



# Recalled saudade is associated with positive affect, close connectedness, and inspiration

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## ABSTRACT

We examined the extent to which recalled saudade is associated with positive and negative affect, loneliness, close and societal connectedness (Study 1), self-esteem (Study 2), and inspiration (Study 3). Participants were either asked to think about a past event that makes them experience saudade or about a neutral event and then to complete a written narrative. Then they responded to sets of items assessing affect, connectedness, loneliness, self-esteem or inspiration. Participants in the recalled saudade condition (either students or adults) scored higher on positive affect, close connectedness and inspiration than participants in the neutral (control) condition. There were, however, no differences between conditions regarding negative affect, loneliness, societal connectedness, and self-esteem. These findings were largely consistent with results from previous studies on the closely related concept of nostalgia.

The term *saudade*, a Lusophone word, covers reactions to a number of circumstances that involve separation from familiar and loved persons and places. There is limited scientific literature on this topic although the term *saudade* is considered to be one of the most common expressions among Portuguese people (Farrell, 2006). It is also common among Brazilians. In 2004, *Today Translations* reported that saudade was, at a global level, the seventh most difficult word to translate. In English, it is usually rendered by expressions such as longing, yearning, missing, homesickness, and nostalgia (Silva, 2012). None of these terms, however, seems to convey the exact meaning of saudade as Portuguese people usually understand it.

Neto & Mullet (2014) have recently explored this concept using prototype analysis (Rosch, 1978). Firstly, they asked university students to list all the terms they spontaneously associated with saudade. Eleven features were frequently mentioned such as memories (recordações), sadness (tristeza), missing someone (sentir falta de alguém), and missing something (sentir falta de algo). Most of these features apparently had a negative valence but some of them, such as joy and love, had a positive one. Secondly, Neto and Mullet (2014) asked another sample of students to assess the level of affective valence of each of these features. The range of affective valence ratings varied from very negative to very positive; in other words, participants were undoubtedly aware of the complexity of the concept.

Saudade is frequently experienced by most people in Portugal, and

it may have positive functions: Yearning to be with one's family, friends, partners, and country presupposes that one has (or has had) a loving family, good friends, reliable partners, and an attractive homeland. Someone who has not enjoyed these fundamental positives in the past would not feel any loss of them. It has also been repeatedly shown that nostalgia – a concept that is close to saudade has positive function. Nostalgia has been found (a) to repair negative mood and to boost positive mood (Wildschut, Sedikides, Arndt, & Routledge, 2006), (b) to support self-worth and self-affirmation (Vess et al., 2012), (c) to counteract loneliness while increasing social connectedness, and interpersonal competence (Wildschut, Sedikides, Routledge, Arndt, & Cordato, 2010; Zhou, Sedikides, Wildschut, & Gao, 2008), and (d) to positively impact inspiration (Stephan et al., 2015; Sedikides & Wildschut, 2016).

The present set of studies aims at examining the functions of saudade, both positive and negative. In the three studies reported below, participants were led to experience saudade through the recall and writing about a previous and recent episode of saudade. Then they were asked to complete a set of items assessing positive and negative affect, loneliness, and social connectedness (Study 1), self-esteem (Study 2), and inspiration (Study 3). By comparing participants' ratings in this recalled saudade condition with participant's rating in a more neutral condition, we expect to show that saudade, just as nostalgia, has positive function such as, for example, enhancing positive affect, enhancing

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close connectedness or enhancing inspiration.

## Study 1

Study 1 examined the extent to which recalled *saudade* is associated with positive affect, negative affect, social connectedness and loneliness. Positive affect “reflects the extent to which a person feels enthusiastic, active, and alert. High positive affect is a state of high energy, full concentration, and pleasurable engagement” (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988, p. 1063). Positive affect is linked to a number of desirable outcomes, such as good life events and extraversion (Diener, 2006), resiliency (Aspinwall & Taylor, 1997), and love and sex satisfaction (Neto, 2012; Neto & Pinto, 2015). In a metalinguistic analysis of *saudade*, Silva (2012, p. 207) suggested that “what is very important in the meaning of *saudade* is the *thinking* element, recalling the past and also the positive evaluation of that state of mind – it is good to feel *saudade*”. Based on Silva’s (2012) analysis, we expected that recalled *saudade* would be positively associated with positive affect.

