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## **DEFINING NOSTALGIA AND ITS FUNCTIONS**

A Review

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**Defining Nostalgia and its Functions: A Review**

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I hereby certify that all material in this final year project which is not my own work has been identified and that no work is included for which a degree has already been conferred on me.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

### Abstract

Nostalgia is a psychological phenomenon we all can relate to but have a hard time to define. What characterizes the mental state of feeling nostalgia? What psychological function does it serve? Different published materials in a wide range of fields, from consumption research and sport science to clinical psychology, psychoanalysis and sociology, all have slightly different definition of this mental experience. Some claim it is a psychiatric disease giving melancholic emotions to a memory you would consider a happy one, while others state it enforces positivity in our mood. First in this paper a thorough review of the history of nostalgia is presented, then a look at the body of contemporary nostalgia research to see what it could be constituted of. Finally, we want to dig even deeper to see what is suggested by the literature in terms of triggers and functions. Some say that digitally recorded material like music and videos has a potential nostalgic component, which could trigger a reflection of the past in ways that was difficult before such inventions. Hinting towards that nostalgia as a cultural phenomenon is on a rising scene. Some authors say that odors have the strongest impact on nostalgic reverie due to activating it without too much cognitive appraisal. Cognitive neuropsychology has shed new light on a lot of human psychological phenomena's and even though empirical testing have been scarce in this field, it should get a fair scrutiny within this perspective as well and hopefully helping to clarify the definition of the word to ease future investigations, both scientifically speaking and in laymen's retro hysteria.

*Keywords:* homesickness, negative emotions, positive emotions, melancholia, triggers, olfactory, psychoanalysis and psychological functions.

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## Introduction

To find the origin of the term nostalgia, we have to travel back approximately 2,800 years, to the time of the ancient Greeks. The famous poet Homer wandered from city to city telling the epic tale of Odysseus. His life was portrayed as the noble man who went out to fight in the Trojan War to secure victory and freedom for his people. As the story goes, he spent altogether twenty years enduring hardships, where three years were spent at sea fighting horrendous monsters and the wraths of gods. Seven years he spent at the island of Ogyia where the seductive and possessive nymph known as Calypso offered Odysseus immortality. But even such a glorious offer Odysseus turned down, because in his mind was only the wish return to his homeland of Ithaca and to reunite with his loyal wife, Penelope and their son Telemachus (Homer, 1921). What kept Odysseus going, according to the tale, was this idea of returning, and the Greek word for return is *nostos*. His burning desire of *nostos* made him suffer a psychological pain, called *algos* in Greek. Therefore the earliest definition to be found of the word nostalgia could be interpreted as “the psychological suffering caused by unrelenting yearning to return to ones’ homeland” (Sedikides, Wildschut, & Baden, 2004, p. 200-201). Its meaning can also be found in lyrics by Hippocrates (McCann, 1941) and in The Bible where the palmist tells us: “By the waters of Babylon there we sat down, yea, we wept when we remembered Zion” (*King James Version*, Psalm 137:1).

The term nostalgia was not officially coined in an academic context until several hundred years later when the Swiss physician Johannes Hofer in 1688 published a medical dissertation describing this condition. He likened nostalgia to *heimweh* - the German word loosely translated to the pain a person feels because he/she is not in his/hers native land, or fears to never see it again, or simply, homesickness. Hofer continues his story by referring to the condition described and reported by Swiss mercenaries fighting for French monarchs, called *maladie du pays* by the French - the country sickness (Rosen, 1975). Since there was

no Latin name for homesickness, Hofer decided to call it nostalgia based on the two Greek words (1688/1934).

During these 300 years of existence in academic scrutiny, its conceptual status has been revised a few times, ranging from animal spirits inhabitant the brain (Hofer, 1688/1934) causing, what we today call homesickness (Rosen, 1975; Van Tilburg, Vingerhoets, & Van Heck, 1996), to modern views of nostalgia producing a positive feeling accompanying a memory of some place, event or object in the past (Batcho, 1995, 1998, Sedikides et al., 2004). *The New Oxford Dictionary of English* (1998) defines it as “a sentimental longing or wistful affection for the past, typically for a period or place with happy personal associations” (p. 1266). It shifted from being this neurological ghost as described by Hofer to a psychiatric disorder in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century (Batcho, 1998; Davis, 1979) coupled with a more detailed description of its pathological genesis. (Fodor, 1950; Kaplan, 1987). It was widely believed in this era that nostalgia caused depression, with severe cases resulting in suicides or murder (McCann, 1941). It was not until the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the conceptual status of nostalgia changed direction to finally exclude homesickness in its narrative (Davis, 1979). Since then the debate have rather focused on what the psychological function could be, with several suggestion, ranging from keeping our “mind [is] peopled” (Hertz, 1990, p. 195) when we feel alone, creating imaginary social bonds (Batcho, 2007; Wildschut, Sedikides, Arndt, Routledge, & Cordaro, 2010; Zhou, Sedikides, Wildschut, & Gao, 2008), to boost self-esteem (Sedikides, Wildschut, Arndt & Routledge, 2006), help the individual to coop with existential threats ( Routledge, Arndt, Sedikides & Wildschut, 2010; Wildschut, Sedikides, Arndt, & Routledge, 2006) and maintaining and augment ones’ identity in transitional faces during ones’ life span (Davis, 1979).

Also ideas from psychoanalysis will be examined in this paper, involving theories of nostalgia as a manifestation for a wish to return to the ultimate ‘home’, the womb of your

mother (Bassin, 1993; Fodor, 1950; Kaplan, 1987; Peters, 1985). And that nostalgia could signify an incomplete mourning process that could halt ego development (Volkan, 1999).

Although neuroscientific explorations of nostalgia are scarce, we will examine what substrates there could be for known nostalgia triggers such as odors (Havlena & Holak, 1998; Hirsch, 1992; Orth, & Bourrain, 2008) and how the olfactory system activates other neurological modules responsible for activating emotions.

The overarching goal with this review is to present historical and contemporary suggestions of this psychological phenomenon that has proven to transcend age, ethnicity and gender differences (Batcho, 1998; Havlena and Holak, 1998; Kaplan, 1987, Sedikides et al., 2006). And present different views on the function of nostalgia to arrive in a concluding chapter, discussing what definition of nostalgia could be meaningful for further scientific inquiry. As suggested by scientific investigators the nostalgic feeling is not only here to help us highlight important memories, but it is also in laymen's interest to easier popularize a vintage retro for commercial gain (Meuhling & Sprott, 2004). The richer a culture gets, the more iconic memories are available to 'exploit' and the faster our societies develop; nostalgic feelings will be more prevalent (Pickering & Keightley, 2006). As distinct from plain reminiscing and normal reflection, nostalgia is important to define for a more nuanced discussion of our temporal understandings. Nostalgia shows a striking pervasiveness, with people reporting feeling it once a week (Wildschut et al., 2006), the importance of understanding this psychological condition for our everyday life could not be more obvious.

### **Nostalgia as Equivalent to Homesickness**

#### **The Academic Origin of Nostalgia**

Even though Hofer (1688/1934) is credited as the founding father of the medical perspective of this 'illness', already at the end of the Thirty Year War (1618–1648), within the Spanish army of Flanders, medicals had diagnosed soldiers with *el mal de corazon*,



loosely translated to 'the evil of the heart'. The diagnosis contained states of deep despair, and was commonly found among those soldiers who were forced into service (Rosen, 1975).

