Speciale i Psykologi



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I dedicate this master project

in memory of my beloved grandmother Eva Møller whom I have so many

nostalgic memories from

# Abstract

The current study aims at investigating the experience of nostalgia from a psychological point of view. Much scientific work within the field of nostalgia has typically investigated the concept by letting people sit in an isolated experimental room and *think of* or *relate to* the experience of nostalgia. However one might argue that there is a difference between *thinking* of nostalgia and actually *experiencing* nostalgia. Therefore, the current study focuses on the unfolding process by which nostalgic experiences arise. To capture the unfolding process of nostalgia it is important to explore how to trigger such nostalgic experiences. The current study hypothesized that environmental surroundings can trigger nostalgic experiences if a person is being brought back to some personal memories of his past. This means that e.g. physical environments or objects can trigger nostalgic experiences if the individual has had a personal relation to those specific items. In the current study such a constellation has been achieved with help from the museum *Den Gamle By* in Aarhus, Denmark. The museum has a 1974-area with different shops and apartments from the 1970s which includes odors from that time as well. It became possible to follow a group of people who had booked a guided tour in the 1974-area, in which all participants had been young adults in the 1970s, and had therefore a personal relation to that specific period of time, which is crucial for the experience of nostalgia. Results from the study confirm that nostalgia is most prevalently experienced as a positive feeling that includes warm feelings of joy, comfort, and security. However, the moments to come after the immediate experience of nostalgia can be followed by less joyful memories of the past where the rosy light pictures of nostalgia might get lost. These results suggest that nostalgia can indeed be of positive and negative kinds, though negative experiences of nostalgia are not as common.

The current study also contains a frame-setting part which focuses on the theoretical and methodological aspects of nostalgia. Different psychological themes (e.g. theoretical review of memory and emotions) are presented and linked to the notion of nostalgia in the following integrated analysis-sections. These sections illustrate the complexity of nostalgia and contribute with knowledge of what to pay attention to when exploring nostalgia scientifically. This information became crucial in the following methodological-sections where different empirical studies concerning nostalgia have been presented and analyzed critically according to their methodologies. Here it was crucial to understand the notion and complexity of nostalgia in order to provide a valid critical review of the methodologies being applied to the different studies. The frame-setting part of nostalgia illustrates that much empirical work made within the field has studied the concept of nostalgia quantitatively and by letting people sit in experimental rooms to *think* about nostalgia (see the section before). Therefore, new scientific studies are required to investigate the actual experience of nostalgia as it develops which has been the goal of the first article (cf. *Walking down memory-lane – The experience of nostalgia*).

Before turning to the current study I would like to present the mind-map that I’ve made in the beginning of the process. The mind-map shows some of the different aspects within nostalgia, though not all aspects have been included in the present study. In this project we are going to focus mainly on the experience-part of nostalgia (see mind-map) though also including the history-, social community-, and coping strategy aspects of nostalgia. The mind-map gives a picture of the complexities of the concept and how broad it is.

## Mind-map



With that said, let us turn to the current study!

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## Introduction

Have your ever experienced the feeling of being nostalgic? Try to think back to the last time you remembered a specific memory of the past that triggered strong emotional responses within you. Perhaps you know the feeling when catching up with an old friend, where you share joint memories which usually include the phrase: “*do you remember the time we….?”* followed by funny memories that are being mutually exchanged through narratives. Or try to recall how it was like to be at your grandmother’s house watching old movies, smelling her delicious home-cooked food, and being spoiled. You might even be familiar with the unexpected nostalgic experiences triggered by e.g. hearing a special song in the radio, by the smell of bonfires reminding you of summer camp, or by the feeling of a snowball hiding your face. Often such nostalgic memories are presented as rosy-like pictures of the past which contribute with warm feelings of joy. However, has the past really been as nice as it is presented through such nostalgic experiences? Probably not! But how can it then be that we have a general tendency to romanticize some past experiences? What can we use the nostalgic experiences for, and why do we even create rosy pictures of the past? And does nostalgia only comprise positive memories, or is there also a negative side to nostalgia? These are some of the questions that the present study aims to investigate by exploring the unfolding experience of nostalgia.

The current study comprises two parts of which the first one is a research article (*Walking down Memory Lane – The experience of Nostalgia)* that investigates the experience of nostalgia by including collected empirical data within the field. The other part (*The frame-setting part of* nostalgia) seeks to elaborate on the theoretical aspects within the psychological field of nostalgia. In this respect different themes will be presented in literature reviews where they are followed up by integrated analysis in which the themes are being linked to the experience of nostalgia. This structure is supposed to give a better understanding of the concept and its complexities which become relevant in later sections where the methodological considerations to prior investigations of nostalgia are being implemented.

But for now, let us take a look at the current article (the first part of the project): *Walking down Memory Lane – The experience of Nostalgia.*

Walking down Memory Lane
- The experience of Nostalgia
Nadia El-Ziab, Aalborg University - Denmark, 2015

**Abstract:**The current study aims to investigate the experience of nostalgia as it is occurring rather than retrospectively. This has been done with help from the museum: *Den Gamle By* in Aarhus (*The Old Town,* Denmark) in which its 1974 section was used to trigger nostalgic experiences among people who had been young adults in the 1970s. *Den Gamle By* organizes guided tours, and it became possible to follow a group of people, who had booked such a tour in the 1974-area. All the group-participants had a personal relation to that specific period of time, which is crucial for the experience of nostalgia. The unfolding process of nostalgia had been captured on camera and dictaphone and a semi-structured interview was conducted with two of the female participants to elaborate on their nostalgic experiences in *Den Gamle By*.

The study confirms that the immediate experience of nostalgia is primarily positive, evoking warm feelings of joy, comfort, and security. However, these may be followed by less joyful memories of the past, which has firstly been covered in the rosy light pictures of nostalgia.

**Keywords:** Nostalgia, Experience, Memory, Environment

You probably know the saying: *Things were much better in the good old days!* But were they really? It almost seems like that the cliché keeps remaining; no matter how far ahead we come in time then we are able to refer to the past as the *good old days*. It is quite paradoxical that specific aspects of the present will come to be romanticized in the future, where new generations most likely will refer to the past (now, the present) as *the good old days*. It suggests that some people have a general tendency to idealize certain aspects of the past and cover it in rosy-like pictures of nostalgia. All people experience nostalgia some times, but why is that the case and under which circumstances do such experiences arise? The present study will, among other things, investigate these aspects, by focusing on nostalgia through its experience and its content. The main focus will be to explore the unfolding process of nostalgia and to clarify its functions – also whether it can be considered a positive or negative experience, and how that comes to affect the functions of nostalgia.

But before turning to the empirical aspects of the present study, let us take a quick walk through history to see how the concept of nostalgia has been characterized and changed.

**Historical walkthrough; the concept of *Nostalgia***

According to the New Oxford Dictionary of English (1998), Nostalgia can be defined as a sentimental longing for the past (p. 1266). The word *nostalgia* originates from Greek, *nostos* meaning *returning home* and *algia* meaning *longing* or *suffering* (Boym, 2001, p. xv; Wildschut, Sedikides, Arndt & Routledge, 2006). The concept was firstly introduced in 1688 as a medical diagnose, given to soldiers suffering from severe cases of homesickness (Hofer, 1688/1934). However nostalgia has an even longer history that can be traced all the way back to the ancient Greek genre of Odyssey. In Homer’s poem Odysseus is struggling 10 years to get home to the island Ithaca and to his beloved wife Penelope. On his journey he spends seven years on an island with a sea-nymph called Calypso, who seduces him to stay with her (Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. 1921, Book V; Wildschut, Sedikides, Arndt & Routledge, 2006). However, Odysseus decides to leave Calypso, and says; “*Full well I acknowledge Prudent Penelope cannot compare with your stature of beauty, for she is only a mortal, and you are immortal and ageless. Nevertheless it is she whom I daily desire and pine for. Therefore I long for my home and to see the day of returning.*” (Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. 1921, Book V, pp. 78-79; Wildschut, Sedikides, Arndt & Routledge, 2006, p. 3). This quote illustrates very well the notion of nostalgia, namely that nostalgia concerns a longing for the past, even though it being imperfect.

The concept of nostalgia has gone through great development throughout history which influenced how it was perceived and processed within science. The Swiss physician Johannes Hofer (1688/1934) introduced nostalgia as a medical disease, where symptoms included being constantly home-oriented, having crying spells, unstable heartbeat, sleeplessness etc. (Hofer, 1688/1934; Wildschut, Sedikides, Arndt & Routledge, 2006). The assessment of nostalgia being a neurological- or cerebral disease continued throughout the 17th and 18th century. But in the 19th century the notion of nostalgia shifted to be perceived as a special version of melancholia or depression, and the view of nostalgia as being a psychological disease continued until the 20th century (Wildschut, Sedikides, Arndt & Routledge, 2006). During the 20th century a new approach of experimental psychology was applied to nostalgia which eventually changed how the concept was perceived. By the second part of the 20th century, a more positive perspective of nostalgia arose, where it came to be perceived as a warm feeling that includes cheerful memories of the past (ibid.).

The historical walkthrough of the concept illustrates that the notion of nostalgia has gone through great development, from being a negative condition to a positive feeling. Of course, the different approaches to the notion of nostalgia influenced how the concept has been discussed in science.
Also note that the psychological approach to nostalgia is just a century old which makes nostalgia a relatively new phenomenon within the field of psychology (Batcho, 2013). One can therefore assume that psychological research within the area of nostalgia is required. Unlike many previous assumptions about nostalgia, this study does not categorize nostalgia as being either a negative condition (which had been the prevailing view up till the 20th century) or as a positive feeling (which has been the main assumption from the mid-20th century till now). Instead, the current study aims at investigating the unfolding experience of nostalgia, its content, and its functions. By taking such a neutral approach to the concept of nostalgia it becomes possible to investigate whether nostalgia is characterized by e.g. positive or negative experiences, and how that influences the way people relate to certain aspects of their pasts. In other words; the current study contributes with new information to the field by exploring the unfolding process of nostalgia without having prior assumptions about its content.

**Nostalgia: remembering the past**

No matter how to perceive the concept of nostalgia one cannot avoid that nostalgia is linked to memories (or imaginations) of the past. Therefore it is very crucial to focus on how these memories come to mind, exposing themselves as nostalgic experiences. To understand such processes we have to take a short look at the concept of memory which will be outlined next.

**Memory & Objects**

One way that memories of the past can be triggered is through objects. Objects can function to connect the present with the past (and the future as well), giving people a sense of identity and continuity (Radley, 1990). However, there are differences in the way that objects are being used: some objects are created with a certain purpose, e.g. function as monuments, to give a specific impression of a person/culture/time/place etc. (ibid.). Other objects are designed with a practical purpose, e.g. like a spoon functioning as a practical tool to eat soup with. But with time these objects might be assigned a different meaning; functioning as symbols presenting a specific time/culture of the past (Radley, 1990). Therefore, not all objects are intended as special reminders in the future; most are only given that role later on.

**Memory & Social-spatial frameworks**

Much remembering takes place in social settings which suggest that there is a social aspect to memory and memory-retention (Radley, 1990). This is similar to Halbwachs’s (1950) argument that remembering is a social process in which social frameworks are essential to human memory. This is because human life is lived with others, who both prompt and participate in our recall. It is only because people move between social frameworks in remembering that they have the illusion that their memory is purely individual (Halbwachs, 1925/1992). Rather, people are parts of society in which they function in different groups, and it is in those societies that memory is located, organized and recaptured (ibid.). This gives rise to collective memory, where the individual has to understand the social frameworks to understand his past (Halbwachs, 1950). The social frameworks also include spatial frameworks where places and spaces (e.g. like a city street or family house) affect social interaction and create a stable setting to relate to the past (Halbwachs, 1950: de Saint-Laurent & Zittoun, 2005). Halbwachs’s argument of memory being a social process can be supplemented by Lev Vygotsky’s (1987) theory regarding mediated memory, in which he states that higher psychological functions (e.g. memory) arise through interaction in social relations (e.g. by the use of language) (Wagoner & Gillespie, 2013). Therefore, much evidence support the assumption that memory is indeed a social process in which social relations (specific people, groups, societies etc.) will come to affect what you remember (Halbwachs, 1950: de Saint-Laurent & Zittoun, 2005). As human beings we cannot live in isolation as our social relations are a part of us and how we remember things. Even in our most personal states, such as dreams, we are connected with others through e.g. language that functions as an inherently social product (Wagoner, 2015).

**Methodological considerations**

Now, that we have gone through a very short presentation of memory and how it links to environment it is time to take a look at some of the methodological considerations: How can we get access to the immediate experiences of nostalgia, and how can we analyze the data empirically? Jaan Valsiner (2007) argues that: *“The* *human immediate living experience is primarily microgenetic, occurring as the person faces, the ever-new next time moment in the infinite sequence of irreversible time* (p. 301). Valsiner (2000) also argues that microgenetic method comprises: *“any empirical strategy that triggers, records and analyses the immediate process of emergence of new phenomena”* (p. 78).

The above described notion of microgenesis opens up for many different ways of applying the method empirically, and contributes with new techniques of exploring psychological phenomena as they unfold. In the present study the microgenetic method is used to; 1) investigate the processes by which objects/environments trigger nostalgic experiences, and 2) to analyze the unfolding process of those experiences in time. This sheds new light on the concept of nostalgia, as previous studies have not investigated the qualitative experiences of nostalgia as it unfolds in the present moment. Therefore it is a great opportunity to dig into the subjective experiences of nostalgia in order to find new information that will affect how to perceive the concept from a psychological point of view.

**Current Study**

Current literature within the field of nostalgia has provided evidence that nostalgia has indeed positive effects such as; higher feelings of relatedness, creates a sense of meaning in life, and contributes with actual physical feelings of warmth (Routledge, Arndt, Sedikides & Wildshut, 2006/2008; Routledge, Wildshut, Sedikides, Juhl & Arndt, 2012; Zhou, Chen, Sedikides & Vingerhoets, 2012). However, many of those studies have investigated the concept by having participants sit in an experimental room and think about- or write down their nostalgic experiences and report how they felt about them (e.g. Wildschut, Sedikides, Arndt & Routledge, 2006; Zhou, Wildshut, Sedikides, Shi, & Feng, 2012). However, taking a critical standpoint one might argue whether this approach is the most valid way to investigate nostalgia. First of all, as argued previously, memory has a social aspect, which is largely overlooked when investigating people separately. Second, it can be quite problematic to carry out investigations in isolated experimental rooms, as the settings may feel artificial to the participants. And thirdly, much information might get lost, if only investigating nostalgia by asking people *to think* of nostalgic events. Instead, it would be quite interesting to investigate nostalgia from the moment that the nostalgic experience appears and unfolds. The goal of the current study is precisely to investigate the nostalgic experiences as they occur in “natural” environments, rather than in typical experimental rooms.But in order to do so one must think of how to provoke nostalgic experiences, and how to capture those experiences empirically. In the previous outlined section regarding memory, it has been argued that objects- and social settings are important for remembering the past. Therefore we have to consider the physical- and social environments when investigating nostalgia. Based on those arguments, the current study hypothesizes that environmental surroundings can trigger nostalgic experiences if a person is being brought back to some personal memories of his past. That way it becomes possible to provoke nostalgic experiences within that person. Those experiences will come to vary when being alone or in social settings, but either way, the nostalgic experiences will expose personal memories in which social relations play a significant role.