Negative affect corresponds to moods and emotions that are unpleasant, such as anger, sadness, anxiety, and envy. Negative affect is linked to a number of undesirable outcomes. Based on Silva’s (2012) analysis, according to which feeling *saudade* is good, we expected that recalled *saudade* would be either negatively associated or not associated with negative affect. Loneliness is also an aversive and unpleasant experience as it is commonly defined as perceived deficits in meaningful interpersonal relationships (Peplau & Perlman, 1982). Loneliness emerged as a central feature of *saudade* (Neto & Mullet, 2014). Based on Silva’s (2012) analysis, we expected that recalled *saudade* would be either negatively associated or not associated with loneliness.

Social connectedness refers to the emotional distance or connectedness between the self and other people (Lee & Robbins, 1995). A distinction can be made between (a) close connectedness, which focuses on emotional connectedness between the self and intimate persons, and (b) societal connectedness, which focuses on emotional connectedness between the self and society. Based on Silva’s (2012) analysis, we expected that recalled *saudade* would be positively associated with connectedness. In addition, and as close others are among the most common objects of *saudade* (Neto & Mullet, 2014), we expected that recalled *saudade* would be more strongly associated with close connectedness than with societal connectedness.

## Method

### Participants

Participants were 64 undergraduates from University of Oporto (54 women, 10 men). Ages ranged from 18 to 33 years ( $M = 20.26$ ;  $SD = 3.46$ ). They were randomly assigned to one of two conditions: recalled *saudade* or neutral event (the control group).

### Material

To assess the level to which students experienced *saudade* in their daily life a Frequency of Saudade Scale, taken from Neto et Mullet (2014), was used. Participants indicated how often they experienced *saudade* by checking one of the following seven options: at least once a day, three to four times a week, approximately twice a week, approximately once a week, once or twice a month, once every couple of months, and once or twice a year. To assess the effect of the experimental manipulation (recalled *saudade*) a manipulation check scale, adapted from Wildschut et al. (2006), was used. Two items were selected: (a) Right now, I am feeling a lot of *saudade*, and (b) Right now, I am having *saudade* feelings ( $\alpha = .97$ ).

Three adjectives from the positive affect scale were selected: Happy,

Joyful, and Attentive ( $\alpha = .77$ ). Three adjectives from the negative affect scale were also selected: Sad, Upset, and Nervous ( $\alpha = .67$ ). The adjective Lonely was used to measure loneliness. Feeling loved and Feeling protected were used to assess close connectedness ( $\alpha = .87$ ). Finally, three items from the Social Connectedness Scale (Lee & Robbins, 1995) were selected: (a) I am in tune with the world, (b) I feel disconnected from the world around me, and (c) I catch myself losing all sense of connectedness with society ( $\alpha = .80$ ).

## Procedure

Participants received materials in a single printed booklet containing instructions relevant to the experimental recalling of *saudade*, a manipulation check, the set of dependent measures, and, finally, the Frequency of Saudade Scale. The instructions were adapted from Wildschut et al. (2006) and Zhou et al. (2008).

Participants in the *saudade* condition were instructed to bring to mind a *saudade* event in their life; that is, to try to think about a past event that makes them experience *saudade*. Participants in the control condition were instructed to bring to mind an ordinary event in their day life that took place during the previous week. Participants in both conditions were given seven minutes to complete their written narratives. Immediately afterward they completed the two items of the manipulation check using a 6-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 6 = *strongly agree*).

Next they filled out the remaining dependent measures: positive affect, negative affect, loneliness, and close connectedness. On a 5-point scale (1 = *not at all*, 5 = *very much*) they rated the extent to which after having completed their narrative they felt happy, joyful, attentive, sad, upset, nervous, lonely, loved, and protected. They also completed the three items assessing general emotional distance between self and society (societal connectedness).

At the end of the session, participants were invited to complete the Frequency of Saudade Scale. It took about 20 min to write their narratives and to complete the four sets of ratings.

## Results and discussion

Thirty-eight percent of participants indicated that they experienced *saudade* at least once a day, 11% three to four times a week, 14% approximately twice a week (the median value), and 13% approximately once a week, 14% once or twice a month, and 10% once every couple of months or less. For a majority of them, *saudade* was, therefore, a common experience. No significant difference was found between experimental conditions,  $\chi^2(64) = 3.20$ ,  $p = .78$ .

