

HOMESICKNESS, FUTURE TIME PERSPECTIVE, AND THE SELF CONCEPT¹

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Nawas and Platt (5) recently presented a testable model of homesickness based on: (a) Zwingmann's(9) suggestion that the past, as opposed to the future, has been overemphasized in research on homesickness, and (b) Adler's insistence upon the importance of the future in the individual's mental life (1, pp. 87-93). This model was presented as an alternative to the current past- and present-oriented theories. Nawas and Platt state:

. . . nostalgia can best be understood if seen as an expression of concern over, or dread of, the future, and that it is a lack of "being-in-becoming" rather than a "homing instinct" or a reaction to unsuccessful adaptation to one's surroundings. The future-oriented view of nostalgia allows a number of derivations which can be cast in testable forms. For example, individuals who emphasize futurity in their time perspectives, or others who are characterized as optimistic, goal-oriented, and planful are not likely to fall victims to nostalgia. An individual who sees his future as potentially promising or gratifying is not likely to become nostalgic either (5, p. 55).

The current study is an empirical test of the following two hypotheses derived from this model: Homesick individuals compared to non-homesick individuals will show (a) impaired future time perspective; (b) greater discrepancy between their views of themselves in the present and their future conceptions of themselves.

METHOD

Subjects and homesickness. Forty freshmen (16 men and 24 women), enrolled in introductory psychology classes, served as Ss. Through a questionnaire survey on the incidence of homesickness, a much larger sample had been classified into four degrees of homesickness: (a) never homesick, (b) homesick at some time in the past, but not during the past quarter, (c) homesick during the past quarter, (d) homesick at the present time. Ss were limited to the two extreme groups totaling 112 individuals. Due to scheduling conflicts or lack of interest only 40 Ss could be obtained from this number, 25 who had never been homesick, and 15 who were "homesick at the present time." These 40 Ss were administered 5 measures of future time perspective (FTP) and a semantic differential, as described below.

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Measures of future time perspective (FTP). The 5 FTP measures referred to the dimensions of density and extension. They were selected because they showed the highest loadings on the factor which Kastenbaum (4) identified as "a general concern for future events." Density, defined as "number of events the individual is able to see in his personal future," was measured by Kastenbaum's method consisting of the questions, "Who will you be?" (*Density 1*), and "What will you do?" (*Density 2*), scored for the number of responses to each. Extension, defined as "length of time span which is conceptualized," was measured by the three methods introduced by Wallace (8). Two tasks call for the completion of a *Structured* and an *Unstructured Story*, scored for length of time span covered in the story. The third method consists of ten future life events. Called the *Ages task*, it is scored for *S*'s average age at which the ten events take place. These FTP measures were used to test the first hypothesis.

Semantic differential. A semantic differential (6, 7) was used to measure the connotative meanings of *S*'s concepts of "a homesick person," "my present self," and "my future self." They were rated on the 10 dimensions used by Osgood plus a "homesick-not-homesick" dimension. Difference in meaning between "present self" and "future self" was computed according to a procedure by Cronbach and Gleser (3). It was used to test the second hypothesis.

Meaning of "a homesick person" was used to validate the classification of *S*s as homesick or non-homesick on the basis of the questionnaire.

RESULTS

Validation of questionnaire results. The classification of *S*s as homesick or non-homesick through the self-report inventory was validated in two ways by using the semantic differential. (a) Homesick *S*s tended to see "present self" as more similar to "a homesick person" than did non-homesick *S*s. A Mann-Whitney U-test for the difference between two medians resulted in differences significant at the .05 level for both males and females. (b) Homesick *S*s also rated themselves significantly more homesick on the "homesick-not-homesick" dimension of their "present self" than did non-homesick *S*s ($F = 48.16$; $df = 1/39$; $P < .001$).

Future time perspective. On the *Ages task*, *Density 1*, and *Density 2*, non-homesick males as well as females scored higher than homesick *S*s, which is in the hypothesized direction. A 2 x 2 unweighted means analysis of variance showed that the *Ages task* differentiated successfully between the two groups ($F = 120.38$; $df = 1/36$; $P < .001$), as did the *Density 1* task ($F = 9.39$; $df = 1/36$; $P < .01$). But the *Density 2* task did not differentiate successfully ($F = 2.14$; $df = 1/36$; $P < .15$).

The results from the structured and the unstructured story were evaluated by a Mann-Whitney U-test since responses ranged from one second to 60 years and thus did not warrant the assumption of normality. For both males and females neither task differentiated

successfully between homesick and non-homesick *Ss*, and medians, while in the predicted direction for females, were in the opposite direction for males.

In summary, the first two of the 5 FTP measures supported our first hypothesis: Non-homesick *Ss* tend to see their futures as more densely populated with events, and as extending further in time, than do homesick *Ss*.

Self-concept. In the comparison of present self with future self, homesick *Ss* tended to see a greater discrepancy than did non-homesick *Ss*. This difference was significant at the .05 level for females and at the .001 level for males, supporting our second hypothesis.

To eliminate the possibility that the significant difference between the two groups on the semantic differential might be due to homesick *Ss* rating themselves with lower self-esteem than do non-homesick *Ss*, the data were re-evaluated with Cronbach's (2) "elevation component." The obtained *F* of .60 ($df = 1/23$) was not significant, indicating that the observed differences could not be accounted for on an evaluative basis alone.

DISCUSSION

Our findings support a theory of homesickness which shows it related to a person's lack of futurity. They also show homesick *Ss* to see a greater discrepancy between conceptions of present self and future self. It would appear that the self ideal which has been posited by such an individual may be an unrealistic ideal, beyond attainment with the means at his disposal. Not having appropriate goals toward which to look, he is then prone to look toward the past for his ego gratification.

These observations have implications for the therapy not only of homesick persons but of any person who sees his future as empty and potentially unrewarding. Before looking into the individual's past, might it not be more useful to look at his future, to see what plans he has formulated for himself, and to see if they are realistically attainable? This would be more economical of time, provide more valuable information concerning the individual than would looking into his past, and suggest some guides for the course of therapy.

SUMMARY

The current study supports a recent theory which suggests that homesickness is a result of a lack of future time perspective in one's

life. With 40 college freshmen it was found that homesick Ss had impaired future time perspectives, as well as that they perceived greater discrepancies between conceptions of their present and future selves than non-homesick Ss. Implications were noted for the treatment of homesickness and other difficulties of persons seeing their future as empty.

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