In order to investigate the experience of nostalgia empirically, a museum in Aarhus, Denmark, called *Den Gamle By* (The Old Town) was contacted, as they have a whole area from 1974 with apartments, furniture, shops, “odors” etc. These surroundings fit the environments of the 1970s and made it possible to explore the immediate arising of nostalgic experiences as participants were brought back to environments of their pasts.

**Method**

*Den Gamle By* offers guided tours and it became possible to follow a group of people who had booked such a tour in the 1974-area. The group-participants were informed in advance regarding the main goal of the study; to explore the experience of nostalgia. All group-participants had themselves been young adults in the 1970s and each participant had therefore a personal relation to that specific period of time, which became very crucial for the experience of nostalgia (cf. hypothesis, p. 7).

The empirical investigations consisted of three parts: 1) observational data was collected by videotaping the guided tour and the participants’ walk through the 1970s apartments, 2) one camera, and one dictaphone was given to some of the participants so they could record their own walkthrough-experience as they split up from the group, and 3) a qualitative semi-structured interview was conducted with two of the female group-participants to get further information of their subjective nostalgic experiences of the tour. The interview was carried out in a coffee dinner from the 1970s – which maintained the participants in the nostalgic environment of the past. Together these data aimed at capturing the microgenetic process of nostalgic experiences. By digging into the subjective experiences of nostalgia as it unfolds could eventually contribute with new information of how to perceive the concept from a psychological point of view, as such a methodological approach have not been applied to prior studies within the field.

Please note that by using the above described method it became possible to observe the immediate experiences of nostalgia, without interrupting the participants in their affairs. The environmental surroundings reflected the real life of the 1970s, and the participants could walk around freely. By conducting such a methodological approach it became possible to come as close to the action of nostalgia as possible, without interfering with the participants (or as little as possible). Or said in another way; it became possible to collect “naturalistic” data that takes its starting point in the immediate experiences of nostalgia.

The people who participated in the current study visited the following places in *Den Gamle By*:

* Coffee dinner
* TV/radio shop
* Apartments:
1) School director, Miss Sneum: single woman
2) The gynecologist
3) Collective: one medicine student, two architect students and a student of social education

4) The Meyer-family: Typical nuclear-family from the 1970s

**Results**

All video- and audio-material collected from *Den Gamle By* have been transcribed and processed linguistically. This has been done by going through the empirical data (transcriptions) where all verbal narratives have been calculated to get a sense of how often objects/the environments provoked nostalgic experiences, exposing themselves as verbal narratives. Though, it is important to note some of the limitations of calculating verbal narratives – how much information is required to label it a narrative? Some narratives can be very long while others might comprise only one sentence. In the current study the verbal narratives should at least be at one sentence to expose the participants’ relation to e.g. a specific object (so by expressing e.g. “*television*” did not count as a verbal narrative, as it only comprise one word). The fact that people also walked around in groups made it difficult to hear all verbal conversations clearly. Therefore it is not completely definitive how many narratives that have been told during the tour and the results will consequently be presented as an estimate-calculation (see schema 1).

Also, some specific words/phrases have been counted through linguistic analysis (cf. schema 1) to get an overview of how often the experience of nostalgia related to: e.g. a sense of social coherence (“we/our”), individual stories (“I/home/had/have”), and feelings (“fun/laughter”). The transcriptions and the linguistic analysis set the ground for applying microgenetic methods to investigate: 1) the processes by which objects/ environments trigger nostalgic experiences, and 2) to analyses the unfolding processes of those experiences. The present results of the linguistic analysis can be found in schema 1 below.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| *Schema 1**Empirical data* | *Video**(researcher): 48.30 minutes* | *Video**(participants):**29.51* *minutes* | *Dictaphone (participant):**36.20 minutes* | *Video: interview:**34.07 minutes* |
| *Verbal narratives**provoked by**objects/environments* | About*50 times* | About*34* times | About*43* times | *29*  |
| *”Fun”**(Danish: sjovt/skægt)* | *13* | *11* | *25* | *17* |
| *”Remember”**(Danish: huske)* | *17* | *3* | *16* | *20* |
| *”Home”**(Danish: hjemme)* | *2* | *8* | *6* | *5* |
| *”Our/we”**(Danish: vores/vi)* | *27* | *28* | *35* | *51* |
| *“I”**(Danish: jeg)* | *93* | *48* | *122* | *187* |
| *“Had/have”**(Danish: havde/har)* | *58*  | *37* | *50* | *64* |
| *Laughter**(Danish: grin)* | *17* | *9* | *12* | *6* |

**Analysis**

The first thing to consider from the results is whether the hypothesis of the current study is valid; that environmental surroundings can trigger nostalgic experiences if a person is being brought back to some personal memories of his past (cf. p. 7). To confirm or reject the hypothesis we have to take a look at the microgenetic method to unfold the processes by which objects/ environments trigger nostalgic experiences.

**The trigger of nostalgia & its characterization**

The transcriptions of the current study expose many personal narratives that have been triggered through the meeting with specific objects and senses. Usually the participants see an object, or recognize a specific smell, in which they report their personal relationships to those through verbal narratives. And taking a look at scheme 1 shows that verbal narratives are being told within an interval of at least once per minute (except with the interview). During the tour most verbal narratives were presented as small fractions with little details, arriving rapidly one after another. It might explain why there seemed to have been told so many verbal narratives during the tour; they function as small stories which exhibit the narrator’s relationship to a specific object. This is an example of how the present can be connected to the past through objects. However, regarding the interview it is worth noting that it was conducted in a coffee dinner from the 1970s, in which the two participants were not exposed to unexpected meetings with objects from their pasts. This means that all the verbal narratives presented in the interview were not triggered by objects, but rather from the participants’ imaginations/experiences of the tour. The rather low amount of verbal narratives being told during the interview could be explained by two reasons; 1) because the two participants were not exposed to multiple stimuli from their pasts, and 2) the narratives being presented in the interview contained very detailed descriptions, in which the participants elaborated in-depth on their personal relations to the past.

The question is then; do the verbal narratives cover nostalgic experiences? To answer that question we have to take a look at the content of the verbal narratives being told. Turning to the results of the current study (cf. scheme 1) provides an overview of how often the participants used the words *have/had* in relation to objects they own or had owned: e.g. they look at a TV and comment, that they had the same kind of TV back in the 1970s, or that “*I have such matches back home”*. Again note that verbal narratives have been told within an interval of at least one time per minute which suggests that participants felt a personal connection to the specific objects/environments which triggered their verbal narratives. During the interview the participants were asked whether the tour, and the meeting with environments of the past, triggered nostalgic memories within them. And the two female participants verified that they had certainly felt nostalgic during the tour, which support the argument that the verbal narratives are expressions for nostalgic experiences. However, the participants were also asked what they considered nostalgia to be, in which they answered that nostalgia is dealing with “*thinking back”*. But to *think back* includes lots of things, so what is it that makes it nostalgic? Well, the participants found the meeting with memories of the past as being funny. One of the participants comment: *“It is funny to remember the past. It is funny to find out what you remember and what is it that makes you remember a specific thing/event”* (trans. from Danish).

And if we take a look at how often the participants mentioned the word *remember* and *funny* during the guided tour and during the interview (cf. scheme 1), then it is mentioned quite some times. Also, the narratives being told during the tour consisted of primarily positive memories. So if we accept the condition that the verbal narratives are expressions for nostalgic experiences, then we can deduce that nostalgia is characterized by joyful memories of the past. This viewpoint might also be confirmed by the fact that the participants laughed pretty distinctly quite some times during the tour and the interview (cf. scheme 1). However, by asking the participants in the interview whether they considered nostalgia to be *the joy of recognition*, they answered that it is not necessarily just joy; it can also be *recognition* only, or even an unpleasant memory of the past. This opens up for the possibility that nostalgia does not necessarily include happy feelings only. To illustrate this, let us take a look at a specific example where one of the female participants (from the interview) told about her rebellion against the norms of the 1970s: *“In the late 60s, early 70s it was our rebellion against all that was… the neatness… the rule-directedness… the - you should do this and that, and what do others think... so our rebellion went well up against all that ... we did not want that way of life, so we wanted to fight it”* (trans. from Danish). Here we have a situation where the participant has a history of fighting the norms within society of the 60s and 70s, which would explain the less-joyful pictures of the past. Though, it is interesting to notice that this specific participant had meanwhile found the tour, and the meeting with the environments of the past, as being funny. So here we have two different ways of relating to the past: one that might have seemed rosy and another which has been less idyllic compared to the first one. But why the two different experiences of the past? Here we come to an interesting point regarding the content of nostalgia! It seems like the immediate meeting with the environments of the past, during the tour, triggered joyful feelings while the interview opened up for more nuanced pictures of the past. And as argued previously, the narratives presented at the tour appeared as small fractions with little details while the interview covered more in-depth narratives. This information tells us that the immediate meeting with environments of the past created nostalgic feelings of joy - perhaps because those experiences did not include in-depth analysis of the memories of the past. However the moments to come after the immediate arising of nostalgic experiences, can be followed by positive, negative, or neutral feelings/thoughts/memories etc., in which nostalgia can take different forms. This might have to do with that people have opportunity to make in-depth analysis of their memories from the past, e.g. by telling detailed narratives, which create a more nuanced picture of that time.

To sum up, the current results and analysis have so far provided evidence, that the hypothesis of the current study can be considered valid; environmental surroundings can trigger nostalgic experiences if a person is being brought back to some personal memories of his past. Also it has been confirmed that the immediate experience of nostalgia, creates warm feelings of joy when being brought back to the memories of the past. However, the moments to come after the arisen of nostalgic experiences might be followed by further considerations in which the nostalgic memories can change forms and become less rosy.

**The individual vs. social aspect of nostalgia**

Another aspect that is worth considering is the social- vs. individual aspect of nostalgia. Looking at scheme 1 it is obvious that the word “*I”* have been used a lot of times during the tour and especially during the interview. By using the word *“I”* participants take a personal starting point to what they are about to say – whether it is: “*I have such a lamp back at home*” or “*I think the apartment is nice”* (trans. from Danish). This suggests that participants have definitely had individualistic approaches to their experiences in *Den Gamle By*. However, looking at schema 1 it is also clear that the social aspect has been an important part of the experience as well, since the words “*we”* and “*our”* also have been mentioned some times during the tour and interview. The phrases “*we/our”* have been used to generate a kind of coherence among the group-members, to create an atmosphere of joint history, such as: “*do you remember that we all had Nivea crème*.” (trans. from Danish). The participants often approached one another, to confirm their joint histories of the environments from the 1970s. It shows that the nostalgic experience is not pure individualistic but rather it includes a social part as well, which confirms Halbwachs’s (1925/ 1992) theory; that people do not have pure individualistic memories. Halbwachs (1950) also argues that the social frameworks (e.g. specific persons) affect what you will come to remember (cf. *current study* p 7), which makes it very important to focus on collective memory to understand the experience of nostalgia. For example, it can be argued that the nostalgic experiences taking place in isolated contexts (e.g. a person sitting home alone, experiencing nostalgia by looking in the photo-album) are quite different from the nostalgic experiences taken place in social groups. As mentioned before, the social-group experience of nostalgia includes feedback from others, where group-members achieve a sense of coherence and joint feeling of nostalgia. This kind of social-community is nonexistent in the individualistic experiences of nostalgia. However, taken Halbwachs argument, then the individualistic experience of nostalgia (e.g. being alone when feeling nostalgic) will still be influenced by social frameworks, since the person has been influenced by society. But the social frameworks function on different levels, in which the experience of nostalgia differs according to whether the individual is alone or in social groups. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge the social aspect of nostalgia which is hardly overlooked within science as individuals are usually being “tested” isolated, and data are typically processed from an individualistically point of view (cf. *current study*, pp. 7). According to the results of the present study, then it is a great pitfall to exclude the social aspects of nostalgia, as they have a great role in the nostalgic experience itself and what is going to be remembered.

But what can we use these information regarding the social-aspect of nostalgia to? First of all it is quite interesting whether nostalgia is experienced the same way among individuals or whether nostalgia is experienced more uniquely on a personal level? The present study’s results show that the individualistic aspect (here exposed by the word “*I*”) are more prevalent than the social aspect (presented by the use of “w*e/our”-*expressions (cf. Scheme 1). This might suggest that nostalgic experiences take their starting point in the personal autobiographical memories within each individual. These personal memories and verbal narratives are being used to compare/connect with others people’s autobiographical memories – to create common stories that both parts can relate to. From this standpoint it can be claimed that nostalgic experiences have their own phenomenological roots within each individual, from which it can spread to social contexts. In the social contexts the phenomenological approach to nostalgia are being linked to other similar experiences among individuals, giving a sense of coherence among group-members, and rising new social experiences of nostalgia. However, in order to confirm the above argument it is necessary to take a look at the unfolding process of nostalgia, which will be presented next.

**The unfolding process of nostalgia**

Now that we have arguments supporting the standpoint that environmental surroundings influence the experience of nostalgia, it is time to take a look at the unfolding process of nostalgia.

The following example will illustrate a short event (during the tour) that has been characterized as a nostalgic experience. Afterwards, the event will come to be analyzed according to the unfolding process of nostalgia.

The following example takes place in one of the apartments from the 1970s in which an employee is installing an old TV and have a conversation with one of the participants;

Employee = E, Participant = P

E: *The TV began to arrive in the mid-70s. I worked in a*

 *Radio-TV shop back in 72*
P: *Here in Aarhus?*
E: *Yes. We were just starting to*

 *sell..*
P: (P. interrupts): *Where was it* (the

 TV-Radio shop)*?*
E: *In Fredensgade*
P: *Yes, it was called Frederiksgade*
E: *Yes yes*
P: (Laughter). *My parents traded*

 *there. My father, he bought our*

*television from that shop. I’m originally here from Aarhus*

E: *Yes?*P: *Yes! Yes, it's quite funny*E: *But at that time a TV cost a*

 *monthly salary before taxes*P: *Yes, it is absolutely unbelievable*E: *We sold one or two TVs per*

*quarter. It was a luxury product*

P: *Yes and you know what? I just bought a new 32 inch TV for no more than 1300kr* (26.7£/29.1$)*. It doesn’t seem right. It doesn’t match together*

E: *Well, 1300kr is no money today*

P: *It is no money. It is no money!*

(Trans from Danish)

As argued previously, the social frameworks will come to affect what you remember (cf. p. 5), and the presented conversation between an employee and a participant illustrates such an example. First, the conversation starts through the trigger of an object, a TV, in which the employee involves a personal life-story. The participant gets curious and starts to unfold their joint bonds to the town of Aarhus in which they are both familiar. At the end the conversation goes back to the trigger, the object, in which the participant and the employee compare the TV of the 1970s to the present time. This is an example of how memories of the past can be triggered- and developed through conversations. The present example illustrates how an object (e.g. a TV) and a social relation (e.g. through conversation) can trigger nostalgic experiences, by affecting what comes to be remembered.

It is interesting that nostalgia can develop a sense of coherence among people, who do not necessarily know each other, by creating joint histories which seem familiar to those involved. And the familiar-aspect seems to be very important, as it sets the foundation of joy when recognizing specific items, which represents the immediate experience of nostalgia. During the tour in *Den Gamle By* the participants created a familiar-bond to the objects they recognized, e.g. by referring them to *home* (cf. scheme 1). It seems like the familiar-bond, to e.g. specific objects, environments, time etc., constitutes the core of nostalgia which function on personal- and social levels.