Participants’ ratings on the manipulation check were, as expected, significantly higher in the *saudade* condition ( $M = 4.97$ ;  $SD = 1.20$ ) than in the control condition ( $M = 3.23$ ;  $SD = 1.75$ ),  $F(1, 63) = 22.20$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .26$ . Participants’ ratings of positive affect were significantly higher in the *saudade* condition ( $M = 3.21$ ;  $SD = 1.13$ ) than in the control condition ( $M = 2.45$ ;  $SD = 1.09$ ),  $F(1, 63) = 7.31$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .11$ . Participants’ rating of close connectedness were also significantly higher in the *saudade* condition ( $M = 3.53$ ;  $SD = 1.38$ ) than in the control condition ( $M = 2.27$ ;  $SD = 1.15$ ),  $F(1, 63) = 15.17$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .20$ .

There were, however, no significant differences between conditions regarding negative affect, loneliness, and societal connectedness. In the three cases, mean ratings were very close: 1.97 ( $SD = .91$ ) and 1.73 ( $SD = .66$ ) for negative affect; 2.64 ( $SD = 1.29$ ) and 2.14 ( $SD = 1.00$ ) for loneliness; and 3.39 ( $SD = .86$ ) and 3.58 ( $SD = 1.01$ ) for societal connectedness.

Far from being maladaptive, *saudade* seems to have psychological functions that are positive. This finding is consistent with Silva’s (2012) suggestions, and with findings by Wildschut et al. (2006). After an episode of recalled *saudade*, participants reported enhanced levels of positive affect and enhanced levels of close connectedness (feeling

loved). In addition, recalled saudade did not enhance negative affect or loneliness and had no effect on societal connectedness.

It is, therefore, important to distinguish the circumstances that may trigger episodes of saudade – the ones that have been assessed in the studies by Neto and Mullet (2014), which tend to be negative in tone – and the effects of the experience of saudade on positive affect and on feelings of connectedness with close others. Saudade, in the same way as nostalgia, seems to have essentially positive effects.

## Study 2

Study 2 had two objectives. Firstly, it was aimed at overcoming an important limitation in Study 1 which refers to the construct validity of several of the brief measures that were used, namely the positive and negative affect scales. Secondly, it was aimed at examining the association between recalled saudade and an additional construct: self-esteem.

Self-esteem is a person's subjective assessment of his/her own worth. It encompasses beliefs about oneself as well as emotional states related to the self (Rosenberg, 1965). In previous studies on the functions of nostalgia, a positive link between nostalgia and a variant of self-esteem – positive self-regard – was found (Vess et al., 2012; Wildschut et al., 2006). Positive self-regard is the capacity to maintain a positive view of oneself, in view of past accomplishments and expected progress and despite full awareness of personal weaknesses and limitations. It would be equivalent to positive self-esteem.

Based on Silva's (2012) analysis, on the results observed in Study 1 and on findings by Vess et al. (2012), we expected that recalled saudade would be positively associated with positive affect, close connectedness, and self-esteem (positive self-regard). We also expected that recalled saudade would not be associated with negative affect and loneliness.

## Method

### Participants

Participants were 68 undergraduates from University of Oporto (63 women, 5 men). Ages ranged from 18 to 44 years ( $M = 20.49$ ;  $SD = 4.55$ ). As in Study 1, they were randomly assigned to one of two conditions: recalled saudade vs. control.

### Material and procedure

To assess the level to which students in Study 2 experienced saudade, the same scale as the one employed in Study 1 – the Frequency of Saudade Scale – was applied. Also, to assess the effect of the experimental manipulation, the same manipulation check scale as the one employed in Study 1 was used.

The other items employed were taken from four scales. The first one was the Portuguese version of Watson et al.'s (1988) Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (Simões, 1993). The Cronbach alphas for positive and negative affect were .86 and .81, respectively. This time, the full set of 20 emotions was employed. Participants indicated how often they generally experience each emotion using a 5-point scale (1 = not at all, 5 = extremely). The second and the third scales were the short Close Connectedness Scale and the Loneliness Scale used in Study 1.