Another condition described by the medicals in that time was *estar roto* - 'to be broken'.

Soldiers suffering from this were considered useless in battle and at least six soldiers were released of their duties due to this illness (Parker, 1972, As cited by Rosen, 1975).

What Hofer did uniquely in the 17<sup>th</sup> century was to provide a specific account of both the psychological and the physiological features of nostalgia. Being active in the city of Basel he based his definition on two local cases, where young people got fatally injured just to recover remarkably quickly when orders of sending them home from the hospital were issued, and the aforementioned officer reports describing Swiss mercenaries located abroad and suffering from *heimweh* (Hofer, 1688/1934, Rosen, 1975).

Hofer concluded that those who were prone to this illness were young people living abroad and especially those who were not able to accustom themselves to living outside their previous life (1688/1934). He noted that displays of nostalgia were due to external factors of which the individual felt attacking or questioning his/hers childhood ideals of the native land. The diagnostic signs which indicate an imminent of nostalgia were increasing sadness, melancholy and even "stupidity of the mind" (Hofer 1688/1934, p. 386.).

In Hofer's attempt to describe nostalgia's pathogenesis he used a rather bold neurological explanation. He said that the disease is essentially due to a distorted imagination, whereby the affected area in the brain is the same that contains memories of the desired place. This was supposed to be the inner part of the brain where animal spirits, or demonic spirits, surge back and forth in the nerve fibers. As a consequence of constant dwelling upon them, these impressions turn so profound that the spirits eventually traveled these fiber channels on their own, suggesting an individual would turn nostalgic. He compared this mechanism to how dreams are built up, arguing that things that impress us deeply seem to reappear in our

dream content (Hofer, 1688/1934). Although this kind of reasoning and terminology is outdated, especially those about animal spirits, modern ideas of brain plasticity could be suggested to hold similar views, where intensive re-appearing thoughts or experiences could make a different neurological pattern structure in the brain to easier access those more bulky axon travels (Levy, 2007; Kolb, Gibb, & Robinson, 2003).

Finally Hofer offers some cures for nostalgia including intakes of emulsions of the oil *Hyosciamus* and opium, and the most effective, to return back to the fatherland or at least induce hope in the patient of one day doing so. He thought that for those who lacked the means of traveling back home the illness could turn fatal, whereas in some other cases there were signs of that “the animal spirits gradually got exhausted and breathed out of their life”, and the individual would be cured (1688/1934 p. 390).

The German/Swiss physician J.J Scheuchzer, active in the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century (see Davis, 1979, McCann, 1941, Rosen, 1975, or Sedikides, Wildschut, & Baden, 2004), thought that nostalgia was due to “a sharp differential in atmospheric pressure causing excessive body pressurization, which in turn drove blood from the heart to the brain, thereby producing the observed affliction of sentiment” (Davis, 1979, p. 2).

To further illuminate the rather bizarre elements of medical explanations to nostalgia in this time, military physicians speculated that the cause of nostalgia could be the never-ending clanging of cow bells common to the Swiss Alps, which supposedly caused damage to the ear drum and brain cells (Davis, 1979).

It was widely believed in this era that nostalgia was an illness exclusively felt by Swiss people (Sedikides et al., 2004, Rosen, 1975). According to McCann (1941), this might simply have a straight forward explanation such as the Swiss simply being the ones who were interested in nostalgia and thus actively searched local cases. We could also accuse the 17<sup>th</sup> - 18<sup>th</sup> centuries for being a more isolated time, scientific wise and in general; hence such ideas

could escape extensive scrutiny. Actually so many cases were reported in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century by the Swiss, that the malady was eventually called *Schweizerkrankheit* (Rosen, 1975). It took 96 years after Hofer's introduction of the word nostalgia before people of other customs were reported to feel this. (McCann, 1941, Rosen, 1975). Those early authors claimed nostalgia to be predominantly a male adolescence disease, but according to McCann (1941) that was probably because in that time, males, and especially young adults, were the ones who left home more frequently in contrast to the women being mainly housewives.

### **Nostalgia and Criminality**

Jaspers (1910) draw the conclusion that nostalgia is closely connected to criminal behavior. Having the view of nostalgia being equivalent to homesickness, he argued for a case described in 1790 of a ten-year old child displaying spells of anger and who eventually choked a another child to death. Investigations pointed towards homesickness being the culprit in this child's behavior (as reviewed by McCann, 1941). Jaspers continued to demonstrate his conviction with another murder case, where the murderer was said to suffer from 'congestion' of the brain. He argued that the excitement received by committing such crimes always make the symptoms of nostalgia to disappear. In Jaspers' defense, he proposed that only weak minded people who suffered from nostalgia could become criminals and that many circumstances deciding ones' personality must be considered before making such connections. Also Gross (1911) believed that people suffering from nostalgia must seek powerful sensory stimulus, including such extremes as arson and murder, to cope with the "dejection and oppression" of nostalgia (as cited by McCann, 1941, p. 167).

### **Nostalgia as a Psychiatric Disorder**

Reviewing the literature from Hofer to the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, almost every medical symptom described by man, have at one time or another been associated with nostalgia (McCann 1941, Davis 1979, Rosen 1975). In physiological measurements; respiratory

disturbances, high blood pressure, cessation of menstrual flow, glandular disturbances, digestive disorders, foul breath, diarrhea altering with constipation, to name a few, have all been linked to nostalgia. Whereas the psychological diagnoses shows conditions like loneliness, loss of appetite, 'empty' feelings in the stomach, an inability to divert thoughts of your home, and finally melancholia and hallucinations for those severely affected (McCann, 1941). According to McCann, ideas of a nostalgia being a universal phenomenon was discussed by authors in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, but stated himself that neurotic and emotionally unstable persons tend to have a greater proneness, where also Fodor (1950) claimed that a person suffering from severe nostalgia is a "mentally regressive compulsive neurotic" (p. 25).

McCann (1941) deduced nostalgia to involve minor unpleasant physiological afflictions but mostly psychological disturbances, including depression and melancholia, where patients suffering from severe nostalgia could end up in psychotic states and sometimes resulting in passive or active suicide. Still, being such a vague term, he meant that there is no specific symptomatology to nostalgia, it has only the characteristics and patterns of what he called an 'emergency emotional behavior' causing the frustration of both symbolic and actual unsatisfactory element of the strong emotionally charged desire to return home. The focused object in the nostalgic narrative is home, but he means it is the same emergency emotional response that characterize being in love, where home is replaced with images of your loved one. Even the mourning process following a lost family member shares the same patterns according to McCann (1941).

Fodor (1950) could also point toward the lack of a certain symptomatology to nostalgia, but that it could develop into a "monomaniacal, obsessive mental state causing intense unhappiness and leading to a complete uprooting of settled existence" (p. 25). Or an 'immigrant psychosis' as Frost coined it (1938).

