfortable.				
21.	Other people tell me I am good at understanding how they are feeling and what they are thinking.				
22.	I can easily tell if someone else is interested.				
23.	Friends talk to me about their problems as they say that I am very understanding.				
24.	I can sense if I am intruding, even if the other person does not tell me.				
25.	I can easily work out what another person might want to talk about.				
26.	I can tell if someone is masking their true emotion.				
27.	I am good at predicting what someone will do.				
28.	I can usually appreciate the other person's viewpoint, even if I do not agree with it.				
29.	I usually stay emotionally detached when watching a film.				
30.	I always try to consider the other fellow's feelings before I do something.				
31.	Before I do something I try to consider how my friends will react to it.				

The Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ; Steger et al., 2006, p. 93)

Please take a moment to think about what makes your life feel important to you. Please respond to the following statements as truthfully and accurately as you can, and also please remember that these are very subjective questions and that there are no right or wrong answers. Please answer according to the scale below:

Absolutely Untrue	Mostly Untrue	Somewhat Untrue	Can't Say True or False	Somewhat True	Mostly True	Absolutely True
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

1. ___ I understand my life's meaning.
2. ___ I am looking for something that makes my life feel meaningful.
3. ___ I am always looking for to find my life's purpose.
4. ___ My life has a clear sense of purpose.
5. ___ I have a good sense of what makes my life meaningful.
6. ___ I have discovered a satisfying life purpose.
7. ___ I am always searching for something that makes my life feel significant.
8. ___ I am seeking a purpose or mission for my life.
9. ___ My life has no clear purpose.
10. ___ I am searching for meaning in my life.

MLQ syntax to create Presence and Search subscales:

Presence = 1, 4, 5, 6, & 9-reverse-coded

Search = 2, 3, 7, 8, & 10

Appendix D. Experimental Conditions

The following instructions for the “The Event Reflection Task,” which is used to experimentally induce nostalgia, including a manipulation check, were taken from Sedikides et al. (2015b, pp. 257-258). To help ensure that participants understand the types of memories they are being asked to reflect on, general examples of nostalgic memories have been added to the Nostalgia Condition. These examples are based on previous research findings and insight pertaining to nostalgia content and conceptualizations (i.e., Hepper et al., 2012; Hepper et al., 2014; Routledge, 2023; Wildschut et al., 2006). In the Control Condition, the script has been slightly modified to specifically ask participants to reflect on an ordinary event that transpired last week in their daily life, thereby incorporating instructions that were given to participants in Wildschut et al.’s (2006, Study 5) research on nostalgia.

Nostalgia Condition

According to the Oxford Dictionary, “nostalgia” is defined as a “sentimental longing for the past.” Nostalgic memories feature a person’s cherished past experiences. For example, nostalgic memories may involve cherished events from one’s childhood or youth, such as a special birthday or holiday tradition, valued time spent with grandparents, a memorable family vacation, or treasured times spent with friends. Nostalgic memories may also include momentous occasions that may have occurred later in life, such as weddings or anniversaries. Additionally, nostalgic memories may feature familiar places and/or significant others in one’s life, such as family, close friends, mentors, companions, or pets. Furthermore, nostalgic memories may involve special food or familiar scents, as well as meaningful memorabilia or keepsakes from one’s past, such as music, clothing, or photographs.

Please think of a nostalgic event in your life. Specifically, try to think of a past event that makes you feel most nostalgic. Bring this nostalgic experience to mind. Immerse yourself in the nostalgic experience. How does it make you feel? Please spend a couple of minutes thinking about how it makes you feel. Please write down four keywords relevant to this nostalgic event (i.e., words that describe the experience).

Using the space provided below, for the next few minutes, we would like you to write about the nostalgic event. Immerse yourself into this nostalgic experience. Describe the experience and how it makes you feel.

Control Condition

Please bring to mind an ordinary event in your life. Specifically, try to think of a past event that is ordinary and occurred last week in your daily life. Bring this ordinary experience to mind. Immerse yourself in the ordinary experience. How does it make you feel? Please spend a couple of minutes thinking about how it makes you feel. Please write down four keywords relevant to this ordinary event (i.e., words that describe the experience).

Using the space provided below, for the next few minutes, we would like you to write about the ordinary event. Immerse yourself into this experience. Describe the experience and how it makes you feel.

Manipulation Check

The following statements refer to how you feel right now. Please indicate your agreement or disagreement by placing a number in the blank space preceding each statement. The number should be anywhere from 1 to 6, according to the following scale:

1	2	3	4	5	6
Strongly disagree	Moderately disagree	Slightly disagree	Slightly Agree	Moderately agree	Strongly agree

___ Right now, I am feeling quite nostalgic

___ Right now, I am having nostalgic feelings

___ I feel nostalgic at the moment