To sum up, the analysis of the present study have provided evidence that the environmental- and social frameworks affect what is going to be remembered, and thereby affecting the nostalgic experiences. Furthermore, it has been proven that the immediate experience of nostalgia is usually characterized by feelings of joy, while the moments to come after the instantaneous arisen of nostalgia can be less pleasant. Last but not least, the analysis has also unfolded the process of nostalgia which is characterized by a trigger that recaptures memories of the past. Those memories are imbedded with familiar-bonds that link the trigger to personal life-narratives in which people can share their joint nostalgic experiences to create a sense of coherence or to use nostalgia as a way to create a sense of continuity throughout life.

Now that the data of the current study have been analyzed it is time to elaborate on the diversity of nostalgia as well as a critical review of the methodology applied.

**Discussion**

The following section will deal with a critical review of the method being applied in the current study. Afterwards, the experience of nostalgia will be processed as to whether it comprises positive- or negative effects, and how the memory-aspect of nostalgia links to meaning-making. But first, let us focus on the pros and cons of the presents study’s methodology.

**Critical review of the method applied**

The present study seems to be ecologically valid since it takes its starting point in actual lived-experiences of nostalgia as they appear and develop in the present moment. Also, the investigation was carried out in “naturalistic” environments, in which participants were not interrupted in their affairs. This contributes with valuable data, in which it became possible to get access to the unfolding process of nostalgic experiences. However, it is important to remember that the collected data has been processed scientifically in which the verbal narratives from the tour in *Den Gamle By* have gone through some interpretations in order to find out what the verbal narratives cover, and how they relate to the experience of nostalgia. We therefore have to be careful of how to process and use the data scientifically in order to make the results valid. In the current study the interview secured that the empirical data and upcoming interpretations (in the scientific analysis) would fit the participants’ actual experiences of nostalgia. This was held by exploring the participants’ nostalgic experiences in-depth to omit errors when interpreting the data scientifically and to support the validity of the gained results.

The results- and method of the present study can advantageously be linked to common research within the field, to support- and contribute with new scientific data concerning nostalgia. And that is exactly what will be held next, to elaborate on the diversity of nostalgia.

**The experience of nostalgia: positive or negative?**

We have seen examples of how nostalgia is most prevalent to expose itself through joyful feelings of recognition. But what do the joyful feelings cover more specifically? Among feeling happy, the participants also explained that they found nostalgic experiences linked to feelings of comfort and security as nostalgia includes familiarity-bonds. But does that mean that there are only positive benefits from experiencing nostalgia? To answer that question we have to take a look at the original meaning of nostalgia which, as previously described, initially arrives from the Greek words: *nostos* = *returning home* and *algia = longing* or *suffering* (cf. p. 3). Here it is worth noticing that the current study has already provided evidence that there seems to be an actual relation between nostalgic experiences and the word *home* (cf. Scheme 1). However, one might wonder whether nostalgia leads to *suffering* or *longing* for the past, as the original meaning of the concept suggests? In the interview one of the participants tells about how she and her family celebrated Christmas when she was a little girl: “*The doors were closed. My father walked in and lighted up the Christmas candles. It was cozy, and I can feel that I lack that part today*.” The participant continues: “*We didn’t get lots of presents, but we were happy. And my father’s cousin always gave us a book. And we had such great upholstered chairs in which we could sit all Christmas day reading our new book in our sleeping wear* […]. *That I miss*.” These quotations might expose some information of the participant’s current situation, where something could be missing – e.g. the simplicity and the coziness from *the good old times* when being a child. These are examples of nostalgic memories which the participant is longing for (where longing might express that something is missing nowadays). However it is a truth with modifications, because the participant explicitly told that even though she might miss that specific period of time, then she is not suffering from the “loss” of it. And that is an interesting point to remember as it nuances how to perceive the concept of nostalgia. Because nostalgia can be linked to *longing* without necessarily including the *suffering*-aspect. However, it is noteworthy that for a long time nostalgia has been linked to neural- or cerebral diseases (cf. p. 4), suggesting negative side effects of experiencing nostalgia. And perhaps the *suffering*-aspect of nostalgia is what links it to the pathological disease-spectra? Because, suffering must include a loss which would explain a rather painful experience of nostalgia. Therefore, let us take a look at an example where the *suffering*-aspect of nostalgia is very evident, leading to negative side effects of experiencing nostalgia. We can find such an example in Julio G. Arenas’ study (1994) where he argues that some refugees are suffering from severe cases of nostalgia, by having experienced enormous breaks from their home-countries leaving them in states of suffering from their lost homes. Arenas (1994) claims, that a massive break with the home-country can lead to active states of being nostalgic where refugees are suffering by the longing to get back to their lost homes.
One might argue that this would be a case of *blind nostalgia*, where the nostalgic experiences maintain individuals in their *suffering*-states, reminding them of all those good things they once had, but cannot get back. The state of blind nostalgia prevents individuals from having a healthy functioning life. Instead, those individuals suffering from blind nostalgia are so occupied by remembering- and trying to regain nostalgic memories of the past, that it prevents them from living in the ever present-moment. One can imagine that such a condition, which occupies the individual in its phenomenological imaginary world of nostalgia, would prevent him to function in e.g. social settings, giving rise to an unhealthy relation to nostalgia. One thing is interesting though, when speaking of blind nostalgia; as presented by Arenas (1994) some refugees *suffer* from nostalgia by longing back home, but please note, that in this condition, people are not experiencing nostalgia by being brought back to the environments of their pasts (cf. the hypothesis, p. 7). Rather, those nostalgic experiences take place inside imaginations of individuals, regardless of the environments they find themselves within. It gives a new perspective of how- and when nostalgia can appear. Apparently, nostalgic experiences do not necessarily need a physical trigger to expose their appearance. Rather, it is possible for nostalgic experiences to arise and be maintained within imaginations of individuals.

The above described example illustrates that nostalgia can be linked to very negative side effects; if nostalgia e.g. keeps individuals in a blind state of *suffering to return to the lost home*, which prevent them from having a normal-functioning life.

Now, we have seen that nostalgia can indeed have negative effects, but as mentioned previously, nostalgia is most prevalent to expose itself through joyful feelings of recognition. This suggests that nostalgia can certainly have positive effects as well; e.g. by creating a sense of coherence among people though their joint histories. Another positive effect of nostalgia is that it creates a bond to recapture memories of the past, which can help to maintain a sense of coherent self and to find meaning in life. That viewpoint will be presented next.

**The memory-aspect of nostalgia: to create- and find meaning**

The present study has confirmed that environments can trigger nostalgic experiences in which the social frameworks affect what is going to be remembered. This suggest that memory is not just something that is located within the brain of individuals. Instead, memory is also located in our relations to the environments, functioning as processes between the individual and the environment. This observation fits very well with some of the preexistent theories within the field such as Halbwachs’s theory (cf. p. 5). To illustrate the aspect of memory further, let us take a look at another study that has also been carried out in *Den Gamle By*. Birgit Kristiansen (2013) has investigated the effects of environmental surroundings on people suffering from dementia. *Den Gamle By* has a special team that coordinates memory-disseminations for people with dementia, where they are being “brought back in time” to an apartment from the 1950s. The study (Kristiansen, 2013) shows that people suffering from dementia would come to respond to the environments that they are familiar with – triggering “lost” memories. It seems that the study of Kristiansen (2013) is consistent with the results of the present study; that memory is located in- and outside the brain of individuals, giving the environment great importance for memory-retention. Please note that the study of Kristiansen (2013) is very similar to the setup in the current study, which makes one wonder whether it is the nostalgic experiences that trigger “lost” memories? If so, there are great potentials to gain positive effects by using nostalgia in the psychological practice; e.g. by conducting memory-disseminations. Both studies have illustrated the great importance of the environment to memory-retention, and that the environments can help retain “lost” memories which give new perspectives to the concept of memory. What might have seemed lost, can perhaps be found with help from the environment where memories can come to be re-lived. This point may challenge the way we perceive memory. According to Ebbinghaus (1913/1885) memory functions as a storehouse that comprises memorization and retention with focus on capacity. This approach suggests that memory is to be found within the individual rather than in the environment, which seems to contradict the results of the present study. However, other theorists such as Bartlett (1995/1932) suggests approaching remembering as an everyday activity in which both social- and psychological process influences what is going to be remembered (Wagoner, 2015). Bartlett (1995/1932) also argued that memory comprises an effort after meaning, which might give a new perspective to the concept of nostalgia. It suggests that the process between the individual and the environment comprises a tendency to connect what is present to what was familiar in the past. It would explain why people, including those suffering from dementia, would come to remember “lost” memories by being brought back to environments of their pasts (e.g. by experiencing nostalgia); as those memories are embedded with personal meaning to their owners. One might wonder then, which kinds of meanings can be covered through nostalgic experiences? A suggestion could be that nostalgia includes an effort to find meaning in one’s life. This would fit well with the notion of Davis (1979) who argues that the primary purpose of nostalgia is: “*to locate* […] *an earlier version of self with which to measure* […] *some current condition of the self*“(Davis, 1979, p. 35; Laubscher, 2012, p. 218). This is consistent with the argument; that an individual can be perceived as a recollected self, which has been composed through memory (Bradbury, 2012, p. 342; Berger, 1973, p. 124). These arguments suggest that nostalgia and memory reminds us of who we once were, who we are now, and who we are going to be. In this way nostalgia comprises an effort after meaning to rediscover personal life-stories that help to nuance the picture of who you are, who you once were, and perhaps who you are going to be. Hereby nostalgia becomes a tool to rediscover your past selves and maintain a sense of coherent self throughout time. So nostalgia becomes important for developing a sense of self in the present by looking back at the past – thereby achieving a sense of coherent self.

HhHIn any case, nostalgia opens up to an effort after meaning, which can alter how the individual perceives itself and its condition.

**Conclusion**

The current study has provided evidence that the immediate experience of nostalgia creates happy feelings of joy – properly because those experiences do not include detailed descriptions of the past. However, the moments to come after the immediate arisen of nostalgia, can be followed by less joyful feelings as they are most likely to include deeper consideration regarding the past, which opens up for other, and perhaps less pleasant, perspectives. Also, the present study has provided examples that nostalgia can have positive effects by contributing with warm feelings of joy or have negative effects by keeping people within the world of their past, which prevents them from living a functionally life in the present. These arguments confirm that nostalgia can indeed be linked to positive or negative emotions- and effects, which explains the rather different ways of perceiving nostalgia. Thus, it is important to notice that nostalgia is most likely to expose itself through positive experiences.

The current study has also verified that environments- and social relations affect what is going to be remembered which confirms preexistent theories within the field. By relating existent research of nostalgia and memory to the results of the present study it became possible to deduce that nostalgia function as an effort after meaning that can help maintaining a sense of coherent self.

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Frame-setting part of nostalgia

# Intro

This frame-setting part seeks to elaborate further on the theoretical- and methodological aspects of nostalgia. The current investigation takes its starting point in different psychological themes that link to nostalgia, which are important to include to fully understanding the concept and its complexities.

First, a literature review will be presented, to give a better theoretical understanding of the different sub-themes that relates to nostalgia. At first hand it can be difficult to make a direct link between these themes and nostalgia – and that is because the themes are being presented in separate sections (the literature reviews). However these literature reviews are to be followed by sections of integrated analyses where they are linked to the field of nostalgia. Thus, a direct link between the psychological themes and nostalgia are not to be found in the literature reviews but instead in the following integrated analysis. So do not despair if the literature review might seem a bit off topic – they are to be followed up by the integrated analysis’ in which the threads will be gathered to give a better understanding of the psychological field of nostalgia and to catch up on some of those aspects within the nostalgic experiences that have not yet been processed in the prior article (*Walking down memory-lane – The experience of nostalgia*). The integrated analysis will also include methodological aspects to give a critical review of the different approaches that have been used to investigate psychological phenomena - which becomes relevant for how to investigate- and perceive nostalgia.

Second, the frame-setting part also presents five psychological studies that have examined the benefits (four of the studies) and disadvantages (one study) from experiencing nostalgia. These studies are to be followed by a critical review of the method being used in order to locate pros and cons when investigating nostalgia empirically. These information also become important when making a critical review of the current study (*Walking down memory-lane – The experience of nostalgia*) which will also be presented.

Last but not least, this frame-setting part tries to incorporate all the information we have gathered from investigating nostalgia through this study and to transfer the results to the practical field of psychology.

But for now, let us take a look at some of the sub-themes linked nostalgia.

# The socio-cultural perspective: affecting the experience of nostalgia

The following section will deal with different themes that relate to nostalgic experiences. As described above; the themes will be introduced in separate blocks through a literature review followed by an integration-section that links the themes to the psychological field of nostalgia in which the prior article (*Walking down Memory Lane – The experience of nostalgia*) will also be included. So please do not despair if the literature review might seem a bit far from the topic of nostalgia because they are to be followed up in the integrated analyses where they are linked to nostalgia. These different themes are going to be used to elaborate further on the different perspectives of nostalgia.

## Literature review

From the previous article (cf. *Walking down Memory Lane – The experience of nostalgia*) it has been illustrated that nostalgic experiences are basically linked to social relations. As Halbwachs (1950) argues then it has to do with the fact that the things being remembered are socially affected through e.g. the society which influences how- and what we remember. This gives a socio-cultural perspective to the notion of memory, and thereby also to nostalgia, which will be processed later in the integrated analysis.

As a child is being born and brought into the world it immediately becomes acquainted to social interactions – usually through relations to the parents. All higher psychological functions seem to develop- and internalize through social relations (Vygotsky, 1978) in which the child gains knowledge about the world and itself (Stern, 1985; Burr, 1995). According to Vygotsky (1982) the child works within the zone of proximal development when coping with difficulties through independent work and guidance from adults. With time the child will start to imitate others in order to communicate through sounds and gestures which eventually will lead to the internalization of language (Charman, 2006). In this respect the language functions as a semiotic tool which connects the individual’s intra-psychological system to the societies he lives within which will come to affect how he thinks- feels- and expresses himself (Valsiner, 2007). If language affects how we think, feel and express ourselves then it must also affect how we experience nostalgia. Taken this account it can be argued that the internalization of language must come to affect how nostalgic experiences are organized and expressed to other people. Here we have an interesting point; because we know that language varies across cultures which can be used to advocates that nostalgia too can very across cultures and thereby be culturally affected. And since language is being internalized on a personal level and functions as a semiotic tool of communication it also suggests that human beings (and their experiences of nostalgia) must be culturally affected as well - that human beings are products of culture which come to affect how they think, feel, and express themselves (including their nostalgic experiences). Such a link between the individual, language, and culture are also to be found in Jerome Bruner’s work (1981) where he argues that micro culture constitutes language through social relations as individuals attain- and learn to master language primary through interaction with the caregivers. Claire Kramsch (1998) also argues that language affects our understanding of the world within a specific culture in which; *“Language expresses cultural reality”* (Kramsch, 1998, p. 3). These arguments support the view that language is a cultural artefact which eventually must lead to the conclusion that human beings too are linked to culture which it cannot separate from. Again this supports the view of nostalgia being culturally affected as well since nostalgia comprises the use of language (whether it is verbal, physical or imaginary) which affects the way nostalgia is experienced. However, this is an aspect we will come back to in the integrated analysis where the link between nostalgia and language is to be processed further.

Last but not least it is important to notice, as Bruner (2002) argues that language functions as a tool to create- and express narratives. In this respect the individual can use different mediums of language to communicate those narratives – whether it is through verbal-, visual- or written mediums (Kramsch, 1998). As narratives are closely linked to language then they must also be affected by socio-cultural mediators as well. This leads us to the point of discussion within this section; because nostalgia consists of personal memories which can be expressed through e.g. verbal narratives and since narratives are affected by culture then nostalgia must be as well. Therefore, let us try to elaborate on the socio-cultural aspect of nostalgia.