## **An Overview of Contemporary Suggestions of Nostalgia**

### **Nostalgia as Distinct from Homesickness**

Following a survey carried out in 1979, by sociologist Fred Davis, nostalgia was now revealed to be a form of a sentimental yearning of any object, event, or place in the past, rather than an emotional response to homesickness. By this time the general view had also shifted from being a medical malady or a psychiatric disturbance to play a normal psychological function that we all experience at times (Davis, 1979), although several authors still argue that nostalgia exists as a pathological condition (Kaplan, 1987; Peters, 1985). Along with Davis (1979), Werman (1977) argued in favor to a separation of empirical traditions for homesickness and nostalgia, with homesickness research paying most of its attention to the psychological difficulties accompanying the transition to boarding school or college, at home or abroad (Van Tilburg et al., 1996). Today the general definition of nostalgia includes recalling memories that give rise to certain complex emotions, creating a positive mood. In addition it is now generally believed that nostalgia transcends age and ethnicity (Batcho, 1995, 1998; Sedikides, et al., 2004; Wildschut et al., 2006; Zhou et al., 2008).

To say that ordinary memories serve a great practical function is hardly an overstatement and there is a fair body of research suggesting that autobiographical memories enables people to maintain a identity throughout the ever changing events of ones' life (Bluck, Alea, Habermas, & Rubins, 2005; Davis, 1979).

Comparing nostalgia, the distinction from plain memories is that one can actively reminisce about an event but it is the emotional component that accompanies some memories that makes it nostalgia, "One can remember without being nostalgic, but one cannot be nostalgic without remembering" (Batcho, 2007, p. 362). According to Batcho (2007) since nostalgia can be seen as the emotional power that distinguishes certain memories, it should

serve some different psychological function compared to that of ordinary memories.

Sedikides, Wildschut and Baden (2004) distinguishes autobiographical memories and reminiscing from nostalgia by stating that the two former includes 'cold' processing (i.e., cognition) and the latter involves 'hot' processing (i.e., affect). This hot component is also believed to be the 'culprit' that a nostalgic narrative normally displays a tendency to go beyond veracity and temporal ordering of the past (Sedikides et al., 2004). Wildschut et al., (2006) also regard nostalgia as a *prima-facie* self-relevant emotion, arguing like: "The self invariably figured as the protagonist in the narratives..." (p. 6). Pickering and Keightley (2006) say that nostalgia lacks an absolute definition because its form is *per se* of multiple functions. It accommodates progressive feelings of utopian idealized states as well as melancholic attributes.

Further showing the difficulties of placing a single focused definition to nostalgia is that it is not indexed in the official DSM-IV categorization (American Psychiatric Association, 1994), where Nikelly (2004) points out that the organization (APA) treats nostalgias' symptoms of distress as sub- types of depression, where an own categorization is needed.

### **Nostalgia as an Emotion**

Today researchers and theorists regard unanimously that nostalgia is a universal emotion (Batcho 1995, 1998; Havlena & Holak, 1998; Sedikies et al., 2004; Wildschut et al., 2006). "There is no one who at one time or another has not experienced nostalgia" says Kaplan (1987, p. 465), although differences in temperament and personality traits influence nostalgia proneness (Batcho, 1998; Holbrook, 1993). When it comes to a more nuanced classifications there is still a debate, for instance the basic and non-basic emotion dichotomy of where nostalgia belongs is still unclear (also known as primary and secondary emotions categorization). As explained by Soudry, Lemonge, Malinvaud, Sonsoli and Bonfils (2010) a primary (or simple) emotion is one followed by a facial expression or gestures independently

of ethnic or social upbringing. The secondary (or mixed) emotions result from combining several primary emotions into something more complex. Several authors describe nostalgia as a complex emotion (Sedikides et al., 2004; Soudry et al., 2010).

On the other hand; Hirsch (1992) proposed that some stimuli create nostalgia without cognitive appraisal, namely odors, which supposedly travel in different, more direct pathways in the brain to more ancestral, 'instinctive', processing areas to create a nostalgic feeling, hinting at a role for a basic emotion, although not stated explicitly by Hirsch.

Using the definition of nostalgia as being the yearning for an idealized past, or what is known as screen memories in psychoanalysis inquiry (Hirsch, 1992; Kaplan 1987), are memories that are not representing the truth, instead being a combination of many different memories intertwined into one single memory where all negative elements are filtered out. This is exemplified by psychoanalysis methods, "during the analysis of the transference neurosis, the patients' earliest memories undergo changes and divide into multiple components that are separate, definable childhood memories" (Hirsch, 1992, p. 390). But unlike screen memories nostalgia is a composition of memories resulting in a strong emotional state (Hirsch, 1992).

### **Nostalgia as a Negative Emotion**

Rosen (1975) describes nostalgia as a "psychopathological condition affecting individuals who are uprooted, whose social contacts are fragmented, who are isolated and who feel totally frustrated and alienated." (p. 340). Peters (1985) says it is a "fleeting sadness and a yearning to an overwhelming craving that persists and profoundly interferes with the individuals attempt to cope with his present circumstances" (p. 135). Even though the shift from homesickness has been made, the concept of nostalgia as significant in melancholia is still supported by Volkan (1999) and Peters (1985) working in the psychodynamic field. Making a nostalgia trip is a trip of sadness. The realization of that the past is irredeemably lost

could only be one highly negative epiphany (Best & Nelson 1985; Hertz 1990).

### **Nostalgia as Including a Bittersweet Component**

As of date many renowned theorists would give credit to the bittersweet component felt while reminiscing, to be the sign of nostalgia (Bassin, 1993; Havlena & Holak, 1991; Hertz, 1990; Kaplan, 1987). Werman (1977) said it is a “wistful pleasure, a joy tinged with sadness” (p. 393). Arguments are going like, it is sweet because to the ‘original print’ was positive and bitter because it is now lost to the past.

Family and close others (e.g. romantic partners and friends), have been reported to be of high significance as content in the nostalgic reverie (Havlena & Holak, 1992). Objects such as jewelry, antiques, toys and cars are also known to make people nostalgic (Havlena & Holak, 1991). Also events such as weddings, school excursions and holidays have proven to wax nostalgia (Havlena & Holak, 1991; Wildschut et al., 2006). Although there is clear evidence such personal memories are mainly positive, Baker and Kennedy (1994), say that nostalgia prompted by an object, a scene, a smell, or a strain of music are still causing a wistful mood, i.e. being bittersweet in its flavor (also see Belk, 1990).

### **Nostalgia as a Positive Emotion**

Davis termed nostalgia “a positively toned evocation of lived past” (1979, p.18) and in great contrast to early observers of nostalgia, Davis means that a “nostalgic feeling is almost never infused with those sentiments we commonly think of as negative—for example, unhappiness, frustration, despair, hate...” (p. 14). Batcho (1998, 2007), Kaplan (1987) and Havlena and Holak (1998), to name a few contemporary researchers, parallel this view, stating that nostalgic reverie is a travel of re-enjoyment of the original experience caused by the emotional, although idealized past. Batcho (2007) states that nostalgia “promotes psychological well-being by countering alienation and strengthens community” (p. 363) whereas Kaplan (1987) says: “Nostalgic memories also preserve something of the self of



early childhood, a feeling of a much loved child” (p. 482). In this sense nostalgia soothes the feeling of loss, serving as a form of compensatory narcissism, because it heightens self-esteem and reduces depression (Kaplan, 1987) and thus serves mainly to produce a positive feeling in the experiencer. Nostalgia’s role of heightened value to objects, events or people, makes it self-evidently detached from notions such as depression and melancholia, where the outlooks induced by those states are normally bleak and negative.

