# Olfactive frames of remembering: theorizing self, senses and society

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#### **Abstract**

By analysing sensorial aspects of social memory and emotions, this paper theorizes the social significance of olfaction and other senses towards reconfigurations of self and social interactions through embodied identity work. The research question that this paper addresses is: how is the self perceived through memories that are mediated by smells? Olfactive frames of remembering are employed in order to explicate sensory meta-narratives including sensory relations (pertaining to familial and other ties), sensory memory, time and space, and sensory scapes. This article also elucidates upon the various moral, cultural and aesthetic codes that may be discerned in biographical narrations of social actors drawn from narrative interviews. Furthermore, it highlights a need to consider sensorial-bodily experiences in qualitative inquiry and thereby conceptualize how actors articulate their sense of self, and how they reformulate their experiences and relationships with others vis-à-vis emotional discourses of happiness, sadness and nostalgia in the maintenance and continuity of selfhood. The paper therefore contributes to sensuous scholarship by explicating how smells and memories operate in conjunction toward shaping self-identity and social relations.

Keywords: smells, senses, memory, biography, embodied identity work

#### Introduction

In 'The Sociology of Odours', Largey and Watson (1972) draw attention to the social relevance of smells by examining the sociocultural meanings and functions of olfaction through secondary data analysis. Their arguments convey the varying associations of smell, identity, and sociality where they explain how olfactive transgressions such as body odours, farting, or the lack of hygienic practices lead to the conferment of a moral identity onto an individual. It follows that one's olfactory identity mediates both social distance and social proximity, where the authors contend that such an identity 'is particularly associated with racial, class, and sexual identification' (1972: 1028).

The creation of social distance between actors occurs when malodours are thought to be emanating from discredited racial minorities and the lower classes, thereby explaining how the sense of smell and the associations that are

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constructed around it account for social avoidance or discrimination. Conversely, scents perceived to be pleasing appeal to individuals that indicate the importance of managing one's presentation of self in producing a 'socially acceptable olfactory identity' (Largey and Watson, 1972: 1027). This identity, as Largey and Watson posit, is maintained through practices of deodorizing and odourizing in removing malodours and perfuming respectively. Departing from Largey and Watson's work, social science and humanities research on smell (and the other senses) have burgeoned in the last few decades. Scholars in the fields of sociology, anthropology, geography, history and others ruminate on the salience of olfaction and other senses that operate across different aspects of social life (for example, Almagor, 1990; Cohen, 1988; Porteous, 1985; Synnott, 1991).

Recent studies which pay attention to olfaction address the intimate connections between smell, place and memory (Beer, 2007; Roubin, 2006; Śliwa and Riach, 2012), the importance of smell (and the other senses) in fieldwork and ethnographic writing (Low, 2009, 2012; Pink, 2004, 2009; Wacquant, 2006), and the dynamics between different social groups such as locals and migrant others interacting through embodied multicultural interfaces (Manalansan, 2006; Wise and Chapman, 2005). Collectively, these works depict the social salience of olfaction, echoing similar directions presented in Largey and Watson's (1972) endeavour. Developing from extant discussions on smell, identity and memory (Waskul and Vannini, 2008; Waskul et al., 2009), the research question that this paper addresses is: how is the self perceived through memories that are mediated by smells? In order to deliberate upon this problematic, the paper is structured vis-à-vis two connected strands of analysis. One, it focuses on olfaction and its sociocultural meanings constructed by social actors that bring about a sensory appraisal of social ties and self-identity. Two, and following from the first strand, the article proposes that embodied experiences and relations connected to smell and other senses merit consideration in the practice and dissemination of qualitative inquiry. The paper therefore contributes to sensuous scholarship (Stoller, 1997; Vannini et al., 2012) by explicating how smells and memories operate in conjunction toward shaping self-identity and social relations.