## Integrated analysis

The previous article (*Walking down memory-lane – The experience of nostalgia*) was based on investigations that have been carried out in *Den Gamle By* where the empirical data consisted of video- and audio-material. Those materials have been transcribed and analyzed according to linguistic- and narrative contents. However, as we have seen above, language is very complex as it functions as a semiotic tool of communication to connect the individual’s intra-psychological system to the societies he lives within. Also the language can take many different forms, depending on the culture it is connected to as well as the mediums it is expressed through. The question is then, is it fair to collect empirical data in audio- and visual forms and present them through written mediums from which they are analyzed? Would such reconstructions of the data be valid and consistent with the actual happenings taken place in real life? From the above section, the answer would be no! Language is so complex that some of the valuable data would be lost through translation to e.g. written mediums. For example it is noteworthy that the visual aspect of nostalgia will be lost in written transcription as the reader cannot see how the participants acts physically through body-language and facial expression when they are exposed to nostalgic experiences. It could be quite interesting to mute the sound and only focus on the visual material of people experiencing nostalgia and how it manifests through physical movements and interaction. The video-materials of the present study display that the participants often walked around in small groups, they used a lot of pointing when seeing specific objects that triggered personal memories (which usually were followed by a personal life-narrative), and they smiled and nodded politely when someone shared a personal story. Furthermore, the participants were also in physical contact with each other, as they usually grab another person’s arm when expressing excitement, e.g. when recognizing a specific object. These visual observations also suggest that nostalgia is indeed a social experience in which people remember together (cf. previous article, pp. 13-15).

Another approach to analyzing the data could be to focus on the audio-material in order to investigate the way nostalgic experiences expose themselves through verbal expression and the tone of voice. For example it is valuable to consider how the joy of recognition sounds or how “old” words and phrases are being revoked through nostalgic experiences and expressed through verbal conversations. All these physical gestures- and verbal expressions contribute to the experience of nostalgia but they are easily overlooked when transforming them to written language or by failing to include them in the empirical work.

The question is then, why do scientists manipulate the collected data in this manner? One answer is that most scientific outcomes are passed on through scientific journals in which they are presented in written language. Furthermore, it is difficult, if not to say impossible, to pass on scientific results that include- and reproduce exactly all what happened during the data collection. In the present study for example it is not possible to replicate the “odors of the 1970s” or to copy the experiencing sense of touching by tagging on e.g. the fabric of clothes from the 1970s. All scientific work comprises analysis of the collected data, in which “actual experiences” are manipulated in some way, which causes some biases (e.g. questioning whether the interpretations, made through the analysis, are valid). In this respect one thing becomes important; scientists have to pay close attention to the methodologies they apply to their investigations, so that they are in line with the phenomena they seek to explore, which would support the validity of the gained results.

Taken the above-mentioned account also questions the validity of the present study; do the current study-results really reflect how nostalgia was experienced during the tour in *Den Gamle By*? On one hand not exactly because there are much data that has not been included, such as the visual- and audio material, which could give new perspectives to the experience of nostalgia. On the other hand yes, because the transcriptions do reflect what have actually been said during the tour and the interview. Furthermore, the results have been processed with respect to what happened during the data collection in which it has been sought to give a realistic picture of the tour and the nostalgic experiences. However, every method has its pros and cons that will come to affect the attained results and it is important to consider those pros and cons (by taking a critical review of the method being applied) in order to maintain the validity, reliability, and generalizability of the results. This is also an aspect we will come back to later, where we will take a critical review of the methodological approach within the current study (*Walking down memory-lane – The experience of nostalgia*).

The above section has illustrated how socio-cultural aspects of language affect the way data are being processed scientifically. However, another aspect is to consider how culture affects the content of nostalgia, the nostalgic experiences, and how nostalgia is expressed. This perspective will be discussed below.

As presented in the previous article (cf, *Walking down Memory Lane – The experience of nostalgia*), nostalgia is a sentimental longing for what has been – or as the Greek understanding of the word suggest; longing/suffering of returning home (cf. p. 3). But what- and where is home? Is home a specific country in a specific town on a specific street or is home a specific time in life, a special person, etc.? Well, it is hard to say, as it must vary among individuals and cultures. But as we have seen before, the way we perceive- and structure the world is affected by socio-cultural mediators. We cannot live purely individualistic lives as we are surrounded by (or have been surrounded by) social relations which will come to affect how we develop, who we develop to be, and how we organize the world. In this way our thoughts- and the way we express ourselves are also linked to the social relations we have been exposed to and the culture we find/have found ourselves within (cf. p. 26). This account suggests that nostalgic experiences as well must have roots in socio-cultural bonds. It gives a whole new complexity-aspect to the notion of nostalgia. Because when investigating nostalgia you also dig into the historical background of the culture that once was (in the past) as well as the culture prevailing now. So, in order to understand the nostalgic experiences in depth you have to understand some of the micro- and macro cultures of the past (which the nostalgic experiences relate to – e.g. the 1970s) as well as in the present. This means that you have to gain knowledge of how the society was/is structured as well as how the individual’s (which is the focus of attention) life-situation were/is. Said in another way; you have to pay attention to the narratives being told and how they fit into the cultural context of the past as well as the present. This viewpoint fits well with Halbwachs’ notion of social framework as the social frameworks affect what and how we remember (cf. *Walking down memory-lane – The experience of nostalgia,* p. 5)

From the previous article and the data collected in *Den Gamle By* it is clear that the narratives being presented cover personal life-stories as well as information of how the society at the time was characterized (e.g. by the oil-crises in 1973, or by the fact that people were very much political-committed, etc.). These narratives expose some of the socio-cultural bonds that are related to nostalgic experiences, and it is important to acknowledge those in order to process the data respectfully. In the current study it has been done by; 1) including the participants’ personal narratives as well as the guide’s (from *Den Gamle By*) speech regarding actual facts of the society from the 1970s, and 2) by conducting an interview in which personal narratives were investigated in-depth. In this way the study aimed at presenting results that was in line with what the participants had actually experienced, and with respect for the socio-cultural aspects. Also it is worth noting that the socio-cultural aspect supports the view that nostalgia is experienced uniquely among individuals (cf. *Walking down Memory Lane – The experience of nostalgia*, p. 14). This has to do with the fact that each individual has its own set of cultural baggage, though he or she shares some of his or her micro- and macro cultures with other people, which affect who the person develops to be and how the person perceives the world. This viewpoint is also supported by Gary S. Gregg (1998) who argues that cultures can be characterized by their one set of major features, in which members of that culture can choose different subsets of the features to affect their identities.

Taken the account above it can be argued that individuals do indeed share common experiences of nostalgia, but the actual-personal-experience of nostalgia is only accessible to its owner (the one experiencing nostalgia). So no matter how hard we try to make generalizations within science, then we are hold back by restrictions that prevents us from gaining direct access to the individuals’ personal experiences of e.g. nostalgia. However, by conducting e.g. qualitative interviews it is possible to gain some access to the individual’s personal perceptions and thereby to deduce information that can be processed scientifically and produce results that expose knowledge of a specific phenomenon like nostalgia.

One last thing that is important to ponder when speaking of the socio-cultural aspect of nostalgia is the fact that nostalgic memories most often comprise relations to other people, and that nostalgic experiences tend to expose itself through social relations (Wildshut, Sedikides, Arndt & Routledge, 2006). This is an interesting point that supports the assumption that investigators have to pay attention to the socio-cultural aspects of nostalgia (also when investigating nostalgia empirically) as they influence how it is experienced and expressed.

The current section have provided evidence that nostalgia is linked to socio-cultural bonds, which investigators have to acknowledge and include in their studies in order to produce results that are in line with reality.

The next section will outline a literature review of memory in order to give a better understanding of the concept and how it relates to nostalgia.

# The memory-aspect: affecting the experience of nostalgia

As we have seen before, nostalgia is very much linked to memories (as it comprise memories of the past) which makes it important to investigate the relation between the two concepts. The following section will be organized as the previous one – this means that a theoretical review of the different perspectives within the psychological field of memory will be presented in a separate block. Afterwards these perspectives of memory are going to be followed up by an integrated analysis where they are linked to nostalgia. So again, do not despair if the subsequent literature review seems a bit off topic compared to the field of nostalgia – it will be linked to nostalgia in the integrated analysis that will follow.

## Literature review

Throughout history there have been different ways of perceiving- and exploring the notion of memory. Plato suggested that memory functions as a block of wax in which the individual can “write” down the perceptions or thoughts he wishes to save. In this way memory is perceived as a storehouse in which sensory impressions are retained over time (Wagoner, 2011). This notion of memory is very widespread within the field of psychology, and it has broadly affected how memory is investigated empirically. For example, Herman Ebbinghouse (1913/1885) carried out investigations in which he used non-sense syllables to measure how much information the individual could store- and reproduce. Thus Ebbinghaus agreed with Plato’s notion of memory; that it functions as spatial storehouse of memorizing and retaining information – as with Plato memory was thought to be better or worse in itself as a function of the quality of the wax (Wagoner, 2011). However, not all scientists support this view; Frederic Bartlett argued that Ebbinghouse’s studies have very little to do with remembering in everyday-life (Wagoner, 2009). Instead Bartlett (1995/1932) argued that memory is an everyday activity that comprises an effort after meaning. To investigate his notion of memory empirically, Bartlett used the method of repeated reproduction, among others (ibid.). One of his most famous ways to do that was by introducing participants to the Native American story *War of the Ghosts,* which encompasses a lot of abstract metaphors and confusing events. After being introduced to *War of the Ghosts*, participants were told to reproduce the story over a number of sessions. This opened up for a new way to investigate- and analyze the different processes of reproduction step by step through increased time delays, and how rationalization-techniques was used to create an effort after meaning (Bartlett, 1995/1932). Such methodological considerations expose Bartlett’s standpoint; that remembering is an active process in which the mind functions as a whole that comprises perceptions, imaginations, thinking etc. (Wagoner, 2011). The different approaches to the notion of memory illustrate the complexity of the concept and the remembering-processes that is linked to it. This point also becomes important for how to perceive the memory-aspect of nostalgia, but this is an aspect we will come back to later in the integrated analysis.

Allan Baddeley and Graham Hitch (1974) proposed that short-term memory must be more complex than only comprising one-multiple component-system which had been the prevailing perception earlier. Instead they suggested that short-term memory was to be replaced by a three-component system of *working memory* that comprises the *central executive* and its two under-components; the *phonological loop* and the *visuospatial sketchpad* (Baddeley & Hitch, 1974). The phonological loop stores audio-material that has been collected through primary language-information and makes it possible to remember small fractions of sounds within short periods of time. The visuospatial sketchpad however stores visual-material in which it becomes possible to remember visual information. The central executive functions as a directive system that guides attention and contributes with information to the phonological loop and the visuospatial sketchpad (ibid.). Later, Baddeley (2000) introduced the *episodic buffer* as a forth component to working memory, in which it comprises a temporary storeroom of information from the phonological loop and the visuospatial sketchpad. This makes it possible for the episodic buffer to operate information in a way that; 1) contributes to problem-solving, 2) gives new understandings of past events, and 3) guide forthcoming events (Matlin, 2005).

Knowledge of working memory becomes important when investigating nostalgia, because we have to be aware of how these nostalgic memories have been kept and stored in mind – for example by focusing on how audio- and/or visual information affect what is being remembered when experiencing nostalgia. However, since nostalgia also refers to memories that go way back in time it is also important to take a look at long-term memories, and how they are stored in mind. Therefore, we will shortly take a look at the composition of long-term memory to understand how it relates to nostalgia.

Long-term memory deals with information that has been gathered throughout the life-course. It consists of multiple components of *episodic*-, *semantic*-, and *procedural* memory (Matlin, 2005; Eriksson, 2003). Episodic memory refers to personal memories of previous events that an individual has been exposed to. If episodic memories contain high levels of emotional intensity and sensory-impressions then they are more likely to appear clearer in the mind (ibid.). Semantic memory however, comprises common knowledge of the world such as rules of social behavior and language. The last component of long-term memory is procedural memory which deals with practical- and motoric skills to complete different task such as learning to walk, talk, and use the telephone etc. (ibid.). Together these three components process different information within long-term memory

From the theoretical walkthrough above it is easy to understand why there seem to be so many different approaches to the notion of memory, as it comprises many complex processes. These different approaches to memory will also come to affect how we perceive the notion of nostalgia, as nostalgia is linked to memory and remembering-processes. Therefore, we have to understand the complexity of memory in order to acknowledge the complexity of nostalgia as well. That is also the reason why we have gone through a theoretical walkthrough of memory as it will help us to better understand the diversity- and complexity of nostalgia. However, it is quite relevant to take a closer look at the notion of autobiographical memory, since nostalgic experiences are based on those memories.

Autobiographical memory is a sub-component of episodic memory in which autobiographical memories refer to remembered experiences while episodic memory comprises over-all-experiences that have actually occurred. Therefore, autobiographical memory is too a part of the long-term memory (see above) in which it does not only encompass actual happenings but can also include personal perceptions (Neisser, 1986). This means that e.g. all childhood memories are not necessarily objective true, but can be made-up-constructions that build upon schematic knowledge from different personal experiences (Hyman & Kleinknect, 1999). This means that memory is an active process where it becomes important to explore how and why people remember specific events/details rather than focusing on the factual details- and how well these memories are being remembered (Bluck, 2003; Brown & Reavey, 2015). So when investigating nostalgia we will not focus on whether the verbal narratives (being presented when experiencing nostalgia) comprise objective factual details, but instead to focus on why and how these memories have been kept. However, this is an aspect we will come back to in the following integrated analysis.

Throughout life the individual has autobiographical memories that rely on the retrieval curve (see figure on the next page) which comprises; childhood amnesia (from birth to ca. 5 years of age), 2) the reminiscence bump (from 10 to 30 years of age), and 3) the recency period (appearing after the decline of the reminiscence bump and increases until the ever present moment) (Rathbone, Moulin & Conway, 2008). In this respect the reminiscence bump refers to increased recollection of prior experiences where people evoke most numbers of memories within free recall tasks. The reminiscence bump becomes very significant in the constitution of identity and personal life goals, as the individual typically goes through many transitions in that specific period of time (e.g. choosing a life-partner, having children and getting a career). However, the three components of the retrieval curve become very important as the individual (typically around the age of 35+) recalls autobiographical memories that encompass information to build up his personal life-story (Rathbone, Moulin & Conway, 2008, Nelson, 1993). In this way autobiographical memory integrates narratives that constitute personal life-stories (de-Saint Laurent & Zittoun, 2015) and suggesting that autobiographical memory must also be affected by socio-cultural mediators (cf. previous section regarding narratives and language).

[[1]](#footnote-1)

Now that we have gone through a short introduction to the notion of memory it is time to integrate that information to the psychological field of nostalgia. But please note from the above section, that memory comprises many complex processes which makes the study of memory very comprehensive.

## Integrated analysis

The hypothesis of the current study is; that environmental surroundings can trigger nostalgic experiences if a person is being brought back to the memories of his past (cf. p. 7). Two things seem significant in this respect; 1) the importance of the environmental surroundings, and 2) how environments can trigger personal memories of the past. First let us start to explore the importance of the environmental surroundings for memory-retention.