### **Nostalgia as a Pathological Condition**

Even if we exclude the ideas posted by the early academic investigations reviewed earlier; nostalgia is still believed to exist in both pathological and normal states. For those suffering from pathological nostalgia, it is said that ‘the acceptance’ of a lost past, is lacking in the subjects’ cognition which according to several authors (see Kaplan 1987; Volkan, 1999) suggest the bittersweet component normally rising in the nostalgic experience is removed. The problem though, is that the past can become ‘too’ idealized. The individual creates denial states instead, which prevents development in the future. “[T]here is a compulsive absorption in fantasy that betrays problems in ego and ego ideal formation” (Kaplan 1987 p. 465-466).

Wernman (1977), sharing the same view, that nostalgia is built up by an ambivalent interplay between cognition and affections, and that irretrievable past acceptance creates the bittersweet element, but in its pathological form he states that nostalgia can be a substitute for mourning (see Bassin 1993; Volkan, 1999) and an “inability to detach the libido or modify the instinctual aims” (p. 468).

What once consisted of wistful feelings for the good old days becomes, in pathological states, a compromise formation. Nostalgia’s function would be the fulfillment of repressed wishes to protect the ego from anxiety. This kind of nostalgia would create blurry views, “fixated versions of masculinity, heroism, physical beauty, rivalry and happy endings

prevent the individual from realistically confronting life's conflicts" (Kaplan, 1987, p. 469).

The pathogenesis for 'severe' nostalgia is that your memories become so pleasurable to think about that all energy is aimed toward putting these memories on repeat, eventually leading to certain individuals reaching belief systems of immortality (Kaplan, 1987).

### **Categories of Nostalgia**

Empirical investigations of nostalgic experiences have been scarce due to problematic operational definitions and methods of measurements. In the light of nostalgia being a difficult phenomenon to define, several authors have suggested to categorize it into different sub-genres, namely, personal nostalgia and historical nostalgia (Batcho, 1998, 2007; Holbrook, 1993; Stern, 1992), also known as true and social nostalgia as discussed by Davis (1979). Three additional types of nostalgia were proposed by Baker and Kennedy (1994); real, simulated, and collective nostalgia. Real nostalgia refers to the sentimental yearning, for the self-lived past, paralleling the view of personal nostalgia. It is experienced only if the person in question has lived through the original event himself/herself. They suggest personal nostalgia to be exemplar based, which in other words mean that external stimulus might be needed to evoke it. Following Belks' (1990) argumentation, people insist on authentic stimulus to symbolize their most cherished experience. Like a similar wedding ring to your own might give nostalgic flashback but are "clearly inferior to and would hardly be traded for 'the real thing'" (p. 672).

When the real thing is not available it may be possible to elicit simulated nostalgia. It refers to the indirectly experienced past. E.g. when listening to elderly peoples anecdotes of 'the good old times' one might experience a nostalgic feeling even though you were not there yourself (Baker, & Kennedy, 1994), which share definitional ground with historical nostalgia (Stern, 1992). In addition, Havlena and Holak (1991) demonstrated that old products that are brought back for a new generation, could elicit nostalgia in them. Simulated nostalgia may

also explain why we feel nostalgic in museums (Baker, & Kennedy, 1994). “Whereas real nostalgia is similar to an exemplar, simulated nostalgia is similar to a prototype, which is an abstract image that is often associated with a certain occurrence” (Baker, & Kennedy, 1994, p. 171).

Collective nostalgia represents a sentimental yearning felt by entire cultures, generations or nations (Baker & Kennedy, 1994). Belk (1990) suggested that collective nostalgia is generation specific, thus a younger cohort prefer different music, movies and other cultural expressions than their parents.

Further categories have also been suggested: Hirsch (1992) said that we could see religious traditions as a form of ‘institutionalized nostalgia’ - “Emotionally-laden rituals discharge nostalgic energies through the physical activity of the ritual, while forging linkages with the past” (p. 390). And to the joy of Odysseus and Hofer, homesickness can be thought of as nostalgia after all, namely, geographical nostalgia- “a yearning for different space rather than yearning for a different time” (Hirsch, 1992, p. 391).

While scientists still argue about what kind of experience fits into what category, today there are some different nostalgia scales aiming to facilitate empirical testing. Batcho developed a 20 –item nostalgia inventory, the NI (1995, 1998), where participants rate how much they miss each of the items in the scale from when they were younger. The NI addresses personal nostalgia while another scale introduced by Holbrook (1993) also concern historical nostalgia. Holbrook suggested a 20 item index, where he found reliability and concurrent validity when applied to sample homogeneous with respect to age. In his study from 1993 he wanted to see the role of same cohort’s age in the development of consumer taste when participants were to rate Oscar winning movies from 1927 to 1988 on a point scale from 1 to 9, where nine being the equivalent to intense liking. The result showed that women were marginally more prone to nostalgia than men, however no correlation with age.

### **Triggers of Nostalgia**

Personal nostalgia can be fortuitous, that is, some external stimuli might passively trigger the components of the nostalgic feeling to react. Sensory stimulus such as odors (Hirsch, 1992; Halvena, & Holak, 1998; Orth, & Bourrain, 2008) and auditory influence (Batcho, 1998, 2007, 2008; Barret, Grimm, & Robins, 2010; Sedikides, Wildschut, Arndt & Routledge, 2008; Wildschut et al., 2006 ) are well known triggers, but also social events, views, or manmade products have shown correlation with nostalgia (Havlena, & Holak, 1991, 1992, 1998; Holbrook, 1993; Muehling & Sprott, 2004).

Alternatively self-created reflection about an object or event may cause this proposed emotional component to rise in a memory (Sedikides et al., 2004; Wildschut et al., 2006). In either case an explicit or implicit evaluation of the current situation and a similar situation of the past is compared, creating a juxtaposition which is the main characteristic of nostalgic experience (Davis, 1979).

In a paper by Wildschut et al.,(2006), exploring what mood states are required to trigger nostalgia, they detected that the distinction between discrete negative affective states like loneliness and being scared, and more generalized affective states like depression and sadness made a difference in the salience of nostalgia, which is also supported by Wildschut, Sedikides, and Cordaro (2011). In fact 78% of the participants referred to negative mood and 58% to negative discrete states, where in the latter; 59% reported loneliness, ranking it by far the most prominent state for nostalgia to occur. These findings suggest going beyond a singular focus on global negative mood and toward a more refined understanding of the discrete affective triggers of nostalgia.

