

Sarah Lapierre

Professor Gail Jauregui

FASD409.A Fashion Design Capstone: Collection Development

8 October 2025

Senior Capstone Research Paper

Part I: Research

The term “nostalgia” has been around since 1688. Swiss physician, Johannes Hofner, used the term to define a new disease caused by pathological homesickness. The word *nostalgia* quite literally is formed from the Greek words *nostos* and *algos*, meaning homecoming and pain. Nostalgia is a feeling humans have been experiencing all throughout time. As we grow and mature, we often look back on our past and the way things used to be. We reminisce on the simplicity, carelessness, and wonder of our childhoods, even if things weren’t perfect.

It wasn’t until the end of the 20th century that we stopped associating nostalgia with mental illness, tying it to traits like depression, neurosis, and lethargy. In Agnes Arnold-Forster’s article “That yearning feeling: why we need nostalgia” she states that our modern definition of nostalgia didn’t arise until the 1970s. She says that, “Today, psychologists believe nostalgia is a near-universal, fundamentally positive emotion – a powerful psychological resource that provides people with a variety of benefits.” These benefits include boosted self-esteem, social connectedness, a sense of meaning in life, and an overall improvement in mental health. Most likely the memories that give you the feeling of nostalgia are positive and the shared memories between generations can give us a sense of comfort and familiarity.

What sets nostalgia apart from other similar emotions is its bittersweetness. The emotion is defined by the self and is reliant on our own personal memories. This can be anything from family members, time in school, to toys and games, anything that stands out in your mind from childhood. The same can be said for autobiographical memory in general, but nostalgia is specifically marked by affect. Not only do we recall the memory from our childhood, but we remember the way it made us feel and how that affected us as we grew older. We often view these memories through “rose colored glasses” and “As such, nostalgia is not only bittersweet but also regulates negative states, soothing emotional conflict...When experiencing nostalgia, people generally feel well even when this sentiment is somewhat unwarranted by the valence of the pertinent past event.” (Yang 2022). Even when we remember times in our lives that included a struggle or hardships, the positive memories and perhaps the blissfully ignorant mindset of being a child helps smooth everything out. We often long for our childhood because of this, the days seemed longer, life seemed easier, and everything was exciting. We feel sadness,

mourning a time we cannot get back, but we also feel joy for how expansive and full of life that time was.

During the first six or seven years of our lives we build a foundation that sets us up for the rest of our lives. We learn what our needs are and how to get them met, what boundaries are and how to respect them, what it means to have “likes” and “dislikes”, and what unconditional love feels like (ideally). At this age, you feel deeply, sometimes without knowing what that feeling means. You can be loud and needy and your parents will still come to care for you and tell you it's alright. We rely on our parents during this time because we literally need them to survive, but this begins the idealized vision you have of your parents. Counselor Tim Robinson states in his article “Our Early Life Shapes Us, but Doesn't Define Us” that “Beyond age seven we start to interact with the world a lot more and this teaches us about ourselves and the world around us.” At this age we gain new cognitive abilities that give us reason and logic. We learn how to follow rules and cooperate with others and how to make our own decisions. People often say a child's mind is like a sponge during this age, soaking up the entire world around them. Influences come from all around us and almost anything can affect who you start to become. We often forget how impressionable we were as children and how much of the world we didn't understand. By remembering this, we give our child selves grace to make mistakes, learn, and feel everything. Once we remember that that's the way we used to be, it can help us spark a similar sense of joy as an adult.

The lessons we learn from our parents, teachers, or peers during this time are greatly impactful for this reason. Our sense of self is so strong as a child since we have not been molded by the world's opinions and standards. This is why any advice or lessons passed onto a child can shift the way they view themselves. Robinson refers to the free spirited, vibrant, and spontaneous version of you as a child as your “authentic self”. Your authentic self begins to mix with your “adapted self”, which is how you begin to change to “fit in” with others. The older we get, the more we cut out from that original version of ourselves in order to blend in and mesh socially with others. While part of this is growing up, some of it is the insecurity of being your true self and indulging yourself in things that brought you joy growing up. The more time we spend remembering our childhoods and our authentic selves, the more we can utilize those traits in our adult lives. Our lives and experiences are completely unique, even if we grew up in the same time, same town, or even the same family. Only we know our true memories and how they made us feel and because of that we are the only ones able to unlock that part of ourselves again.