In the current study much attention was directed towards the physical surroundings which attempted to illustrate authentic environments from the 1970s. But focus was not just on the visual sensing of the environments; the hearing- and smelling-senses (which reminded of the 1970s) were also activated during the tour e.g. by the characterizing smell of cigars and disinfection at the gynecologist place or by the sound of TV-cooking from the 1970s. In this respect the physical surroundings played a great role in the experience of nostalgia where the senses became activated. By taking a look at the content of working memory reveals that memory is indeed linked to sensing – e.g. by the phonological loop or the visuospatial sketchpad. However, it seems like some of those sensing-memories are being transmitted from working memory to long-term memory where they are being stored and maybe “forgotten” for some times. Thus some of those memories are being revoked if an individual is being reunited with specific senses-impressions that recall old memories. In this respect it is relevant to notice that Simon Chu and John J. Downes (2002) have provided evidence that odors have special effects when it comes to remembering experiences of the past. Meanwhile studies conducted by Frederick S. Barett et al. (2010) have confirmed that songs are being rated as more nostalgic if they are autobiographically familiar (Barett, Grimm, Robins, Wildshut & Sedikides, 2010). These studies advocate that senses-impressions do actually affect how- and what we remember, which makes it important to pay attention to the sensations in memory-retention. If we go back to the study of Birgit Kristiansen (2013) which has shortly been introduced in the prior article (cf. p. 20) then we will also find that senses play a significant role in memory-disseminations for people with dementia. The current study does not have focus on dementia as such, but it is interesting that people suffering from dementia, who experience a decline in mental- and cognitive abilities (Ismail, Cheston & Christopher, 2015) can retain lost memories by activating their sensory-impressions. We are not once again going to discuss the importance of the environment to memory-retention, but it is however relevant to focus on the importance of sensing-impression of the environments and how they affect memory. In Ebbinghous’ and Bartlett’s studies both investigated memory from a cognitive perspective with different angles (Bartlett also included the social aspect), but little attention was directed towards the importance of the senses. However, the above arguments illustrate that it is very important to include the sensing-aspects in scientific investigations of memory, as it is the whole body that help us to remember as well as the environments we find ourselves within (cf. p. 5). The arguments also support the hypothesis of the current study thus they imply significant role of the sensing-impression within the environments. We can therefore also derive that nostalgic experiences are linked to sensory impressions. And since nostalgia deals with personal memories of the past it suggests a clear link between nostalgia, autobiographical memories and sensory impressions. Therefore, let us take a look at the link between nostalgia and the autobiographical memories.

From the empirical data-collection of the current study we have seen that nostalgic experiences deal with personal memories of prior events. These memories must be linked to the autobiographical-spectra of long-term memory, as they comprise personal perceptions of past experiences. This means that nostalgia does not just refer to events that have actually occurred (which would be episodic memory) but instead it might also refer to memories that could be infiltrated with imaginary impressions. It would explain why some memories are being romanticized in the rosy-like picture of nostalgia: because some of those memories have been processed in a way that does not necessarily reflect the objective truth of past experiences. The interesting thing in this respect is not whether these memories contain factual details of what really happened during the past. Instead, it is relevant to focus on the content of those memories and why they have been kept throughout time. Said in another way; how are these memories functional for the person’s ongoing sense of self and relations with others? If we go back to the literature review of autobiographical memories (cf. pp. 34-35), then we will find that they help build up narratives that expose an individual’s personal life-story. In this way autobiographical memories are what distinguish people from each other and making every single human being unique. Again it can be argued that these memories have been kept and stored in mind as they cover important meanings to their owners – and this is also what distinguishing people from each other and making up the individual’s sense of self.

However, it is relevant to take a closer look at how concretely nostalgia is linked to autobiographical memories. Nostalgia is a subcomponent or a variation of autobiographical memory, as it cannot be the other way around. But if that is the case, how does nostalgia differ from other autobiographical memories? Well, autobiographical memories can contain positive, negative, or even neutral memories while nostalgia refers to bitter-sweet memories of the past. In this respect it important to notice that nostalgia links to feelings of *longing* or *suffering* which is not necessarily the case with other autobiographical memories. Thus, nostalgia and other autobiographical memories share some of the same features; e.g. they both constitute information that is being remembered over time which gives autobiographical memories special meaning to their owners. However, nostalgia is characterized by a complex mix of emotions and thoughts that relate to autobiographical memories – and these are not necessarily to be found in other autobiographical memories.

A last thing that is relevant to consider is how the experience of nostalgia relate to the retrieval curve. The participants in the current study were all in the age of 50+ which imply that they find themselves within the period of recency (see figure, p. 36). This information suggests that the participants of the current study are “supposed” to recall many autobiographical memories – and this is actually in perfect line with the gained results of the present investigation (cf. scheme 1, p. 10). However, that is a truth with modifications; because in order to conclude that the participants recalled many memories we would have to make a similar investigation with another crowd of people in a different age-group to compare the two results. But it does question whether nostalgic experiences are more prevalent to occur in a specific age-group – perhaps at the period of recency? And is nostalgia experienced differently in different age-groups throughout life? For example; does a person in his mid-20s experience nostalgia about the same way when he is in the 60s? It is interesting questions that have not been elaborated empirically (or at least not to my knowledge). However, by incorporating the retrieval curve to the experience of nostalgia, it would suggest that nostalgia is not necessarily experienced the same way during the lifespan. It would have to do with the fact that the period of recency is characterized by *looking back* at memories that build up an individual’s personal life story. The retrieval bump, however, concerns a period of many transitions in which nostalgic memories might contribute with a sense of consistent identity. Actually, scientific studies have already confirmed that nostalgia helps to maintain a sense of coherent self and to direct the future self (Davis, 1979). Either way, it would be interesting to carry out further investigations that examine the age-related difference in the experience of nostalgia.

To sum up; the current section have demonstrated that sensory impressions are indeed significant when it comes to remembering. Therefore scientists also have to pay attention to importance of senses when carrying out investigations within the psychological field of memory. The present section has furthermore advocated that nostalgia is a sub-variant of autobiographical memory in which nostalgia does not necessarily reflect objectively true facts of past experiences. Instead nostalgia might take its starting point in imaginations of autobiographical memories. Last but not least, nostalgic experiences have been compared to the retrieval curve in which it has been derived, that nostalgia is not necessarily experienced the same way in different age-groups throughout life. However, more empirical work on this topic is required.

Now that the memory-aspect of nostalgia has been elaborated it is time to turn to the emotional side of nostalgia which will be processed next.

# The emotional perspective: affecting the experience of nostalgia

From the prior article (cf. *Walking down Memory Lane – The experience of nostalgia*) it was argued that remembering is a social process in which the social frameworks affect what is being remembered and how the experiences of nostalgia unfolds. This fits very well with Zhou, Wildschut, Sedikides, Shi, and Feng’s (2011) notion of the concept where they argue that nostalgia functions as a social emotion that reinforces- and supports social relations. Therefore, it is important to take a look at the theoretical aspects of emotions, to understand its content and how it relates to nostalgia, which we will process next.

## Literature review

Some scientist argue that emotions are universal among individuals (Darwin, 1998; Lazarus, 1991) while others maintain that emotions include personal interpretation which vary among cultures (Barrett, 2006). Emotions can be of positive or negative kinds, where positive emotions are consequences of goal attainment which includes; *happiness*/*joy*, *pride*, *love*/*affection*, and *relief*. However, negative emotions are due to goal-incongruence and comprise: *anger, fright/anxiety, guilt/shame, sadness, envy/jealousy, and disgust* (Lazarus, 1991, pp. 217, 264). In this respect it is important to notice that emotional states are usually rated by the levels of arousal and valence. Here arousal refers to the variations of being calm to being very much excited while valence concerns the diversity of pleasantness to unpleasantness feelings when being in emotional states (Dolcos & Cabeza, 2002). Emotional states are commonly expressed in physical behavior through e.g. facial expression and body-language. Some of those expressions are easily recognizable within different cultures; e.g. by recognizing a smile or laughter as emotional states of happiness (Darwin, 1998). However, there seems to be cultural differences in the way that emotional states are being expressed within social life, which is due to variances of norms- and display rules of behavior within different cultures (Ekman, 1992). This supports the following view; that emotions are not just universal among individuals but are also affected by cultural strains.

In scientific work much evidence has confirmed that emotional stimuli do in fact increase better recalls of memory compared to neutral stimuli. This tendency is named the *enhancement effect* and it causes the *trade-off effect* which means that emotional arousing stimuli eliminate attention directed towards non-arousing stimuli. In this respect non-arousing stimuli are usually not being remembered as well because the emotional-stimuli take most of the attention (Kensinger, Piguet, Krendl, and Corkin, 2005). These tendencies have typically been investigated through experiments were participants are presented with visual- or auditory stimuli that contains non-arousing elements as well as emotional arousing features. After being presented with the visual and/or auditory stimuli the participants are going to take an unexpected memory recall test which might be offered hours or even weeks after the stimuli-presentation (ibid; Adolphs, Cahill, Schul, & Babinsky, 2014). But most of the emotionally arousing stimuli-material builds upon unpleasant features (which causes high levels of arousal and valence) where very little attention (if any) is directed towards positive emotional stimuli. However, this is quite problematic, as positive emotions are not being included within scientific empirical work on the field. The reason for that might have to do with the assumption that it is difficult to trigger high levels of arousal- and valence through positive emotional stimuli. But one can advocate that it all comes down to the question of method; if positive emotions are investigated within natural environments it might be possible to provoke high levels of arousal- and valence; e.g. by the experience of nostalgia! This is an aspect we will come back to in the integrated analysis.

To end this section regarding emotions it is important to notice that scientists have found that nostalgia comprises a complex mix of emotions that refer to memories of prior experiences- and relationships (Ye, Ngan & Hui, 2013). Davis (1977) argues that the complexity-aspect of nostalgia has to do with the fact that; “*to merely remember the places of one’s youth is not the same as to feel nostalgia for them. Neither for that matter, does active reminiscence - however happy, benign or tortured its content - necessarily capture the subjective state characteristic of nostalgic feeling*” (Davis, 1977, p. 418; Wildshut, Sedikides, Arndt & Routledge, 2006, p. 41). So nostalgia is indeed a complex emotion that can be difficult to trigger and capture empirically. But it seems like nostalgia is too a social emotion that reinforces- and supports social relations (Zhou, Wildschut, Sedikides, Shi & Feng, 2011) which suggest that nostalgia is a positive emotion that compromises excitement (high arousal) and pleasantness (high valence). However, this is an aspect we will process in the next section of the integrated analysis. But one last thing to notice is; that since nostalgia is a social emotion it also suggests that nostalgia is affected by cultural mediators in which culture affects the way emotional states of nostalgia are being expressed within social life. As presented by Paul Ekman (1992) it is due to the fact that there seems to be variances of norms- and display rules of behavior within different cultures which affect how emotional states are being expressed – hereby also nostalgic experiences. So once again we can deduce that nostalgia must indeed be affected by socio-cultural mediators.

## Integrated analysis

Now that we have a better understanding of the concepts of emotions and nostalgia, it is possible to elaborate on the link between those two.

First of all it is relevant to turn focus back on the prior article (*Walking down Memory Lane – The experience of nostalgia*) where it has been discussed whether the experience of nostalgia can be considered as being positive or negative. The discussion illustrates that it depends on the specific nostalgic experience; thou it seems like nostalgia that includes the suffering-aspects are linked to a *negative* sides of nostalgia while the *longing*-aspect constitute positive sides of nostalgia (cf. p. 18-20). However, does that mean that the negative side of nostalgia relates to negative emotions of *anger, fright/anxiety, guilt/shame, sadness, envy/jealousy, and disgust*, while the positive side of nostalgia comprises *happiness*/*joy*, *pride*, *love*/*affection*, and *relief*? In order to answer those questions we have to turn to some positive- and negative experiences of nostalgia and analyze the content of those experiences. And that is exactly what has been done in the prior article (cf. pp. 18-20). However, it is worth reflecting whether it is possible to locate all emotions as being either positive or negative? As we have seen in the prior article (*Walking down Memory Lane – The experience of nostalgia*) and the literature review (cf. p. 41), then some experiences of nostalgia comprise a complex mix of emotions which can be difficult to frame as being either positive or negative. This information might question whether standard assumptions about emotions within psychology are adequate.

If we try to use the information from the prior article (*Walking down Memory Lane – The experience of nostalgia*) and combine it with the knowledge of emotions that we have now, it might be possible to elaborate whether nostalgia can be considered a positive- or negative emotion; or maybe both. Examples of positive experiences of nostalgia have been presented through the empirical data collection of the current study. These positive experiences comprise happy feelings of joy (cf. *walking down Memory Lane – The experience of nostalgia*), which is actually one of the components in positive emotions. This might suggest that nostalgia can be considered a positive emotion! However, from Arenas’ study (1994; cf. prior article p. 19) we have seen that some refugees suffer from nostalgia by experiencing a major break from their home countries – e.g. during times of war. This condition of nostalgia is linked to feelings of sadness, distress, and fright which is some of the components within negative emotions. So we can also find that nostalgia is linked to negative emotions, which suggests that nostalgia is not just a state that comprises positive emotions only. This would explain the reason why scientists throughout history have had very different assumptions of how to perceive the concept of nostalgia (cf. pp. 3-4). Some of it has to do with the fact that nostalgia is often referred to as a bittersweet emotion that comprises positive as well as negative feelings (Zhou, Wildshut, Sedikides, Shi & Feng, 2011). This fits very well with the results of the current study, in which nostalgia also here can be perceived as a bittersweet condition that comprises multiple combinations of emotions.

Please notice that to remember past experiences, it being happy or tortured, does not necessarily contribute with feelings of nostalgia (cf. p. 41; Davis, 1979). However, the concept can be defined as follows; “*Nostalgia, a sentimental longing for a personally experienced and valued past, is a social emotion. It refers to significant others in the context of momentous life events and fosters a sense of social connectedness*” (Zhou, Wildshut, Sedikides, Shi & Feng, 2011, p. 39). This definition sets up some premises that are required to access the experience of nostalgia. But notice that those premises do not necessarily lead to the experiences of nostalgia (cf. p. 41; Davis, 1977), which might question the validity of the current project. Because the methodological approach of the current study aimed at investigating the unfolding experience of nostalgia through environmental triggers. But Davis (1977) proposes that such arrangements might trigger memory but does not necessarily capture the unique experience of nostalgia. This illustrates the very complex structure of nostalgia and how difficult the concept is to investigate empirically. However, it is important to notice that the participants of the current study did actually confirm verbally that they felt nostalgic during the tour in *Den Gamle By*, which does support the validity of the gained results.

Another thing that is relevant to elaborate is whether nostalgia functions as a positive emotion that affects memory? Would it be possible to incorporate nostalgia in empirical investigations where it functions as a positive emotion that provokes high levels of arousal and valence? Well, we have already seen that nostalgia can indeed be categorized as a positive emotion, although it can also take other forms. Therefore it would be crucial to provoke nostalgia in a way that leads to positive experiences and thereby positive emotions as well. The current study has shown that it possible to provoke such positive experiences of nostalgia by focusing on the immediate meetings with environments of the past, in which the meetings are constituted by “harmless” environments. In the present study such experiences have been found by observing participants walk through environments of their past within an open museum. The participants explicitly expressed that they had definitely found the meetings with their pasts as being very funny and indeed very nostalgic. This suggests that the positive experience of nostalgia might provoke high levels of arousal and valence which advocate that nostalgia can indeed be used as a positive emotional trigger to elaborate on the link between emotions and memory within science. The current study (including the literature review as well; cf. pp. 40-42) has already provided evidence that nostalgia do certainly constitute emotions that affect memory. Therefore, let this be a request for scientist to incorporate positive emotions in empirical investigations where it is sought to elaborate how emotions affect memory. However, since this aspect is not the prime focus of attention for the current study we will not go further into the discussion here – but please note that the experience of nostalgia could be one way to investigate the emotion-memory link from a positive emotional perspective.