The fourth one was the Portuguese version of Rosenberg's (1965) 10-item Self-Esteem Scale (Neto, 1996; Neto & Mullet, 2004). The Cronbach alpha was .86. A sample item was: "On the whole I am satisfied with myself". Participants indicated their level of agreement with each item using 4-point scale (1 = *totally disagree*; 4 = *totally agree*). The procedure was the same as in Study 1.

## Results and discussion

Seventy-four percent of participants indicated that they experienced

saudade at least once a week, 15% once or twice a month, 2% once every couple of months, and 9% once or twice a year. No significant differences were found between the experimental and the control conditions,  $\chi^2(68) = 6.16, p = .41$ .

Participants in the recalled saudade condition ( $M = 4.67$ ;  $SD = 1.16$ ) felt more saudade than those in the control condition ( $M = 2.09$ ;  $SD = 1.46$ ),  $F(1, 67) = 65.34$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .49$ . Participants' ratings of positive affect were significantly higher in the saudade condition ( $M = 2.79$ ;  $SD = .81$ ) than in the control condition ( $M = 2.22$ ;  $SD = .90$ ),  $F(1, 67) = 7.56$ ;  $p < .01$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .10$ . Participants' rating of close connectedness were also significantly higher in the saudade condition ( $M = 3.50$ ;  $SD = 1.24$ ) than in the control condition ( $M = 1.79$ ;  $SD = 1.08$ ),  $F(1, 67) = 36.92$ ;  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .36$ .

There were, however, no significant differences between conditions regarding negative affect and loneliness. In both cases, mean ratings were very close: 1.31 ( $SD = .33$ ) and 1.47 ( $SD = .56$ ) for negative affect; 1.51 ( $SD = .85$ ) and 1.42 ( $SD = 1.75$ ) for loneliness. Finally, for self-esteem there was no significant difference between the saudade condition ( $M = 3.23$ ;  $SD = .54$ ) and the control condition ( $M = 3.30$ ;  $SD = .46$ ).

Study 2 nicely replicated the main findings observed in Study 1: Recalled saudade was positively associated with positive affect, and with close connectedness. Contrary to what was expected, however, recalled saudade was not associated with self-esteem. This result was not consistent with previous findings showing an association between positive self-regard and nostalgia.

## Study 3

Study 3 had two objectives. Firstly, it was aimed at overcoming another limitation in Study 1 regarding the nature of the sample, i.e. all were university students, and therefore adults living in the community were enrolled. Secondly, it was aimed at examining the association between recalled saudade and one additional construct: Inspiration.

Inspiration is an evoked experience involving transcendence of ordinary preoccupations and motivating goal pursuit or behaviour (Thrash & Elliot, 2003). Inspiration has been shown to be positively associated with nostalgia (Stephan et al., 2015): Nostalgia proneness was linked with the frequency and strength of the experience of inspiration. Also, nostalgic events were shown to produce greater general inspiration and greater inspiration to engage in novel activities in specific domains than other kinds of events.

Based on Silva's (2012) analysis, on the results observed in Studies 1 and 2, and on findings by Stephan et al. (2015), we expected that recalled saudade among adults would also be positively associated with positive affect, and with inspiration. We also expected that recalled saudade among adults would not be associated with negative affect. Close connectedness and loneliness were not considered in this study.

## Method

### Participants

Participants were 188 adults living in the Lisbon area of Portugal (150 women, 38 men). Ages ranged from 19 to 62 years ( $M = 41.72$ ;  $SD = 10.80$ ). Sixty-six participants were assigned to the control condition and 112 to the saudade condition. There were no significant differences between conditions regarding age and gender.

### Materials

To assess the level to which adults experienced saudade, the same scale as the one employed in Studies 1 and 2 – the Frequency of Saudade Scale – was applied. Also, to assess the effect of the manipulation, the same scale as the one employed in Studies 1 and 2 was used.

The other items employed were taken from two scales. The first was, as in Study 2, the Portuguese version of the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (Simões, 1993). The second was the Portuguese version of Trash & Elliot's (2003) Inspiration Scale. A sample item was: "I am filled with inspiration". Participants indicated the level to which they feel inspired using a 6-point scale (1 = *totally disagree*; 6 = *totally agree*). In this study the Cronbach alpha was .95.