As I've previously stated, one of the reasons we remember childhood fondly is because the days felt longer and more exciting. Of course, the days were never actually longer, we were just more present. "Nostalgia is about more than just nostalgia - it's about a longing for the way we once inhabited time. Time itself hasn't sped up, we've just stopped experiencing it the way we used to." (Yuhai 2025). As kids, our attention was sharper, we were more aware of the world around us, even if we didn't understand it. In fact, the lack of understanding is what helps spark that youthful curiosity and wonder that we long for as adults. We want to learn and understand everything we encounter, taking note of specific details in all five senses, imprinting sensations and locking in memories. Everything is exciting to you as a child because it is new, it hasn't fallen victim to repetitiveness and routine. That's why you might have fond memories of going to the grocery store with your parents, even if it's a simple, mundane task to you now. The more times we do something, the more ordinary it becomes, causing your brain to care less about it and not create the same memory every time. As we become more patterned, we stop "recording" every moment and let life fly by a little easier. This is known as the "oddball effect", "a cognitive phenomenon where the brain devotes more energy to encoding novel events, making them feel stretched in memory." (Yuhai 2025). These "novel events" often take place as a child, making that time in our lives seem very significant and rich in memory.

In order to feel that childhood joy we all long for, we must be present and pay attention to our lives. Taking the time to appreciate the world around you can improve your mental health and give you a better understanding of who you are and have always been. In Yana Yuhai's study, "The Neuroscience of Childlike Wonder (and how to find it again)" she describes what happens in our brain when we feel wonder. By understanding how these feelings affect us, it inspires us to dedicate time towards achieving that feeling. We feel wonder when we encounter something new, surprising, or beautiful. This triggers our attentional capture which causes the brain's ventral tegmental area to flood the system with dopamine. In this scenario, dopamine is not only rewarding us by feeling good, but it also signals our brain to tell us that whatever we are encountering is important. While this is happening, the brain's amygdala becomes more active and heightens our senses. For a moment, this makes the world seem extra special; colors are richer, sounds are sharper, and you can really "feel the moment". From here, the brain's hippocampus begins safely preserving the memory, including all of the sensory details, for you to reflect on in the future. All of this induces something called "transient hypofrontality", which essentially means the brain's prefrontal cortex lets its walls down. The prefrontal cortex is responsible for self-control, attention, organization, and decision making; often bringing out your "inner self critic" and stress. During transient hypofrontality the prefrontal cortex becomes less

essential and shifts our brain, allowing us to fully be present in the moment. This same phenomenon also occurs during flow states such as meditation and intense exercises.

Growing up doesn't mean you have to lose your wonder or sense of self. The important thing is to not be afraid to be curious. By surrounding ourselves with new surroundings or media we can open up our "childlike" mindset and be okay with not knowing everything. Even if we are reflecting on our past, it can push us towards our future by reminding us of who we really are at our core. Unfamiliarity and new experiences trigger the dopaminergic system and sparks that feeling of wonder we are always searching for.

Part II: Response

Personally, I have such fond memories of my childhood and the way those memories make me feel is almost indescribable. In broad terms, my collection is inspired by these childhood memories; the colors, the places, the toys, the people, everything. During my research, I focused on what those memories evoke and the feelings we long for as adults. I want my collection to focus on that feeling of pure, unfiltered joy and innocent wonder. As shown in my research, I believe this is a feeling most people relate to and feel positively about. My goal is to spark that feeling in the audience as soon as my first piece walks down the runway. I plan to achieve this through bright colors, nostalgic patterns, and whimsical design elements.

When thinking about my childhood, I have my mother to thank for everything. As stated earlier, children can form an idealized version of their parents growing up since they do so much to take care of you and provide for you. I can say whole heartedly this is not the case in my situation. As soon as I was born, I was my mother's best friend and as I grow older I only have more respect and love for her. A few weeks before I was born, my father passed away. My life was different from everyone else's since birth, yet I never felt that way. Somehow my mom was able to fill the roles of both parents, not only for me, but for my brother who's two years older. My childhood was filled with love and joy, even more so than other "typical" families I knew. During the summers, she would take us to Cape Cod and we would play on the beach until the sunset. We took vacations to Disney World and stayed at the nice hotel with the best pool. She enrolled us in extracurricular activities and played with us at home. I could go on and on about my mom and all of the amazing things she did for us, that's the point. Whatever my brother and I needed, she was there. My childhood could've been much more difficult and depressing, but she made sure that didn't happen. Thanks to her, I was able to live a full childhood just like any other kid and I never complained about the situation I was in. As sad as I was, and still am, I am

more overcome with the feeling of pride and joy that I have a childhood I get to look back so fondly on.