To sum up, we have illustrated that nostalgia is indeed a complex emotion that constitutes multiple components. Nostalgia can best be perceived as a bittersweet state that comprises a complex mix of positive and/or negative emotions.

As we have seen from the current study then nostalgia can indeed be perceived as a positive emotion. And actually most empirical work on nostalgia (made from a psychological point of view) suggest that nostalgia is characterized as a positive emotion that contributes with beneficial side effects. Therefore it is relevant to focus on these constructive benefits from experiencing nostalgia, which we will process next.

# Benefits from experiencing nostalgia:

Until now we have focused much on different psychological themes that relate to the experience of nostalgia. It has been important to focus on those themes in order to achieve a better understanding of the concept of nostalgia and to illustrate the complexity-aspects that are connected to it. However, it is now time to change focus towards specific scientific studies that have in fact been carried out to investigate the concept of nostalgia from a psychological point of view. The reason why these studies have not been presented comprehensively in prior sections (though small fractions have been incorporated) is because we had to gain knowledge of the structures-, and complexities that are linked to nostalgia (such as aspects of memory, emotion, and socio-cultural mediators), before we can develop critical reflection on the methodologies being applied within those studies. Therefore, we have waited until now, to elaborate in-depth on prior studies conducted within the field.

In the following section four different studies will be introduced – they all have in common that they have found empirical evidence that confirm benefits from experiencing nostalgia. The four specific studies have been chosen as they each contribute with different perspectives of how nostalgia has beneficial effects. Besides, the four studies use different methodologies to investigate nostalgia empirically which give us opportunity to dig into the pros and cons of using specific methods to explore the notion of nostalgia. This will also be valuable information that we can use when making a critical review of the current study’s method (cf. p. 62).

The four studies will be presented in separate sections where they are to be followed by a critical review of their different methods. The studies will also be linked to the information we have gathered up till now, from the current study regarding nostalgia (e.g. by including the socio-cultural-, memory, and emotional aspects of nostalgia, and by incorporating the results of the prior article; *Walking down memory-lane – The experience of nostalgia*).

With that said, let us turn focus to some specific studies that have found beneficial effects from experiencing nostalgia.

## *A blast from the past: The terror management function of nostalgia*, by Clay Routledge, Jamie Arndt, Constantine Sedikides, and Tim Wildschut (2006/2008)

Terror management theory (TMT) focuses on behavior that underpins a sense of meaning in life when facing mortality. In this way people seek meaning by dealing with anxieties that relates to mortality-consciousness. It has been suggested that nostalgia might function as such a terror management function by achieving- and sustain meaning in life when fronting existential danger. Therefore, this study wanted to investigate; “… *the extent to which nostalgia provides protection from threatening cognitions about death*” (Routledge, Arndt, Sedikides & Wildshut, 2006/2008, p. 132). The authors perceive nostalgia to be a primarily positive- and self-relevant emotion that improves self-esteem and supports social bonds. The hypothesis of the study came to be; “*if nostalgia serves a meaning-providing function, in the context of terror-management processes wherein meaning-relevant defenses are needed following reminders of mortality, higher levels of nostalgia should be associated with greater perceptions of meaning*” (Routledge, Arndt, Sedikides & Wildshut, 2006/2008, p. 133). The study originally consists of the three experiments, but in the following we will only address one of the experiments to illustrate the method being applied, and how nostalgia has been investigated empirically.

**Experiment 1:** 76 individuals participated in the experiment (54 woman, and 22 men), where they were about to filler personality measures to strengthen their cover stories of thinking positively about the past (which functioned as an alternative for nostalgia proneness). Afterwards the participants completed eight items from the *Time Perspective Inventory* which measures attitudes concerning the past, the present, and the future – but here focus was only on the past as relating to nostalgia proneness (Routledge, Arndt, Sedikides & Wildshut, 2006/2008). These eight items were rated on a scale from 1-5 (1 presenting *not characteristic of me*, and 5 indicating *very characteristic of me*). Subsequently participants where randomly exposed to one of two conditions; either 1) activation of death-thoughts, or 2) dental pain manipulation. Activation of death-thoughts were conducted by asking participants to describe their emotions when thinking about their own death, and to write down what they think will happened to them physically when they die. Similar kinds of questions were asked to those in the condition of dental pain manipulation – but here the questions concerned the experience of dental pain instead of death (ibid.). Last but not least participants finished 12 of the non-death related items in the *No Meaning Scale* (originally contains 18 items), in which it was sought to measure how meaningful they perceived life to be – e.g. *“Life has no meaning or purpose,” “All strivings in life are futile and absurd”; 1=strongly disagree, 4=strongly agree*“ (Routledge, Arndt, Sedikides & Wildshut, 2006/2008, p. 134).

Through regression analysis the authors found; that in the state of activating death-thoughts, positive perceptions of the past increased opinions about life being meaningful. However, no such relation was found in the condition of dental pain manipulation. These results propose that nostalgia is in fact a meaning-providing-resource in which activation of death-thoughts increases positive thinking about the past, thereby contributing with perceptions about life being meaningful (Routledge, Arndt, Sedikides & Wildshut, 2006/2008).

Now that we have illustrated the method being applied to the above-described experiment, it is time to take a critical look at the method of the study.

The first thing to consider is how the authors perceive the concept of nostalgia, and how they implement it to the empirical investigations. The authors do explicitly recognize that nostalgia can indeed take the form of being bittersweet but they still maintain the perception that nostalgia is primarily a positive emotional experience with several benefits (here they are referring to some of their prior investigations). However, here we have the first problem, because the authors only focus on the positive side of nostalgia thereby overlooking many other aspects. As we have seen in previous sections, then nostalgia is a very complex condition which comprises positive as well as negative emotions. Therefore, it is a great pitfall only to focus on the positive side of nostalgia and thereby excluding other perspectives.

The second thing to be very critical about is the assumption that positive thinking of the past may function as a proxy for nostalgia. The authors do not provide any evidence that would justify such a coupling between the two phenomena, and therefore it does also question the validity of the project. Because, one might argue that it is possible to think positively back at the past without it necessarily being nostalgic. You might remember your first day of school at the University as being positive where you are thinking positively back at that period - but that does not necessarily make you feel nostalgic by thinking back at that time. In other words, it is a great pitfall to accept the condition that thinking back at the past in a positive way functions as a proxy for nostalgia – especially when the current study (*Walking down memory-lane – The experience of nostalgia)* has provided evidence that nostalgia does not just comprises pure joy. Rather, nostalgia can also encompass feelings of *longing* or *suffering* which are aspects that this study overlooks when only focusing on nostalgia as a way of thinking positively back at the past. Therefore, it can be questioned whether the study really investigates effects of nostalgia or effects of thinking positively back at the past – because those two processes/phenomena are not necessarily the same.

Third, as shortly noted in the prior article (*Walking down memory-lane: the joy of nostalgia*, p. 7) there is a difference between *thinking back* at nostalgic events and *experiencing nostalgia*. When asking people to think back, it does not guarantee that those people will feel nostalgic. Therefore, it also questions whether the results of the above described experiment actually say something about nostalgia as an experience or nostalgia as something you can relate to – a thought. So is it really nostalgia that comprises a terror management function or is it the thought of nostalgia (or positive remembering) that is a terror management function? It is a relevant issue to address, as it questions the method being applied when investigating nostalgia.

Another aspect to consider is the construction of method; the fact that people are being tested individually when they are about to fill out different tests might not assembly real life, but instead seem artificial. As we have seen previously in the current project (cf. p. 5), then remembering is also linked to social interactions where the social frameworks affect what is being remembered. Therefore, it might seem as a pitfall to investigate nostalgia (which is very much personal and subjective) in isolated experimental rooms with fixed structures.

A fourth and last thing to consider is how the investigators have implemented different tests within their studies to access the gained results. In the above described experiment the authors made use of two tests; the *Time Perspective Inventory* and the *No Meaning Scale*. But all the items that are originally to be found in the two tests were not implemented in the experiment – only those who “fitted” into the context of the investigation were cherry picked. This can cause some biases, because one might think that the tests have been created to function as wholes which will make it problematic to sort out those items that fit into a definite context. Also, there is the bias of how those items are linked to the definite context; e.g. in the current experiment the investigators only used the items concerning attitudes of the past (in the *Time Perspective Inventory*) as a measure for nostalgic proneness. In this way the test is being manipulated to fit into the context of the current experiment regarding nostalgia. Again, it is problematic without further argumentations, to accept the condition that attitudes of the past function as nostalgia proneness. As we shall see (and we have seen a bit) then nostalgia does not necessarily concerns the past only – it also refers to the present and the future as well. Therefore, it seems like that the current experiment has taken a very simple (perhaps too simple) methodological approach to investigate a complex phenomenon, and as a result it causes some conceptual and methodological oversights.

It should be noticed that the study consisted of two more experiments (which we will not go through here), but in general the authors conclude that temporal thinking through e.g. nostalgia, contributes with meaning in life which protects people from death thoughts (Routledge, Arndt, Sedikides & Wildshut, 2006/2008). Though it all seems very optimistic we might acknowledge that there are some biases to these results, and that there might be other (and less positive) sides of nostalgia. However, for now we will keep focusing on the benefits from experiencing nostalgia in which another study will be presented next.

## *The power of the past: Nostalgia as a meaning-making resource,* by Clay Routledge, Tim Wildschut, Constantine Sedikides, Jacob Juhl, and Jamie Arndt (2012).

The authors build upon the assumption that nostalgia is a resource to achieve and sustain a sense of meaning in life. They argue that nostalgia may function as a resource to create meaning in life in which positive remembering of past experiences may result in imaginations of a desired future (Routledge et al., 2012).

The study originally consists of three experiments but we will only focus on one of them here.

**Experiment 1:** The hypothesis of the current experiment was; “*Does reflecting nostalgically on the past increase meaning relative to contemplating desired future events?”* (Routledge, Wildshut, Sedikides, Juhl & Arndt, 2012, p. 454).

24 students (11 woman, M ages = 20) from a Midwestern US university received course credit by participating in the experiment. Young adults have been selected to participate in the experiment as they have multiple important meaning-events ahead of them – such as getting married, having children, getting a career etc. (cf. the reminiscence bump, p. 35). In this respect young adults might have a bigger tendency to create imaginations about a desired future, which contributes with a sense of meaning to their lives (Routledge et al., 2012). The participants were told that the study investigated personality and life attitudes, and the experiment consisted of different tasks that were to be completed at a computer. Thereafter, participants were divided into two of the following conditions; 1) in the nostalgic condition participants were introduced to the new Oxford Dictonary of English’s definition of nostalgia (1998, p. 1266; cf. current study p. 3), in which they afterwards had to think of a nostalgic experience and write down four keywords significant to this. 2) The other condition comprised desired-future-events where participants were to think about important desired future events and write down four keywords appropriate to these (Routledge et al., 2012). Participants in the two conditions were afterwards going to complete the f*ive-item Presence of Meaning in Life subscale* in which they had to consider to which extent they agreed with declarations such as; “*I have a good sense of what makes my life meaningful’’ (1 = absolutely untrue, 7 = absolutely true)”* (Routledge, Wildshut, Sedikides, Juhl & Arndt, 2012, p. 454)*.*

By conducting an ANOVA-test the authors found that the participants in the nostalgic-condition conveyed greater amounts of meaning in life compared to those in the condition of desired-future events. Thereby the authors came to the assumption that nostalgia contributes with higher sense of meaning than by thinking about a desired future event (Routledge et al., 2012).

Now that the experiment has been illustrated it is time to take a critical review of the method being applied.

Please note that the participants in the experiment consisted of a primary homogeneous group from the same university. This might question the generalizability of the gained results, as the participants do not represent a variety of people with different backgrounds. However, it seems very reasonable to use a group of young adults when investigating the effects of nostalgia as being a meaning-making resource to improve imaginations of a desired future. As argued previously, it has to do with the fact that this period of life is filled with multiple up-coming transitions that will have huge effects on the individual’s life course (Zittoun, 2006, *Memory in life* transitions). But still, it can be quite difficult to apply the gained results to others age-groups. Thereby it becomes difficult to accept the condition that nostalgia function as a general meaning-making resource that imbues desired imaginations about the future.

Like in the previous study, we again have the bias of *thinking* about a nostalgic event vs. *experiencing* nostalgia, as well as being “tested” individually (here by a computer) which might seem artificial – but we will not go through these discussions once again (instead take a look at pp. 7, 48).

It would be quite interesting to dig into the nostalgic experiences that the participants remembered, and how the four keywords related to those experiences. However, in the study the keywords do not seem to be used in any way, which is a pity, because it might have exposed what kinds of words the individuals associated nostalgia with. Thus it is important to remember that the participants in the nostalgic-condition were provided with a definition of nostalgia (from the New Oxford Dictionary of English) which might have manipulated their own personal assumption of what nostalgia comprises for them. Instead of searching for results that confirm pre-developed assumptions of nostalgia (as fitting a certain definition), it would be valuable to investigate how participants perceive the concept and how they experience nostalgia. This has been the goal of the current study (*Walking down memory-lane: the experience of nostalgia*), in which the method took a completely different form.

Back to the current experiment; a last thing to notice is the use of the f*ive-item Presence of Meaning in Life subscale*. By implementing this questionnaire it became possible to find differences in the way that nostalgic conditions and desired-future-events contribute with presence of meaning. However, it would have been nice to have a little introduction to the content of the f*ive-item Presence of Meaning in Life subscale* instead of just a reference, as the authors use. This would give a better understanding of how the test can be related to nostalgia and what kinds of pros and cons this entails.

We have now seen evidence that nostalgia does in fact contribute with meaning in life. However, we will continue to explore the benefits from experiencing nostalgia – now by taking a look at how nostalgia contributes with feelings of belongingness.

## *Individual differences in nostalgia proneness: The integrating role of the need to belong*, by Johannes Seehussen, Cordaro, F., Wildshut T., Sedikides, C., Routledge C., Blackhart G. C., Epstude K. & Vingerhoets A. J. J. M (2013)

In the current study the authors wanted to investigate the link between neuroticism and nostalgia, hypothesizing that neuroticism concerns a need to belong which activates nostalgia. The study differentiates the “social view” of nostalgia (meaningful relations to e.g. family, friends etc.) from the “maladaptation view” in which nostalgia is considered a state characterized of emotional instability or depression. The maladaptation view suggests that people who are unable to cope with the demands of adulthood might develop a tendency to be nostalgic in which nostalgia functions as a withdrawal into the past (Seehussen et. al., 2013). The two perceptions of nostalgia have tried to be integrated through two propositions; that neuroticism concerns a need to belong (NBT) and that neuroticism triggers nostalgia which constitutes to the hypothesis of the study. In this respect it should be noted that the authors perceived nostalgia to be an indirect coping strategy (creating mental representations of social relations) to deal with insufficiencies of belonging (ibid.).

The study originally consisted of 4 experiments, but we will only focus on one of the experiments in order to illustrate the method being used.