### **Music and Lyrics as Triggers**

With the knowledge that song lyrics are a strong originator to evoke emotions (Stratton & Zalanowski, 1994), Baumgartner (1992) showed that hearing a piece of music

could evoke memories of past times, and such recalls normally obtained a positive tone. Batcho (1998) wanted to explore the relationship between personal nostalgia and perceived affect in songs. Also her results were in great contrast to ideas relating nostalgia to melancholy and depression. Neither did the participants perceive sad songs as sadder nor happy song less happy than did low nostalgia participants. The songs chosen in the study were not explicitly aimed for nostalgia sentiment; they were only describing the happy beginning and the sad ending of a relationship. To explore the outcome of that study, a new experiment was conducted by Batcho in 2007, where the chosen songs were manipulated to such an extent they were specifically written for the experiment. The overarching goal was to explore connections between nostalgia and certain emotions, including measurements of social connectedness. The lyrics in the songs aimed to facilitate three different emotional tones in the participants, resulting in six songs, representing happiness, sadness and a 'neutral' valence of nostalgia. Every category was bundled into two sets with two different states, the happy set had one lyric that was considered solitary and happy and the other more social related, i.e. sharing happiness with others. Same design with the sad and nostalgic songs. Batchos' own NI scale was used to address results in personal nostalgia. The result was as expected from earlier studies (Batcho 1998), people high on the NI scale preferred the happy lyrics, and found them more meaningful. The highs' also related more than the low scorers' on the nostalgia songs, further strengthen the usefulness of the Nostalgia Inventory as a tool measuring personal nostalgia (Batcho, 2007). Social connectedness was also in line with previous studies (Wildschut et al., 2006; Sedikides et al., 2006), stating that it was especially salient to people prone to nostalgia. The bond between personal nostalgia and social connectedness was reinforced by the absence of any correlation between high scorers and the ratings of sad lyrics.

Also the discussed separation between personal and historical nostalgia was evident in

the study by the inclination of Holbrook's scale (1993). Where scores on The NI was correlating to the liking of happy and nostalgic songs, Holbrook's scale correlated positively with the two sets of sad lyrics, which shows that the two scales measure different types of nostalgia (Batcho, 2007).

Where the outcome in Batcho's study could show the importance of close others in the nostalgic feeling, it was not a requisite for nostalgia to appear, because participants also showed preference to the solitary-happy song. The object in that song was a bicycle representing childhood adventures, which, according to Batcho, might help to fortify the participant's identity by extending the very object to the individual's self-image. This asymmetry "may reflect the difference between nostalgia as a personality dimension and nostalgia as a transient mood state" (Batcho, 2007, p. 375). The nostalgic experience may thus serve a dual function, social connectedness and individuation augmentation, "the force of opposing emotions may constitute another" (Batcho, 2007, p. 375).

In a paper the year after (Batcho, DaRin, Nave, & Yaworsky, 2008), this ambivalence was explored further; using different lyrics once again, showing that people prone to personal nostalgia did seek comfort in other related context to augment one's own identity, while those more nostalgic for an historical past rely less heavily on social bonds to define their identity, relating more to solitary identity lyrics. I.e. different categories of nostalgia are of importance to find more nuanced description of nostalgia and its functions, since evidently more than one psychological function are at display (Batcho et al., 2008)

In another study of music evoked nostalgia (Barrett et al., 2010), researchers let participants listen and rate randomly selected excerpts of popular songs. The intensity of music-evoked nostalgia was evaluated by using two variables, a context-level and person level. Context-level is referring to the personal relationship participants might have to a certain song, as well as attributes of a person's experience while listening to any given song.

The context- levels construct helped the researchers explain how feelings felt by the same person may vary when listening to different songs. By person- level constructs they referred to the individual's differences before listening among the participants. Including nostalgia proneness and personality traits like extraversion and neuroticism. This variable was aiming to explain why some persons felt more nostalgic than others to the same specific song.

Resulting in the prevalence of nostalgia was most strongly predicted by context, less strongly by the person level construct and the interplay between these two. Claiming that the source of music evoked nostalgia to be “the idiosyncratic associations that people have formed between particular songs and events in the past.” (Barrett et al., 2010, p. 401), i.e., rather than by sheer personality traits.

### **Odors as Triggers**

A person with a fully operational nose and olfactory system is said to detect 10.000 different smells (Ackerman, 1990), although no two persons' smell capacities are exactly the same (Hirsch, 1992). In general it is believed that women are more sensitive to smells (Doty, Shaman, & Applebaum, 1984). Also ethnicity and geographical heritage is said to affect the perception of smells (Hirsch, 1992). Anatomically the nose directly connects with the olfactory lobe in the limbic system- the area considered to be responsible in creating emotions. “The olfactory lobe is actually a part and parcel of the limbic system” (Hirsch, 1992, p. 391). The olfactory –evoked –recall is considered a universal phenomenon and refers to the fact that odors can bring forth memories from the past (Hirsch 1992). He uses examples of when an aroma of freshly baked bread was spread in US supermarkets and the bread sales increased threefold as well as when cinema owners spray popcorn odors in the salons to create ‘the special atmosphere’. The same is a fact for negative smells, where the odor of fish is considered a foul stench, and stores being neighbors to seafood markets show drops in sales (unpublished American poll survey, 1989, as explained by Hirsch 1992). One newer study by

Orth and Bourrain (2008) stated that nostalgic memories evoked by odors positively influence individual sensation seeking when it comes to consumer preferences.

In Hirsch's study from 1992, exploring odor evoked nostalgia by letting participants' rate different smells. The respondents communicated their predominant localization during childhood and in what decade they were born. Out of 478 males and 511 females, 85.2% reported odors that evoked recalls. A generational effect was demonstrated, 86.8% of those born after 1930 displayed olfactory evoked recall and only 61.3% of those born before 1930. Which is not surprising since one half of those over 65, and three quarters of those over 80 years of age have a reduced ability to smell (Doty et al., 1984). The gender difference was not prevalent in this study; hence regardless of sex aroma is an important trigger of nostalgia. A significantly generational difference was found to what type of triggers. For those born before 1930, odors of nature, including hay, horses, and sea air had the greatest effect while for those born after 1930 listed food aromas as the greatest triggers, but also plastic, airplane fuel, sweet tarts and 'play dough' to name a few could elicit nostalgia for certain cohorts (Hirsch, 1992). A correlating link between happy childhoods and smells could not be detected due to over 91% of both males and females and regardless of age reported a happy childhood.

## **Olfactory System and Emotions**

### **A Neuroscientific Approach**

Brain scanning research aiming at understanding nostalgia is hard to come by, but some research has been done on some of the responsible parts of creating a nostalgic reverie, namely odors and emotions. Like emotions odors display positive, negative or neutral valence. According to Soudry et al (2010) odors and emotions neuroanatomically share the same substrates. Zald and Pardo (1997) associated negative odors (aversive) with activation of amygdala and left orbitofrontal cortex, with positive stimuli (appetitive). They detected



correlations with piriform cortex and right orbitofrontal cortex while using PET scans. Levy, Henkin, Hutter, Lin, Martins and Schellinger (1997) used fMRI to find activation of both orbitofrontal cortex, entorhinal cortex and anterior cingulate cortex, regardless of the pleasantness of the smell. Herz, Eliassen, Beland and Souza (2004) conducted fMRI experiments that indicated activation in the amygdala and hippocampal regions during recall to personally significant odors.

To summarize this diversity, normally a distinction is made between two ‘classical’ types; neocortical areas, e.g., orbitofrontal cortex, responsible for the conscious detection of an odor, and the limbic systems, e.g. amygdala and hippocampus, responsible for detecting odors in a more unconscious fashion (Soudry et al., 2010).

The olfactory system can detect very discrete stimuli compared to other senses which are in line with Hirsch’s (1992) statement that smells take a ‘shorter’ neuronal pathway, excluding cognitive processing and thus suited the best experimental trigger for nostalgia research. This was later confirmed by Orth and Bourrain (2008), stating that odor memory is independent of memory of other modalities.