My mom was also a Kindergarten teacher throughout my whole life. She actually just retired this year after teaching for 33 years! I mention this because I think I have so many vivid memories of elementary school because this was her job. I used to hang out in her classroom in late August while she set everything up for the incoming class. To me, an elementary school classroom is nostalgia heaven. I can picture it all so vividly even now, the smell of the crayons, the texture of the rug, to the sounds the chairs make when you have to move them across the room. I love how everything is bright and eye-catching, creating a safe environment to learn and socialize. Growing up, I thought I wanted to be an elementary school teacher too, but I soon realized I just wanted to be like my mom. She is extremely caring, patient, and organized and I've always admired those qualities about her. I was a very shy kid and she helped me be able to express myself freely with others. I often feel very lucky to have her as a mom. I know a lot of her students care for her and she is likely an important part of many people's childhood memories, but I got to see her and be her daughter everyday.

By the time this collection is complete, I will be 23 years old and facing the world on my own for the first time. I often struggle with self acceptance and the way I present myself. When I truly think about who I am, I think about my childhood self. I ask myself what that version of me would do and how she would feel about the choices I've made. While I know my childhood self wouldn't agree with every decision I've ever made, I think it's important to keep her and her values in my heart. As discussed in my research, you are extremely authentic and self expressive as a child. The world has not "knocked you down" or made you dislike parts of yourself yet. That is the version of me I try to be everyday. I go into everyday willing to learn, ask questions, make mistakes, and grow. I think it's important to embrace that "knowledgeless" part of yourself and take in all of your surroundings. My collection should make the viewer feel this way too. I want to show how joyful our childhoods were/can be and through nostalgic references I hope I can spark memories within people, especially those close to my age.

I know not everyone has a happy childhood and this time in your life is not perfect. I understand that more than anyone would know by looking at me, yet this is still what I chose to base my senior collection on. I could have focused on the immense feeling of loss, grief, and confusion, but that does not push me forward. I am inspired by how happy my life and family is *despite* the hardships. By focusing on my joy, it brings me freedom. Bright colors make me feel happy and patterns can remind me of a specific setting or item, so I want to focus on that element bringing my collection together. I want my models to be over-accessorized and have

embellishments all over their garments. Growing up doesn't mean losing that spark and joy of being a child. If dressing "like a kid" in bold colors and frilly silhouettes is immature or childish, I wish to never grow up. My hope is that the audience sees my collection and understands the lust for life I continue to have. I am thankful everyday for my life and that I get to experience everything in it. Through my research I have learned that this feeling of nostalgia and longing for childhood is something we all share. My goal is to embrace it by creating this collection and sharing my joy and memories with others.

Works Cited

Arnold-Forster, Agnes. "That Yearning Feeling: Why We Need Nostalgia." *The Guardian*, 28 Apr. 2024, www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2024/apr/28/that-yearning-feeling-why-we-need-nostalgia. Accessed 8 Oct. 2025.

Robinson, Tim. "Our Early Life Shapes Us, but Doesn't Define Us." *Tim Robinson Counsellor*, 22 Nov. 2022, www.timrobinsoncounsellor.com/mensmentalwellbeingblogour-early-life-shapes-us-but-doesn-t-define-us. Accessed 8 Oct. 2025.

Yang, Ziyang, et al. "Patterns of Brain Activity Associated with Nostalgia: A Social-Cognitive Neuroscience Perspective." *Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience*, vol. 17, no. 12, 13 May 2022, pp. 1131–1144, academic.oup.com/scan/article/17/12/1131/6585517, <https://doi.org/10.1093/scan/nsac036>.

Yuhai, Yana. "The Neuroscience of Childlike Wonder (and How to Find It Again)." *Substack.com*, Mindbox, 26 Apr. 2025, contemplationstation.substack.com/p/the-neuroscience-of-childlike-wonder. Accessed 8 Oct. 2025.

---. "Why Time Felt Slower When We Were Kids (and How to Get It Back)." *Substack.com*, Mindbox, 12 Mar. 2025, contemplationstation.substack.com/p/why-time-felt-slower-when-we-were-128?r=3jauki&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web&triedRedirect=true. Accessed 8 Oct. 2025.