**Experiment 1:** The first experiment investigated the link between nostalgia and neuroticism through their joint association of the need to belong. 533 people (of which 272 were women) from the Dutch public (all with different educational backgrounds, relationship status, and ages) participated in the experiment by completing an online survey (Seehussen et. al., 2013). The participants were exposed to five items from the *Southampton Nostalgia Scale* thatdefines nostalgia as a sentimental longing for the past. Here the participants were going to rate their nostalgic tendencies such as; *“How prone are you to feeling nostalgic?’’; 1=not at all, 7=very much”* (Seehussen, Cordaro, Wildshut, Sedikides, Routledge, Blackhart, Epstude & Vingerhoets, 2013, p. 905). Afterwards the participants completed one item from the *Ten Item Personality Inventory* in which they rated themselves on a scale “*ranging from anxious, easily upset to calm, emotionally stable*” (Seehussen, Cordaro, Wildshut, Sedikides, Routledge, Blackhart, Epstude & Vingerhoets, 2013, p. 905). Last but not least, the participants filled out the *Need To Belong Scale* which encompasses 10 itemssuch as; *‘‘I try hard not to do things that will make other people avoid or reject me’’; 1 = strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree*” (Seehussen, Cordaro, Wildshut, Sedikides, Routledge, Blackhart, Epstude & Vingerhoets, 2013, p. 905). The experiment found evidence that there seems to be a positive correlation between neuroticism and NBT, as well as a positive association between NBT and nostalgia. Furthermore, there was a significant correlation between neuroticism and NBT when controlling for nostalgia which confirmed the hypothesis; that neuroticism do relate to NBT, and that a NBT activates nostalgia (Seehussen et. al., 2013, p. 905).

If we take a look at the method being applied we will find some of the same critical points as being mentioned in the other studies; e.g. cherry picking specific items from a test, to make it fit into a certain context (cf. pp. 48-49). Also there seems to be the bias of *thinking* about nostalgia and *experiencing* nostalgia (cf. pp. 7, 48).

The sample size of the current study is very big, which might support the generalizability of the gained results, as the participants also vary in age, status of relation, as well as educational background. However, it is important to notice that the participants completed the survey online, which might have caused some biases. This has to do with several things; 1) it is not possible to control which kinds of environments the participants found themselves within when taking the survey (as we have seen before, the environment has a huge impact on memory; cf. p. 5), 2) the environments differed from each participants, making it impossible to standardize the physical surrounding when taking the test, and 3) it was not possible to reassure that the participants understood the different tasks properly in the same way. So even though the sample size was very big, there have been some biases that could undermine the reliability and validity of the study. It also has to do with the fact, that it can be very difficult to rate personal experiences (such as nostalgia) on fabricated scales without having any qualitative options to extend one’s replies. Therefore, one must be critical about the results that come out of such studies, and whether they can be considered valid.

A smart, but maybe also critical move is that the study investigates the link between neuroticism and NBT and thereafter the relation between NBT and nostalgia. This is smart, because it shows whether there is a connection between the two concepts and the need to belong (NBT) – and apparently there is, according to the results of this study. However, the critical point is; that just because the two concepts relates to NBT (as a common denominator) it does not necessarily explain a certain link between neuroticism and nostalgia. It might suggest that such a link is to be found, but in order to conclude what that link entails and contributes with would need more investigations that focus on the direct connection between the two concepts.

Again we have seen that there appears to be certain benefits from experiencing nostalgia. However, all these benefits relate to better psychological wellbeing through e.g. terror management function, coping strategy to deal with insufficiencies of belonging, and meaning-making resource to achieve and maintain meaning in life. Nonetheless, in the next section we are going to see that nostalgia also has the ability to contribute with actual physical comfort as well.

## *Heartwarming Memories: Nostalgia Maintains Physiological Comfort*, by Xinyue Zhou, Xiaoxi Chen, Tim Wildschut, Constantine Sedikides, and Ad J. J. M. Vingerhoets (2012)

The authors mention that all people experience nostalgia; often 1-3 times per week. In this respect it should be noted that the current study also perceives nostalgia to be a positive- and social emotion that concerns a sentimental longing for the past. Therefore, the authors believed that nostalgia supports psychological comfort but they also want to investigate whether nostalgia contributes with actual physical comfort as well (Zhou, Chen, Wildshut, Sedikides & Vingerhoets, 2012). In order to test this hypothesis the investigators conducted 4 experiments, but we are only going to present two of the experiments here to illustrate the different methods being applied.

**Experiment 1:** The current experiment investigated whether physical coldness activates nostalgia, in which people will feel more nostalgic on colder days compared to warm days. 19 students (13 female) from the Sun Yat-Sen University participated in the experiment in which they rated their levels of nostalgia over a period of 30 days. Each day the participants received a text message at 10.00 pm in which they had to rate their levels of nostalgia on a scale; “*0 = not at all nostalgic, 10= extremely nostalgic”* (Zhou, Chen, Wildshut, Sedikides & Vingerhoets, 2012, p. 679). The average daily temperature was collected from local weather stations in which it became possible to control the different variations in temperature. It is relevant to notice that the participants were not provided with a definition of nostalgia before completing the experiment (Zhou, Chen, Wildshut, Sedikides & Vingerhoets, 2012)

Hierarchical linear modeling provided results that confirmed a tendency to feel more nostalgic on colder days. These results provide evidence that nostalgia does in fact contribute with physical comfort in which nostalgia are experienced more frequently when being in physical cold environments (Zhou, Chen, Wildshut, Sedikides & Vingerhoets, 2012).

If we try to take a critical look at the method being applied, then it is firstly important to notice that the authors do recognize that the experiment is restricted by some boundaries; such as the probability for participants to avoid thermoregulatory discomfort by e.g. wearing warm clothes on cold days or by staying inside (Zhou, Chen, Wildshut, Sedikides & Vingerhoets, 2012). However, it is also important to notice that the participants were not provided with a definition of nostalgia. Thereby it is not possible to control how the participants perceived the concept, and whether they found the experience of nostalgia as being positive or negative. Said in another way; there are ambiguities as to whether participants perceived nostalgia the same way, and thereby how they related to those nostalgic experiences. It would have been beneficial to explore the participants’ assumptions about nostalgia and how it related to their responses. However, a big plus of the current experiment is that nostalgic tendencies are measured over a period of time equal to 30 days. Hereby it became possible, not only to locate single moments of nostalgia but rather, to get an overview of how much- and how often participants felt nostalgic, and how these tendencies related to differences in temperatures. This information becomes very important as it gives another aspect of how often- and how intense nostalgia is experienced in everyday life. However, as described earlier there are some biases when addressing the experience of nostalgia to physical changes in temperature – at least by conducting the method of the current experiment. Because there might also be other factors that affect the experience of nostalgia without only comprising temperature; e.g. cloudy- vs. sunny weather in which dark vs. light environments affects the experience of nostalgia. We will not go further into this issue here, as focus of the current experiment should be maintained on the relations between nostalgia and temperature. Instead we will turn to the second experiment of the study, as it addresses some of the limitations of the current experiment by influencing ambient temperature.

**Experiment 2:** The current experiment examined whether physical coldness activates nostalgia, in which people will feel more nostalgic when being exposed to colder temperatures. In order to test this proposition empirically the investigators used thermostat-controlled temperatures to see how different temperatures affect the tendency to feel nostalgic. The authors refer to the assumption that thermo-neutral temperature for human beings are 24°C, and that thermoregulatory discomfort are to be found in temperatures below this point (Zhou, Chen, Wildshut, Sedikides & Vingerhoets, 2012). 90 students (50 female) from the Sun Yat-Sen University participated in the experiment in which they were all asked to wait in a room of 24°C for five minutes. Afterwards the participants were randomly assigned to either a cold, neutral, or warm room with the following temperatures; 20°C, 24°C, or 28°C. In these rooms the participants were going to complete; a five-minute filler task and a state version of the *Nostalgia Inventory* (ibid.). Here the participants rated their levels of nostalgia when being exposed to 20 items that relates to their pasts through e.g. music, place, special persons, films etc. Results showed that there was not a significant difference between the tendencies to feel nostalgic in the two conditions of warm vs. neutral settings. However, those participants who were exposed to coldness (sat in a cold room of 20°C) tended to be more nostalgic than those being exposed to neutral temperatures (24°C) or warm temperatures (28°C). This supported the assumption that thermoregulatory discomfort activates nostalgia (Zhou, Chen, Wildshut, Sedikides & Vingerhoets, 2012).

Now that we have illustrated the experiment let us take a short look at the method being applied. By implementing thermostat-controlled temperatures it became possible to standardize- and maintain the same physical temperature when testing the participants and this support the reliability of the experiment. Furthermore, the experiment consisted of a big sample size which made it possible to derive generalizations from the gained results. But as mentioned in the previous studies that we have been through, there are some biases when using a homogeneous group of participants (here students from the same university). With that said, it is very valuable to perform such a standardized experiment where it becomes possible to investigate the effects of temperatures on nostalgia. However, there is one thing to be critical about, and that is whether the 20 items from *Nostalgia Inventory* really trigger nostalgia the same way among the participants? One might wonder that e.g. specific music does not evoke the same kinds of responses among individuals as they encompass personal perceptions. Therefore, it would be interesting to see what these items comprises concretely and whether individuals have responded nostalgic to them in much the same way. However, we are not going to dig further into the content of the *Nostalgia Inventory* as it is not the prime focus of the study – but please note that we have to be critical about how such tests are being applied in experiments and how they affect the gained results.

We are not going to process the last two experiments of the study, but it is relevant to notice that from these experiments the authors found evidence that nostalgia do actually increases physical warmth. So it seems like there is truly a link between temperature and the experience of nostalgia, in which nostalgia can maintain physical comfort. But before leaving the subject of nostalgia-temperature relationship, it is relevant to try to transmit the gained results to the empirical data of the prior article (*Walking down memory-lane: the joy of Nostalgia*). Because the studies that have been carried out in *Den Gamle By* took place the first December 2014 in which the temperature had been very low (2-5°C, but would have felt as -10°C at its worst[[2]](#footnote-2)). According to the study of Zhou, Chen, Wildshut, Sedikides, and Vingerhoets (2012) it might have affected people to become more nostalgic than they would have been during e.g. the summertime. Hereby the cold temperatures made favorable conditions for exploring the occurrence of nostalgia where nostalgia might have contributed with actual physical feelings of warmth - at least by taking the viewpoint of Zhou, Chen, Wildshut, Sedikides, and Vingerhoets (2012). These physical feelings of warmth could explain the rather positive experiences of nostalgia that the participants had during the tour. However, it is important to notice that people could also have been more nostalgic during the tour in *Den Gamle By* as Christmas was near. It is perhaps more likely that Christmas functioned as a catalyst to trigger multiple nostalgic memories rather than the ambient temperature. However, this is an aspect we will come back to in the critical review of the current study (cf. p. 62). Nevertheless the results of the current experiment found a relation between nostalgia and temperature where it is suggested that cold environments set up favorable conditions for nostalgic experiences to occur.

To sum up, we have now been through four studies that all investigated the positive benefits from experiencing nostalgia. Apparently nostalgia is linked to; terror management function, meaning-making resources, an indirect coping strategy to deal with insufficiencies of belonging, and nostalgia maintains physical comfort by contributing with physical warmth.

It is important to remember that we have only processed some of the sub-experiments within each study. This means that some things have been left out, and the reason for that has to do with the fact that it would be all too extensive to present every experiments here (it would end up with 14 experiments in the four studies). Therefore we only processed one or two experiment per study to illustrate the different methodological approaches that could be applied when investigating nostalgia empirically. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that we have not been through all the study-material and therefore miss some of the intermediate steps. It does of course affect how to perceive the studies and their gained results – but the reader is encouraged to find the specific articles for a close scrutiny of the different studies and all their experiments.

Now that we have been through some of the advantages from experiencing nostalgia it almost seems like there are only positive benefits from being nostalgic. But as illustrated previously in the project it is clear that nostalgia can indeed be linked to less positive experiences as well (cf. p. 42-44). So to be fair let us take a look at a concrete study where it has been proven that nostalgia can indeed have disadvantages side effects as well.

# Disadvantages from experiencing nostalgia

The attentive reader might have noticed from the presented studies above that much psychological work made on nostalgia, are carried out by the same authors such as Constantine Sedikides, Tim Wildshut, and Clay Routledge. This has to do with the fact that nostalgia is a relatively new phenomenon within the psychological field (cf. p. 4) in which a couple of scientists seems to have gathered and specialized in the subject. However, one might wonder whether it would lead towards a number of studies that investigate nostalgia much the same way? Because as we have seen from these studies then nostalgia is primarily perceived as a positive, social, and self-relevant emotion. But it can be questioned whether these perceptions lead towards a more one-directional way of perceiving the concept, which eventually affects; 1) how to investigate nostalgia methodologically and 2) the gained results from these investigations.

By looking back in time nostalgia was perceived as a negative condition, while it now has developed to comprise a more positive state with beneficial side-effects (pp. 3-4). It almost seems like the two perceptions of the concept are incompatible, and it might suggest that more evidence within the field is required. However, there has actually been carried out studies that investigate some of the disadvantages from experiencing nostalgia, and we are going to present one of those studies next.

## When bittersweet turns sour: Adverse effects of nostalgia on habitual worriers by Bas Verplanken (2012)

The author does recognize that much evidence support the assumption that nostalgia is a positive experience with several benefits. However Verplanken (2012) problematize whether these benefits also apply to those people suffering from severe habitual worrying. These worries comprise feelings of anxiety, they often refer to worries about the future and they arise automatically, repetitively, and persistently. Therefore, the author hypothesize that; “*nostalgia elicits feelings of anxiety and depression among individuals with a strong habit to worry and thus turn the experience of remembering a pleasant past into a source of suffering in the present*” (Verplanken, 2012, p. 286). In order to test this proposition 203 people from USA and UK participated in an online experiment (of which 192 people completed the experiment; herby 139 women) in which they were exposed to a visual imagery task. The participants were randomly assigned to either a nostalgic- or control condition, in which their habitual worrying levels were measured (Verplanken, 2012). The experiment took approximately 23 minutes to complete and it consisted of a visual imagery task followed by assessments of mood, habitual worries and feelings of; anxiety, depression, and nostalgia. First, the participants completed the *Positive and Negative Affect Schedule* (PANAS; consists of 10 positive and negative adjectives) to measure their levels of mood on a five-point scale. Then they were exposed to the visual imagery task in which the participants in the nostalgic condition were asked to imagine a past experience that made them feel most nostalgic. Afterwards they were going to visualize these nostalgic experiences by describing:

“*(i) the place, situation or event that makes you feel nostalgic.*

*(ii) things, people, sounds, smells.*

*(iii) how it makes you feel being there*” (Verplanken, 2012, p. 286)

The same procedure was conducted in the control condition, but here nostalgic experiences were substituted by everyday experiences. Afterwards the participants were going to rate their emotions on a valence scale of -1 (negative), 0 (neutral), or 1 (positive). The participants also completed 18 items from the *Nostalgia Inventory* (cf. p. 56)to test for differences of feeling nostalgic within the two conditions (Verplanken, 2012). Afterwards the PANAS was completed once again followed by a task where participants were going write down three worrying or upsetting thoughts. Then participants completed the *Habit Index of Negative Thinking* (HINT; comprises 12 items) to get an overview of whether these worrying experiences arise automatically and repeatedly. Last but not least, the participants rated their feelings of anxiety and depression by assessing the *Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale* (HADS; consists of 14 items) (ibid.).

Statistical analysis showed that more positive feelings and moods were to be found in the condition of nostalgia rather than in the control condition. However, nostalgia had no impact on negative mood, and results actually showed higher levels of anxiety and depression among those participants in the nostalgic condition (compared with those in the control condition) who suffered from severe worrying-habits. This supports the hypothesis that habitual worrying might elicit feelings of anxiety and depression when being exposed to nostalgia (Verplanken, 2012).