The fear responses induced by the amygdala are well known to detect even the smallest indications of emotion display (Soudry et al., 2010). In close cooperation with the hippocampus; those modules are reasoned upon for shaping emotional memory, i.e. enhance memory significance by inducing an emotional component (Hamann, 2001), including the coloring of memories done by odor stimulus (Pouliot, & Jones-Gotman, 2008). Such statements provide an investigational ground for nostalgia researchers and neuroscientists to design brain imaging studies explicitly aimed to understand how nostalgic reflection works.

### **The Function of Nostalgia**

#### **Psychological Suggestions**

Although briefly touching upon the function of nostalgia when reviewing the history

and defining nostalgia as an emotion, the upcoming segments shall provide a deeper exploration of contemporary suggestions of what the psychological function of nostalgia could be.

According to Pickering and Keightley (2006), nostalgia is not "only a search for ontological security in the past, but also as a mean of taking one's bearings for the road ahead in the uncertainties of the present." (p. 921). These two dimensions of nostalgia are dependent on each other and inform each other. Nostalgia serves the function of keeping a dialogue with the past to help us recognize a continuum to all those fleeting transitory phenomena's in our ever changing society. (also see Davis, 1979) I.e. suggesting that nostalgia has a more prominent role in our time, due to modern societies constant changes, compared to pre-industrial times (Pickering and Keightley, 2006). Hirsch (1992) claims that the nostalgic urge to re-create past emotions is a driving force of behavior. Asking rhetorically; "[H]ow frequently we marry spouses with characteristics reminiscent of those of our parents?... become [D]emocrats, [R]epublicans, even racist because our parents were... children of alcoholics marry alcoholic spouses—not because their childhood was happy, but rather because they seek to recreate their idealized sanitized memories of their childhood..." (p. 390). The same nostalgic mechanisms are behind food choices and the passing of recipes down the generational spiral, amplifying the role of nostalgia's input to daily behavior. How religious and cultural traditions are celebrated annually indicates further nostalgia's force in our lives, according to Hirsch (1992).

The pervasiveness of nostalgia is striking, 80% of respondents to a study conducted in 2006 (Wildschut et al.,) reported that they felt nostalgic at least once every week. Using the definition of nostalgia being a "sentimental longing for the past" as given by *The New Oxford Dictionary of English* (1998), and due to their own research (Sedikides et al., 2004, 2006; Wildschut et al., 2006) they concluded nostalgia to be a positive and self-relevant experience.

From this perspective they suggested nostalgia to serve four major psychological functions.

The first function serves as a repository of positive feelings, where Wildschut et al. (2006, 2010; also see Sedikides et al., 2006, 2008) could show that a nostalgic account reflected more positive than negative emotions and eventually led to an overall more positive mood. As in line with earlier suggestions, where Batcho (1998) discovered that respondents scoring high on the personal NI were no more optimistic, pessimistic or negatively emotional than less nostalgic respondents, but when giving them an emotional intensity test developed by Larsen and Diener (1987) they scored much higher. Nostalgically prone participants could not display a better free recall but often recounted autobiographical memories where other people played prominent roles.

The second function of nostalgia is to boost self-esteem. (Wildschut et al., 2006; Wildshut, Sedikides & Cordaro, 2011) Nostalgia creates a more positive outlook on yourself, strengthen you identity by solidify both happy and solitary memories (Batcho, 2007). Wildschut et al. (2006) showed that participants who wrote down their nostalgic experience reported elements of higher self-esteem than control groups. Reverie about close others or inanimate objects also showed to extend and augment individuals visions of self- worth.

The third function involves social connectedness. Individuals have a fundamental need to belong to social communities as famously stated by Maslow (1954). Under particular stressful events humans tend to seek the security of social bonds. It is even said that those who have great social bonds experience greater psychological and physical well-being (Cohen, & Wills, 1985). While feeling adrift from social closeness compensating psychological mechanisms like direct and indirect strategies are often used (Gardner, Pickett, & Knowles, 2005). Direct strategies are accessible when there is a suitable interaction partner available and the aim is to repair the relationship with him/her. Indirect strategies are mental preparations to form an interactional partner where there are none (Gardner, et al., 2005). As

suggested (Wildschut et al., 2006), nostalgia plays this role of an indirect strategy, which parallel Hertz's idea of "the mind is 'peopled'" by nostalgic reflection (1990, p. 195).

In a series of experiments, Wildschut et al., (2006) wanted to explore the social elements of nostalgia. Participants brought to mind either a nostalgic or an ordinary memory of an event and then complete measures of positive and negative affect, self-esteem and social connectedness. The nostalgic group scored significantly higher on all measurements except the negativity part and demonstrated a much more secure and adult attachment style as well as greater confidence in new intrapersonal relationships, than the control group. To further test this, Zhou et al., (2008) in a four -study design, examined Chinese children, students and factory workers and the role of nostalgia in the regulation of loneliness. They found that loneliness induced nostalgia, but that nostalgia in turn increased perceptions of social support. Further suggesting that nostalgia holds an ambivalent nature.

### **The Terror Management Function of Nostalgia**

The fourth function of nostalgia is believed to play the role of inducing meaning to existential threats like mortality awareness. The ability to understand time makes humans realize the inescapability of our forthcoming death. It is an ability that supposedly differentiates us from other mammals and should create a certain psychological stress (Routledge et al., 2010).

The terror management theory developed by Greenberg, Pyszcznskiy and Solomon (1986) focus on the wide range of behaviors that humans display to cope with thoughts of their own mortality. Examples are; advocating meaning into the culture one lives in, reinforcing ideas of self-worth, and investing in intrapersonal relationship.

Routledge et al. (2010) wanted to test nostalgia as a terror management function through three experiments. In the first study they measured the participants' propensity to think positively about the past, as a proxy for nostalgia proneness, and then induced death

awareness (mortality salience; MS) to half of the participants, to arrive in a result showing that low nostalgic participants who were given MS responded less positively to existential threats. Experiment two showed that those low on nostalgia proneness displayed more death anxiety when given MS. Whereas in the final study this protective function was even more prominent because the more prone you were to nostalgia the less death-related thoughts were accessible after inducing MS. Results point toward our ability to conjure up past experiences is to meet the defensive need of MS in the present. This is not to say that some reflections over one's lifespan will not be threatening, but shows that the very same mechanism which creates awareness of mortality also protects us from anxiety of such thoughts by inducing meaning to one's life with a nostalgic reverie.

Another study (Juhl, Routledge, Arndt, Sedikides, & Wildschut, 2010) extended the result obtained from Routledge et al., (2008) by claiming that personal differences makes a difference on how nostalgia is assessed after inducing MS.

