



## The Role of Nostalgia in Retro Sewing

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*Background.* Retro sewers consume fabrics, sewing patterns, and related items in their quest to create clothing that either replicates or is inspired by fashions of the past (typically the 1920s through the 1980s), to be worn for everyday use. These consumers seek to present a retro appearance and do so by sewing clothing for themselves. Martindale and McKinney (2018) found that women sew as a hobby as a way to control the style, fit, and quality of their clothing, eschewing typical retail-based consumption practices. Although retro sewers share some of these motivations of general home sewers, their desire to create their appearance through interpretation and recontextualization of past styles may indicate unique motivations.

Since the 1970s, postmodernism has guided fashion consumption, leading to the triumph of personal choice over designer mandates, and the borrowing of many elements of past fashion (Farrell-Beck & Parsons, 2007, p. 209). Researchers have generally agreed that nostalgia is a motivating factor in the choice to wear vintage or retro clothing (Cassidy & Bennett, 2012; Cervellon, Carey, & Harms, 2012; Veenstra & Kuipers, 2013). Through the lens of nostalgia, this research explores what motivates postmodern consumers to create retro clothing for themselves.

*Methods.* As part of a larger grounded theory study about motivations and methods of sewing retro clothing, 18 women from English-speaking countries were interviewed about their practice of retro sewing. Participants were recruited from the researcher's personal network, from Facebook groups dedicated to retro sewing, and via snowball sampling; 103 potential participants filled out the prescreening survey. The participants were purposively selected to participate to provide the maximum possible variation in age, race/ethnicity, geographic location, education level, preferred decades, and types of patterns used for sewing. Each participated in an in-depth, semi-structured interview that was transcribed verbatim and coded to find themes in the data. The participants were asked questions about why they sew retro clothing and what methods they use in sewing retro.

*Findings.* Nostalgia was a major theme of the interviews, corresponding with previous studies that identify nostalgia as a motivator for wearing vintage clothing (Cassidy & Bennett, 2012; Cervellon et al., 2012; Veenstra & Kuipers, 2013). The forms of nostalgia motivating retro sewers are shown in Figure 1. The first primary form of nostalgia was *connecting with the past*. For these retro sewers, the past is integral to their identities and provides a sense of security and continuity, supporting Wilson's (2014) findings about nostalgia. Connecting with

the past was expressed in several different ways. First, many of the retro sewers interviewed have a strong interest in history. Second, retro sewing may be used as a connection with the sewer's personal past, although that connection is usually indirect and not expressed as sewing clothes that one wore as a child. Linked to connections with one's personal past are connections with family, which were described by most of the participants as being integral to their beginning retro sewing. Third, the participants' relationships with their place in time are discussed; some would prefer to live in the past, whereas others are content living in their own time and connecting to the past in alternate ways.

The second primary form of nostalgia is that of *valuing the past in the present*. Retro sewers tend to value objects from the past, exemplified in the collections that all the participants maintain. They also value knowledge from the past, as illustrated by the types of collections they create and the ways in which they use their collections. Many retro sewers view history as a roadmap that enables more successful navigation of the present. Finally, an aesthetic preference for styles of the past also informs the decisions made in retro sewing.

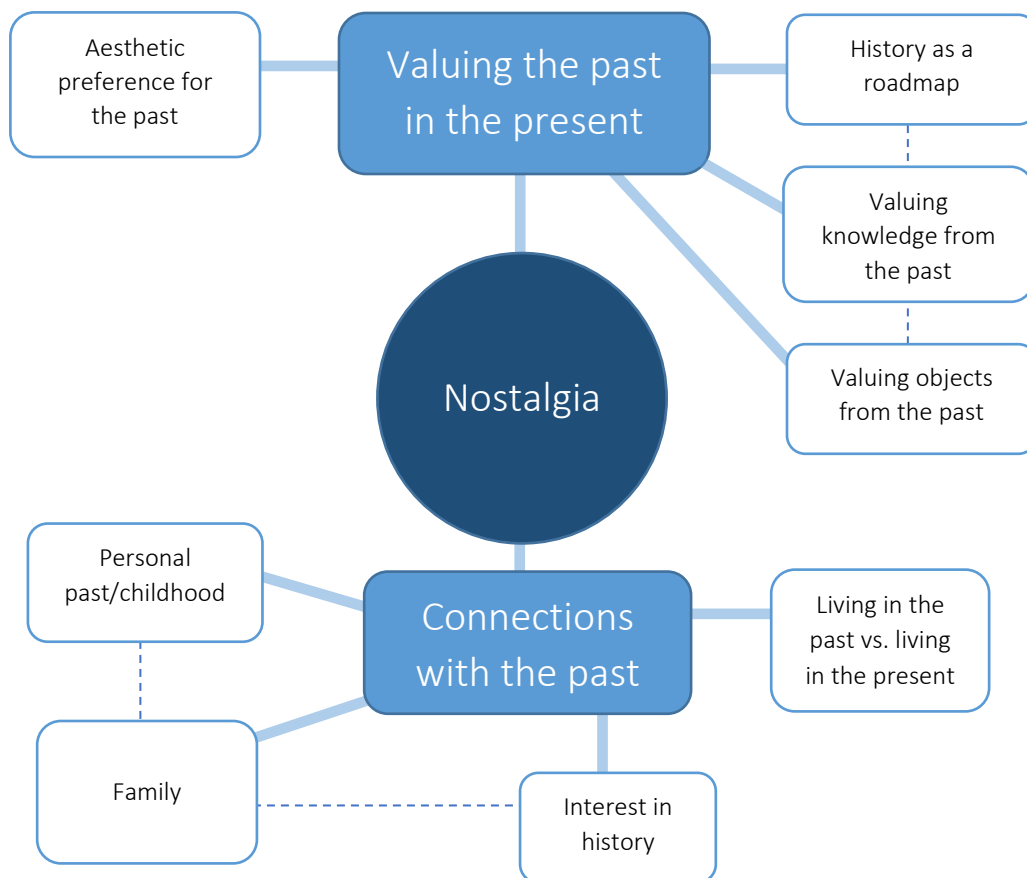


Figure 1. Forms of nostalgia found in retro sewing

*Implications.* Examining nostalgia exhibited by retro sewers provides a context for the role of nostalgia in postmodern fashion and helps to explain what type(s) of nostalgia motivate people to create retro goods. Understanding the motivations of the retro sewer provides insight into this specific segment of the home sewing market, which, like wearers of vintage clothing, has additional motivations (e.g., nostalgia) not seen in home sewers that create non-retro clothing. This research demonstrates how multiple types of nostalgia should be considered in understanding consumers' behavior, as they are often intertwined. Further, seemingly opposing forms of nostalgia can be seen within a group of consumers. Future research of the role of consumer motivations for acquiring, using, and collecting vintage and retro items should consider multiple types of nostalgia in interpreting consumer behavior.

### References

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