Now that we have presented the above described experiment and its results it is time to take a critical review of the method being applied to that study.

A lot of people participated in the study which might support the generalizability of the study-results. In this respect it should be noticed that participants were located in the USA and the UK, which contributes with a cross-cultural aspects to the study. However, one might argue that the cultural differences between the two countries are not very significant (both belong to western culture) – therefore, it would have been interesting to investigate whether there are differences in the way people of e.g. western- vs. eastern cultures experience nostalgia. However, it is a general critique that can be applied to most studies done in psychology today as they use specific group of participants from western cultures in their studies. Joseph Henrich, Steven J. Heine and Ara Norenzayan (2010) argue that much empirical investigations use a similar group of participants to explore different phenomena; these participants are the WEIRD people that come from Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich and Democratic places. This suggest that there is a general tendency to overlook some of the cross-cultural aspects when investigation psychological phenomena. However, this is not the prime focus of the study, but it is an interesting point to remember, also when investigating the experience of nostalgia.

Like in previous studies, we have the bias of conducting experiments online, as it is not possible to exclude some variables (such as the physical environments). Also, it is difficult to assure that the participant have understood the different tests properly, which might question the reliability of the study. However, it is very valuable to make people visualizing nostalgic experience in which they are going to rate how those experiences made them feel, because that illustrates whether the nostalgic experiences are positively- or negatively oriented. Furthermore, by comparing these results to; mood, habitual worrying, anxiety- and depression as well as emotional condition exposed new and perhaps surprising results; that nostalgia does not necessarily have positive effects on all people. It is refreshing with a new perspective on nostalgia, in which it does not only comprise positive effects. Rather Verplanken (2012) proposes that people suffering from severe cases of habitual worrying might experiences disadvantages of nostalgia as it elicits feelings of anxiety and depression within them. So the effects of nostalgia consequently depend on the specific condition of the individual. Because as we have seen previously, refugees that have suffered major losses might also experience negative side effects when being exposed to nostalgia (cf. p. 19). And the current study of Verplanken (2012) has provided evidence that nostalgia can elicit feelings of anxiety and depression for those people suffering from habitual worries. Thus, there seems to be pros and cons of experiencing nostalgia - though much evidence support that nostalgia are most prevalent to be experienced in a positively way.

Now that we have taken a critical look at different studies within the psychological field of nostalgia, it is finally time to turn to a critical review of the present study. Therefore, we will now focus on the current study that has been presented in the previous article (cf. *Walking down memory-lane: the experience of Nostalgia*).

# Critical review of the current study

As we have seen from some of the previous presented studies, then most of them use quantitative methods to examine nostalgia. Of course this contributes with some benefits – e.g. supporting the generalizability of the gained results. However, as we have also seen from the current study then nostalgia is very much a subjective experience (cf. p. 15) which makes it important to pay attention to the individuals’ unique personal perceptions of nostalgia. One way to do that is by conducting qualitative studies which is the methodological approach that has been applied to the present study (*Walking down memory-lane: the experience of Nostalgia*). By using a qualitative method it became possible to explore the unique experience of nostalgia and thereby to investigate some phenomenological notions of the concept. Also the current study did not aimed at providing a specific definition of nostalgia as it would interfere with the participants’ notion of the concept (which we were interested in) and it could also affect the way methods have been used in order to confirm the pre-defined notion of nostalgia. From the current results we have seen that nostalgic experiences are mostly linked to active states of joyful remembering in which small fractions of less-positive experiences can occur (cf. p. 22).

Since this is a qualitative study one might argue that it can be difficult to derive generalizations that apply to all people. But is this assumption really correct? Brady Wagoner (2009) argues that much early work in psychology has been carried out through analysis of single cases, in which it is possible to make general models that can be generalized back to single cases once again. Such examples are to be found in the time before the Second World War where qualitative- and ideographic studies were more widespread. Here single cases lead to general models and such methods are also to be found in studies conducted by e.g. Vygotsky, Bartlett, Luria, and Piaget (Wagoner, 2009). The difficult thing about psychology has been to deduce results about the human mind/soul – *the Geist* (the object of attention) in a way that methodologically fits into the criteria of natural science. Our human knowledge can be considered ideographic (that will say unique) as it is our mental system that produce such knowledge by comprising unique experiences (Salvator & Valsiner, 2010). Thereby it is argued that; “*Thus, all science is idiographic as it strives towards generalization about its phenomena through time - yet the outcomes of such efforts can become nomothetic in the sense of generalization based on evidence that “once was” and “another time was as well”*. “ (Salvator & Valsiner, 2010, p. 819). This means that in science it is sought to focus on the unique aspects of psychological objects in order to make generalizations (going from ideographic to nomothetic). Or said in another way; generalizations can be made by turning attention towards the uniqueness of psychological objects whereby general knowledge can be attained. Thereby it becomes possible to attain generalized knowledge through ideography (Salvator & Valsiner, 2010). Taken this account of generalizations made from single cases makes it reasonable to propose that the results of the current study of nostalgia (a single case) might function as a springboard from which there can be derived general models concerning nostalgia.

Back to the critical review of the current study; another aspect to consider is that the current study uses cameras to videotape the observational data. We have already been through some of the benefits from using video-material in empirical work where it becomes possible to catch non-verbal information. However, it is difficult to transfer such data to written language whereby it can be presented in papers like this one (cf. pp. 28-29). How can we illustrate the way nostalgic experiences look like, and how they are experienced emotionally? Quite frankly it is impossible to fully capture such experiences. But we might think of creative ways of getting access to such nostalgic experiences and subsequently do our best to pass on those results the most suitable- and valid way. This has been done in the present study by observing the participants live, recording the tour and interview on camera and dictaphone, and by transcribing those to written language which sets the ground for empirical analysis. However, we have to accept that those information and results are manipulated to some extent as we cannot reproduce the exact experiences (cf. pp. 28-29).

A last thing to notice is the fact that the empirical data of the current study was collected the 1th December 2014. This means that Christmas was very near and actually *Den Gamle By* opened a Christmas-exhibition with accessories from different Christmas calendars that have been broadcasted in TV throughout many years (dating back to 1962). It might be that the participants were affected by the Christmas-spirit in which they tended to be more nostalgic than usual. *Den Gamle By* was ornamented with Christmas decorations (some places more than others) which had affected the participants to express verbal narratives concerning their Christmas-memories (mostly from their childhood; cf. p. 18). This is an important account to remember and in fact an obvious starting point to explore whether some festivals make us more nostalgic than usual. However, it would need more investigations to elucidate such relations – e.g. by conducting a similar study during the Easter or summer-period (thou summer-winter periods also involve temperature-differences which have been accounted for earlier; cf. *Heartwarming memories: Nostalgia maintain physical comfort*). But these reflections do in fact expose some of the variables that affect the experience of nostalgia and we have to pay attention to those variables when carrying out investigations.

More critical review of the current study is to be found within the different sections that we have been through already. Also these sections comprise information of former studies and psychological themes where they have been compared to the method- and results of the present study in order to conduct critical reviews of the pros and cons when investigating nostalgia.

Now that we have gathered an in-depth overview of nostalgia and its content it is time to implement those results to practice. Because we have achieved great scientific knowledge of the concept, but that knowledge might be more valuable if we can transmit it to psychological practice with clients. Therefore, next section is going to process this aspect.

# How can nostalgia be implemented in psychological practice with clients?

Going through the different aspects of nostalgia have shown that it can have positive as well negative side effects. But how does that affect the way we use nostalgia in practice? And when should or could nostalgia be implemented to the psychological practice with clients?

Whether nostalgia can be perceived as having positive or negative effects depend on the individual’s condition and its personal relation to the specific nostalgic experience. Some experiences might seem positive while others appear negative. On one hand it is possible that experiencing nostalgia can be joyful but facing the real world after being nostalgic can seem quite depressing. On the other hand it is also likely that nostalgia can serve as a tool to create- and preserve a sense of meaning in life when feeling lonely or depressed (cf. pp. 49-50). It all comes down to the unique nostalgic experience and how the individual relates to it.

First, let us try to work on the condition that nostalgia has positive effects:

As we have already presented (cf. p. 20) nostalgia has a connection to meaning-making. And the current study-results have also shown that nostalgic experiences are linked to personal narratives (cf. pp. 10-16, 36-39). Hence nostalgic experiences trigger personal narratives (of which some are exposed verbally) that have special meaning to their owners (the person experiencing nostalgia) - thereby constituting the individual’s life-stories and affecting the self (p. 21). It therefore seems reasonable to argue that nostalgia refers to certain memories from a preceding time whereby it comprises information that becomes part of the self, and one's personal life-story. Through nostalgia it might be possible to focus on the good things in the past in order to create positive perceptions of a desired future (cf. pp. 49-50).

Let us take a specific example where nostalgia can be used as a psychological tool with positive effects: A person who suffers from depression might have difficulties to find meaning in life at the present moment (Routledge, Wildschut, Sedikides, Juhl & Arndt, 2012). However, by challenging such a person to come up with a specific example of a nostalgic experience might re-evoke some small fractions of joy. By doing this, the psychologist can get little glimpses of what seems (or have seemed) important to the client: something that is covered with meaning. But remember, nostalgia includes a *search* for meaning. Hence the psychologist and the client are supposed to work together in order to cover the meanings that are located within specific nostalgic memories, and how those meanings can help the client in his present condition. For example one might have nostalgic memories from painting pictures. In cooperation with the client, the psychologist can use these experiences to explore their meanings and the emotions associated with them. Perhaps it could be a beneficial step for the client to resume painting pictures, reliving the nostalgic memories once again. And if the client agrees, then those pictures being made can be included in the psychological work in which the paintings become objects for nostalgic experiences, providing access to a *search for meaning* to some of those essential themes being important to the client. It might open up for new ways of getting depressed people in touch with positive feelings and imbue their lives with meaning.

Please note, that by using nostalgia as a tool for gaining positive effects it is important that these nostalgic experience do actually trigger positive feelings. However, it can be difficult to predict whether the client will have benefits from experiencing nostalgia as it depends on how the individual relate to those experiences. Thus it might be a good idea to assure that the nostalgic experiences relate to *longing* rather than *suffering*. Because *longing* can be associated to positive experiences, since it makes you longing for those. So if nostalgia includes *longing* then the nostalgic experience must be positive. However, it might also be that *longing* could relate to feelings of *suffering* for a positive time of the past. In this way; longing includes positive imaginations of the past (since you are longing for those), but it can evoke a complex mix of emotions that do not necessarily comprise positive emotions only. As described previously this has to do with the fact that you can *suffer* from *longing* – where *longing* becomes *suffering* towardsnostalgia – and this is what contributes with negative effects (cf. pp. 18-19). Therefore, now let us try to work on the condition that nostalgia has negative effects:

If people are suffering from being nostalgic (cf. pp. 18-19), how can it be tackled from a psychological point of view? Well, here the goal must be to detach those individuals from the nostalgic experiences that prevent them from having normal functioning lives. However, this can be difficult business since it is not the environments that lead to the nostalgic experiences. Instead these nostalgic experiences seem to be trapped within imaginations of the individuals in which nostalgic experiences can occur regardless of the environments that the individuals find themselves within (cf. pp. 18-19). Therefore it seems most likely to work on how those individuals can come in touch with the present moment rather than living in the past. Again, those nostalgic experiences are imbued with meanings which can be used to figure out what are considered to be important for the clients; what is it in the nostalgic experiences that they carry about? Is it feelings of home, security and familiarity? If so, the psychologist has the opportunity to explore what it is within nostalgic experiences that provoke such feelings, and perhaps it becomes possible to apply/substituting those feelings to the present moment.

These are all suggestions to how nostalgia could be implemented in psychological practice with clients. However these suggestions build upon interpretation from the current study-results in which they rather function as hypothesis. In order to implement nostalgia in psychological practice more investigations are required in order to transfer scientific results to practice in an advantageous way.

We have now seen examples that illustrate positive- and negative side effects of experiencing nostalgia. We have also demonstrated that there seems to be great potential to the experience of nostalgia, which most likely could be incorporated in psychological practice. However, further investigations are required and scientists are encouraged to explore how nostalgia can be applied in a beneficial way to the practical psychological work with clients.

# Conclusion

The results of the current study provide evidence that nostalgia is primarily a positive experience that is linked to happy feelings of joy. However, nostalgia can also comprises less-joyful experiences – e.g. to those people suffering from habitual worries in which nostalgia can contribute with feelings of anxiety and depression.

Nostalgia is a social, but self-relevant emotion which often comprises personal relations to close others (such as family, partners, friends etc.). It is a very unique experience that takes its starting point in the individual’s autobiographical memories.

Nostalgia can be implemented in the psychological practice with clients in which it might function as a meaning-making resource to access and maintain meaning in life – e.g. through terror management function when fronting existential danger.

The current study has also managed to illustrate how different scientific studies within the psychological discipline have investigated the notion of nostalgia empirically. Much of those studies presented a clear definition of the concept (usually taken from the dictionary where nostalgia is described as a sentimental longing for the past; cf. p. 3) in which they produce results that fit into this description of nostalgia. Also, most of the studies within the field have conducted quantitative results in which little attention has been directed towards the participants’ subjective experiences of nostalgia. This is quite problematic since nostalgic experiences are very unique and might differ from each other and from the definition of the dictionary. Therefore, more qualitative research is required, as it would sheet new light to the notion of nostalgia and how to perceive the concept from a psychological point of view. The current study has tried to address this need by providing some qualitative results that might function as a spring-board to further empirical investigations.

With that said; the next time you experience nostalgia then try to pay attention to what it does to you and what it makes you think and feel.

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# Appendix

**Samtykke til deltagelse i specialeafhandling vedr. Nostalgi (Psykologi)**

Mit navn er Nadia El-Ziab og jeg studere psykologi ved Aalborg Universitet. Jeg skal som afslutningen på min uddannelse skrive en specialeafhandling, og dette har jeg valgt skal omhandle nostalgi; hvordan nostalgi kommer til udtryk og påvirker os som mennesker.

Til det har jeg brug for jeres hjælp! Jeg vil gerne have lov til at filme jer (og måske, hvis I får udleveret et kamera af mig, kan I også selv filme) når I sammen besøger *Den Gamle By* i Århus, og går ”på opdagelse” i deres 70’er bygning. Filmmaterialet vil på ingen måde blive offentliggjort, men vil kun blive benyttet ifm. dette projekt, hvorefter det slettes. Filmmaterialet vil blive brugt til at undersøge jeres oplevelse af at blive bragt tilbage til en fortid, som I muligvis har en personlig relation til (f.eks. hvis I var barn/ung i 70’erne) – og hvorvidt dette har frembragt nostalgiske minder hos jer.

Om muligt vil jeg også gerne lave et kort interview med nogle af jer eller lave en fokusgruppe, for at få sat ord på, hvordan I har oplevet ”1974 rundvisningen”, og om I evt. har haft nostalgiske oplevelser på vejen.

Det vil være en stor hjælp, hvis I vil deltage!

Hvis I har spørgsmål, skal I være hjertelig velkommen til at kontakte mig:
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M.v.h.
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1. <http://smilingfearlessly.blogspot.dk/2013/03/autobiographical-memory-am.html> - 16/04-2015 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <http://politiken.dk/indland/vejret/ECE2470110/vinteren-begynder-med-sol-og-kulde-men-skifter-hurtigt-til-efteraarsvejr/> - 28/4-2015 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)