### **The Discontinuity Hypothesis**

Besides the four most common contemporary suggestions of nostalgias' function described above, one of the most influential theories in nostalgia literature is the discontinuity hypothesis developed by Fred Davis in 1979. Simplified, it states that nostalgia permits people to maintain their identity after major transitions in their lives. Nostalgia really blossoms where apprehension and nervousness about a great change in one's life is at hand. Stated alternatively, people who face existential disruptions, like moving to a new location, changes in an intrapersonal relationship, occupational crises (e.g. layoffs), loss of family members etc., will be more nostalgic about the past than those who maintain greater continuity in their lives. What are the emotional and existential consequences of disruptions? Davis points at psychological conditions like becoming more fearful, displaying anxiety and a showing a general disappointment to all the elements of one's life. Whereas Sedikides et al.,

(2004) add mortality awareness, loneliness and alienation to the list. As Davis' hypothesis goes, nostalgia's main function is to ease these kinds of distress. Davis also claimed that men are more prone than women, using arguments in the same veins as Hofer did 300 years earlier. "[W]omen's status passages occur in the familiar and re-assuring context of home, family and kin..." (p. 56). A rather controversial claim, considering the scientific status of his work and the time period he published. Nonetheless this particular claim was forcefully contrasted by Batcho (1995) and Best and Nelson (1985) in their attempts to test the hypothesis. Although Baker and Kennedy (1994) agree with the non-existing gender differences, they found that the item for which nostalgia reacts differs between the sexes.

### **Critique of the Discontinuity Hypothesis**

Baker and Kennedy (1994) discusses that the discontinuity hypothesis seems counterintuitive, as it would be expected that people facing a great transition should look to the future ahead as a psychological preparation rather than produce a romantic shimmer of the past. But they extend their reasoning saying that even though this should be true, one might need a nostalgic reflection in order to see the future more clearly. Best and Nelson (1985) found that deteriorating circumstances were associated with an increase in nostalgic reverie among participants and thus in line with Davis's predictions, but that work interruptions could not be counted as one. Batcho (1995) and Best and Nelson (1985) treated the reservoir of memories as unipolar when they tested the hypothesis, whereas Godbole, Shehryar and Hunt (2006) included that people facing discontinuity and having a positive past will be more nostalgic, while those with a more negative upbringing will not be as nostalgic. They used variables that would place participants in either a bleak outlook of the future or a positive one. Results showed that those with a positive childhood and a negative outlook became more nostalgic than those with a predominantly negative past, whereas those in bright outlook condition showed no increase of nostalgia, regardless of valence of the past (Godbole et al.,

2006). The authors thus suggest an extension of the discontinuity hypothesis, namely that "valence of past experience [works] as a moderator of the degree to which one seeks solace in nostalgia when confronted with a threatening future" (Godbole et al., 2006, p. 630), i.e. Davis should have included the outlook of the future as a significant variable.

### **A Psychoanalysis Approach to the Function and Aim of Nostalgia**

Among some of the forefathers to 20<sup>th</sup> century psychology, nostalgia as such was never indexed either by Freud or Jung (Peters, 1985). Neumann (1949), though, vaguely mentions nostalgia as it signifies a wish of returning to uroboric incest, which in more general terms mean the wish to return to the safety of the womb (p. 17 as cited by Peters 1985). This was later commented by Samuels (1980) saying that this uroboric phantasy is prevalent in people who have an "infantile ego threatened by an unacceptable and annihilating feeling of lost omnipotence" (p. 49), where also Kaplan (1987), Bassin (1993) Fodor (1950) and Peters (1985) argue along the same line.

"Nostalgia is a universal human experience, that the experience has a specific quality, and that the feeling that all parts of one's self are involved, makes it both possible and useful to regard nostalgia as an archetypal experience" (Peters, 1985, p. 137). He means that nostalgia is the manifestation of this archetypal constellation. Even though 'home' or a utopian paradise has figured in innumerable theories, the role of an omnipotent archetypal mother has been one of the most prominent figures in psychoanalytical inquiry (Bassin, 1993). "[T]he representations of motherhood reverberate with the complexities of our own maternal bonds as our own infantile experiences objectify the mother and tie her to images of nurturing provider and omnipotent transformer" (Bassin, 1993, p. 426).

Peters (1985) argue that the mother/infant dyadic experience is the first expression of archetypal creator to be experienced. The infant's first experience with the mother is a beautiful event but out of obvious reason it also contains a chaotic filled epiphany. According

to Peters (1985), both sides are needed. “I believe that at a deep level in nostalgia, the yearning is for the other to be there in a perfect way” (p. 137). Whatever the ‘other’ might represent; a home, a loved one, or your mother’s womb. The newly born is so dependent on the ‘other’ that “the balance is delicate between on the one hand shortcomings that are bearable frustrations, and, on the other, failures that are intolerable; if too much is experienced as the latter then the trust which is so necessary to accept the human level of relationship, is impaired” (Peters, 1985, p. 138). When that ‘trust’ is damaged, he argues, the archetypal level is less ‘mediated’- then a person might strive more to find the archetypal balance or ideal. This is manifested by the melancholic aspect of nostalgia. “Nostalgia aims toward individuation inasmuch as its pain provides an impulsion to do something” (Peters, 1985, p. 145).

During the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> -century, a cultural fascination for collecting and quoting form the past has been prevalent (Bassin, 1993). Countless institutions, companies and entertainment industries have pulled a nostalgic string to popularize ‘vintage retro’. Bassin (1993) means that a person searching retro objects, “is closely related to the means or procedure of transformation that originates in the mother- infant matrix and that when internalized, contributes to the development of subjectivity” (p. 426). She continues by saying that entering nostalgic reflection will lead to a powerful affect guarding against dependency, fragmentation, unresolved narcissism and powerlessness. Nostalgia in her argumentation also represents a thwarted attempt at ‘mourning play’. In psychoanalytical terminology a mourning play is an activity of the ego that both mourns “the loss of difference of self and others and celebrates playfully the possibility of oneness regained” (Bassin, 1993, p. 427). In the attempt to re-find one’s ‘mother’, you have to travel through the process of mourning. By keeping the memory animated and colorful by adding nostalgic shimmer, you become in an appreciative and grateful state for what your mother did to you in the earliest days of your life (Bassin,



1993; Peters, 1985). She claims that without true psychological recognition of the mother/creator you could not find the balance or harmony required to become a suitable parent yourself.

When commenting on the positive elements of the nostalgic experience she means that the pleasure resides in the search for something in the past, a quest with no ends due to the impossibility to re-find the past. Ironically this is what temporarily fulfills the desire (Bassin, 1993).

### **Nostalgia as a Linking Phenomenon**

“People cannot accept change without mourning what is lost to the past” (Volkan, 1999, p. 169). Volkan (1999) has coined the term ‘linking object’ or ‘linking phenomena’ which are concepts used by the mourner to adapt to change or loss. The ‘healthy’ outcome of mourning is that you acknowledge specific mental representations of what is lost. What you once experienced in the original setting, you will now be able to master in the present. An ‘unhealthy’ outcome of the mourning process is when both the love and the hate aspect of the original print are still prevalent. The ambivalence found in the original setting is now transferred into an internal struggle about the mourners own self and the mourner becomes depressed (Volkan, 1999). A third outcome according to Volkan is when the mourner turns the thing or event into an ‘introject’. Although the introject is an active representation of the lost object/event- you have cut all emotional identification with it. Still the introject is very influential for your inner self and needs constant attention, thus the mourner (also referred to as a “perennial mourner” by Volkan, 1999) is doomed to carry this burden for as long as an identification with the past becomes complete.

“A linking object is the externalized version of an introject. The mourner ‘chooses’ an external item such as the watch of his or her dead father, and psychologically speaking turns it magical” (Volkan, 1999, p.174). The perennial mourner might feel extensions of relief in their

mind but the mourning is not complete, it just transferred to a more easily attained overview of the situation. As an example, the mourner might lock in the watch in a drawer and thus distance himself/herself temporarily.