## Results and discussion

Thirty-four percent of participants indicated that they experienced saudade at least once a day, 16% three to four times a week, 14% approximately twice a week (the median value), and 12% approximately once a week. No significant differences were found between the two conditions.

Participants in the recalled saudade condition ( $M = 4.76$ ;  $SD = 1.42$ ) felt more saudade than participants in the control condition ( $M = 3.05$ ;  $SD = 1.58$ ),  $F(1, 187) = 56.89$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .23$ . Participants' ratings of positive affect were significantly higher in the saudade condition ( $M = 3.45$ ;  $SD = 1.09$ ) than in the control condition ( $M = 2.95$ ;  $SD = 1.27$ ),  $F(1, 187) = 7.88$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .04$ . Participants' rating of close connectedness were also significantly higher in the saudade condition ( $M = 3.59$ ;  $SD = 1.36$ ) than in the control condition ( $M = 2.66$ ;  $SD = 1.38$ ),  $F(1, 187) = 19.95$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .10$ .

Participant's ratings of inspiration were also significantly higher in the saudade condition ( $M = 4.07$ ;  $SD = 1.49$ ) than in the control condition ( $M = 3.59$ ;  $SD = 1.51$ ),  $F(1, 187) = 4.37$ ;  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = 0.02$ . There was, however, no significant difference between conditions regarding negative affect. Mean ratings were very close: 1.89;  $SD = .88$  and 2.06;  $SD = 1.16$ .

Study 3 replicated on a sample of adults, some of the main findings observed in Study 1: Among adults, recalled saudade was positively associated with positive affect, and was not associated with negative affect. In addition, and as expected, recalled saudade was positively associated with the experience of inspiration. This result was consistent with previous findings by Stephan et al. (2015).

## General discussion

Although saudade has inspired thought and literature for centuries (Rodrigues, 1967; Lourenço, 1978; Botelho, 1990; Teixeira, 1996; Vasconcelos, 1996; Fanha & Letria, 2002; Noronha, 2007), empirical research on saudade within the field of psychology is scarce. This set of studies has provided findings that advance our understanding of saudade in several ways. Firstly, it showed that a large majority of Portuguese people (more than three-quarter) experience saudade at least once a week. This finding is in itself not surprising, but statistics of this kind are not readily available. Secondly, this set of studies has pointed out the feasibility of manipulating in-the-moment feelings of saudade. In all three studies, participants who were asked to recall a saudade event scored higher on a feeling-of-saudade scale than control participants.

Thirdly, the present set of studies provided preliminary insights into some psychological functions of saudade. Recalled saudade seemed to increase positive affect, bolster close bonds and enhance inspiration without impacting negative affect, loneliness and societal connectedness. These findings were largely consistent with results from previous studies on the closely related concept of nostalgia (Stephan et al., 2015; Vess et al., 2012). Although saudade is associated with negative aspects in Portuguese people's mind (e.g., sadness, missing someone, and missing something in Neto & Mullet's study, 2014), and fragile Portuguese people tend to experience saudade to a greater extent than robust people (Neto, 2019), saudade has positive effects.

These findings suggest that Portuguese participants in previous studies on saudade were sensitive to the circumstances in which

experiences of saudade occurred. They were, however, not sensitive to the consequences these experiences may have had on them. It is probably because circumstances and current mood states (e.g., feeling alone) are more easily detected or assessed than changes in mood states (e.g., small increase in positive affect).

An intriguing difference between the current findings and the ones reported in previous studies has been found: Recalled saudade did not affect self-esteem. This difference may be due (a) to the fact that positive self-regard (Wildschut et al., 2006) is substantially different from self-esteem or (b) to the fact that induced nostalgia is substantially different from recalled saudade. Future research including measurements of self-esteem, positive self-regard, recalled and induced nostalgia, and recalled and induced saudade would be needed to shed light on this difference. The same device could also be used to understand the reasons why nostalgia and saudade impact negative affect differently.

The finding that recalled saudade (and induced nostalgia) seems to promote positive affect and inspiration suggests practical implications in several domains. Future research in the domain of therapy, for example, would shed light on the effect of recalled saudade on psychological well-being (for example, among depressed people). In the same way, future research in the domain of education would shed light on the effect of saudade on school performance (for example, in literature) or on creativity in organizations.

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