A linking phenomenon is the same as the linking object but attains more abstract things like songs, smells, gestures or actions. Perennial mourners can enter a pathological state where they become trapped for not letting the past go, which infects the future. Others can cure themselves by these linking objects/phenomena. They can even gain a greater understanding for the continuity of time as well as see a clear distinction of the past and the present. The 'cure' for achieving a healthy mourning process is to do something creative with the linking object. When creativity works as an adaption there is no need for nostalgia, says Volkan (1999).

### **Discussion**

Evidently enough, the story of nostalgia is a long one. We have seen it as the psychological manifestation of the wish to return home, accompanied by severe melancholic feelings (Hofer, 1688/1934; McCann 1941; Rosen, 1975), and we have seen claims that we need to search powerful sensory stimulus such as murder and arson to cope with nostalgia (Jaspers, 1910; Gross, 1911, a reviewed by McCann, 1941). The human urge to understand phenomena's around us has put a lot of different ideas to nostalgia. All kinds of symptoms described by medicals and psychiatrics have been given at one time or another to nostalgia (McCann, 1941). It took until the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century before it was considered a normal feeling (Davis, 1979).

To be able to discuss meaningfully about a psychological condition in terms of its functions, at least the conceptual ground should be established. Nostalgia being constituted by several combined emotions, i.e. being a complex emotion as discussed by Sedikides et al., (2004) and Soudry et al., (2010), makes it difficult, since the very notion of a classification of

simple and complex emotions is itself resting on questionable pillars. Different categories have been suggested to easier assess empirical testing (Batcho, 1998; Baker, & Kennedy, 1994; Davis 1979; Holbrook, 1993 Stern, 1992;), by sub-typing nostalgia with more detailed descriptions of the different feelings elicited by different objects and situations.

Although disagreement is still prevalent to what the main emotion of nostalgia is, on this side of the most recent millennia shift, there seems to be somewhat of a consensus that nostalgia serves to gratify the subject with mainly positive emotions of an idealized past, including a bittersweet pinch to the experiencers realization of the irredeemably past. Also claims that it is a universal feeling transcending age, ethnicity and gender are now considered a fact (Batcho, 1998; Havlena, & Holak, 1998; Sedikides et al., 2004, 2006). Those who actually feel sad when reflecting over the past might suffer from even more complex sates of reminiscing than nostalgia. Once seen as homesickness, a condition few of us would considered to be a 'warm and fussy' feeling, could now be an intense missing of not feeling align with the anything in general. Those working in the psychoanalytical field discusses this yearning of an utopian world, explaining it that we miss the warmth and wholeness found in the stage of being encapsulated in our mother's womb (Bassin, 1993, Peters, 1987) and put the nostalgic reverie to be the sign of such desires. With further explorations though, we might find this to be the search for achieving general content with one self's caused by several other psychological mechanisms and maybe nostalgia should not be one of them. Rather it can be of neurological reasons, e.g. where some suffers from PTSD because of a smaller hippocampus (Pavića et al., 2007), some might feel a constant melancholia because of some neurological disorder. Obviously your social upbringing and several other external elements may have profound influence on how you rate the past versus the present and the future (Godbole et al., 2006) which raises the question if there is more categorization to be made of nostalgia?

Also personality traits should be out of more concerns for researchers. Early authors suggested unstable and neurotic persons were the most sensitive to nostalgia (Fodor, 1950, McCann, 1941), but such ideas were refuted by Batcho (1998). Barret et al.,(2010) tried to implement personality traits as a main premise but was unsuccessful in demonstrating the importance of them.

Cognitive Neuroscience in general does not pay as much attention as needed to understand what areas gets activated when we feel nostalgic, but again the reason for this might be that it is such a hard phenomenon to define. What can be of interest, though, is how neurotransmitters or certain neuronal patterns can be of importance in eliciting emotional memory reflection. Amygdala is said to be responsible in coloring memories with emotions, to help you pay attention to certain memories (Hamann, 2001; Pouliot, & Jones-Gotman, 2008). Further inquires in this field could fruitfully help us to distinguish nostalgia form other forms of reminiscing.

When examining nostalgias proposed functions, there is often ambivalence at play. Understanding the discontinuity hypothesis, we shall understand the flow of time and transitional phases into wholeness by nostalgic augmentation of the past (Davis, 1979). As Baker and Kennedy (1994) discusses, it seems strange that we augment the past to prepare for the future, asking if that is really necessary. Those who search for nostalgias' role of strengthening social bonds (Batcho, 2007; Sedikides et al., 2006; Wildschut et al., 2006) have seen results point at two ways. Nostalgia prominent when we feel alone serving to people our minds to make us feel more socially supported (Hertz, 1990; Zhou et al., 2008). But it is also at display when we want to distinct our own identity in the flow of time through putting inanimate objects as an extension of ourselves (Batcho, 2007; Sedikides et al., 2004; Wildschut et al., 2006)

Ambivalence is also detected in nostalgia's supposed role of buffering existential

threats such as mortality awareness. Where the very same mechanism that constitutes temporal consciousness, and thus our realization that life will one day come to an end, is also supposed to trigger nostalgia to react aiming at putting value to things around you and thus buffer the anxiety (Routledge et al., 2010). Which seems to exclude the possibility of when someone is suffering from death anxiety; putting more value to things could increase the anxiety even further because the individual might obtain an even greater fear to lose what is valuable.

Several authors also fight for there to be a pathological side to nostalgia. Like ideas that constant dwelling upon the past are signs of an incomplete mourning (Volkan, 1999; Bassin, 1993). And people who get 'stuck' in such fantasies will eventually replace the present, and thus prevent ego formation and personality growth (Kaplan, 1987; Peters, 1985). To our concern such ideas cannot be solely of nostalgia, it should include more aspects such as childhood content and personality properties, or as simple as dysfunctional cognitive processing due to imbalance in certain chemical transitions in the brain, although not explicitly stated by this paper.

### **Conclusion**

Nostalgia has evolved during its lifespan and there is nothing saying it cannot continue to do so, including more or less elements. After reaching a definition that holds for the scientific community in general, we can then implement data from several biological fields, such as cognitive neuroscience or evolutionary psychology, which can find nostalgia to be an adaptation of a different kind than reviewed in this paper, to revise the meaning of the word once again. Or maybe start in the other end, using knowledge of such above mentioned fields' different outlook, arriving in a further evolution of the function and definition of nostalgia. What is for sure is how laymen's, in terms of being influential in politics and several economical-wise important industries have a certain power in 'pulling the string' to

popularize and exploit nostalgia, and for the sake of entire cultures, a common idea of the psychological underpinnings of what nostalgia could do to us is of great significance. One paper stated that we experience nostalgia once a week (Wildschut et al., 2006) and thus the importance of understanding this phenomenon could not be more obvious.

This paper's main question was to define nostalgia and its functions, which clearly is a difficult task; nonetheless nostalgia certainly has its conceptual basis today, being a positive emotion with multiple functions. Although important to note, nostalgia is still sensitive to conceptual changes, but to satisfy our never ending strive of finding more adequate explanations to the phenomena's around us, its ambivalent nature could be a good thing.

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