The first strand on sociocultural meanings of smell in relation to self-identity is elucidated by my employment of four olfactive frames of remembering as an organizing schematic – broadly, what Goffman would term as individuals' 'structure of experience' (1974: 13; see also, Irwin-Zarecka, 1994: 4) – in analysing sensorial biographical reconstructions (Waskul and Vannini, 2008). These frames comprise childhood memories, familial relationships, relationships with partners, as well as memories of difficult times and hardship. The discussion to follow will deliberate on (1) olfactive and other sensorial outlets as triggers of memory; (2) olfactive memory which affects behaviour and attitude in the present day context; (3) nostalgia and food consumption; and (4) olfactive-spatial links. Together, these frames of remembering are useful toward theorizing meta-narratives which include sensory relations (pertaining

to familial and other ties), sensory memory, time and space, and sensoryscapes (Degen, 2008; Śliwa and Riach, 2012). These spheres of sensorial experiences therefore contribute toward understanding the senses as media of knowing, where smells are conduits that are often associated with experiences, people and places (Classen *et al.*, 1994; Low, 2005). As a corollary, the meta-narratives correspondingly illuminate moralities, values and social norms (Classen *et al.*, 1994) that are connected to sensorial reconfigurations of the self. Furthermore, I argue alongside Misztal (2003) that the study of remembering the past needs to locate the embodiedness in which the past is being recollected, for embodiedness draws attention to how our bodily sensations and feelings that were generated in the past, aid in interpreting previous and current experiences. I refer to olfactory sensations employed by respondents in reconstructing their past, and how such sensory relevances may have consequences in present-day encounters.

Data presented in this paper are drawn from narrative interviews conducted both in person and through email correspondence with 36 male and 35 female respondents with ages ranging between 20 and 45.² Following the phenomenological approach (Hockey and Allen-Collinson, 2009; Schutz, 1970), the interviews usually began with me posing a broad question – 'Tell me about your smell experiences' – so as to invite respondents to offer a flow of narration (ie 'stream of consciousness') which they so choose to share. In this manner, I took the lead from individual informants that thus led us to talking about olfactive stories and experiences which concerned him/her the most. The main objective of the interviews was to locate and explain how smell forms an intermediary towards evaluating everyday life experiences in varying contexts of sociality (see Low, 2009).

The second strand that has to do with embodying qualitative research is proposed in the context of recent debates (Gillies *et al.*, 2004; Kleinman and Kleinman, 1994; Pink, 2009; Sandelowski, 2002; Wacquant, 2006) which touch on embodied practices and the senses of both researchers and their informants. Gillies *et al.*, for instance, locate the use of memory work among themselves as a way to explore embodied practices of sweating and pain. They focus on the 'socially constructed nature of bodily processes from an embodiment standpoint' (2004: 100), which articulate both the discursive and non-discursive. Consequently, the authors argue that embodied experiences transpire through practices, activities and events which take place within the larger social world. Attention paid to embodied discourses in memories of sweat and pain therefore addresses how bodily practices influence one's identity and subjectivity.

Sandelowski (2002) argues that qualitative inquiry that relies on the interview has led to research which is far from being 'full-bodied' as it should be. She points out that there is thus a need to embody qualitative inquiry so as to move beyond Western cultural preoccupations which separate body from mind, as such approaches veil the potential of locating the body as a 'point of departure for any process of knowing' (2002: 104). Besides, Sandelowski also

discusses the inadequacy of participant observation, which usually does not take into account the role of the senses of the researcher. She argues that there is a tendency to think of observation as merely involving the act of looking. Instead, it should incorporate all of the researcher's senses. Adopting this approach means that there is recognition of the senses as an avenue of embodied awareness, where participant observation is enhanced in that both the bodies of the respondents and the researcher are accorded due attention (Pink, 2009), thus making qualitative research more 'full-bodied', robust, and richly textured (Sandelowski, 2002).

In line with the attempt to embody qualitative inquiry, and taking the lead from the works of authors discussed above, this paper emphasizes the ways by which social actors recollect their past experiences with smell as a conduit of memory recall. Additionally, I argue that olfactive-memory recollections become imbued with emotional qualities (Dorland, 1993; Misztal, 2003; Vroon, 1994; Waskul *et al.*, 2009) which also contribute to the reconstruction of one's identity. The analyses to follow will show how actors project their sense of self, and how they reformulate their experiences and relationships with others vis-à-vis emotional discourses of happiness, sadness, and nostalgia (cf. Waskul and Vannini, 2008). Embodied processes of remembering therefore throw light upon how memories are both socially and physiologically experienced. Subsequently, one's identity is contingent on such olfactive memories that informants narrate and evaluate.

Extant literature on identity work is animated by some salient ideas from which I outline three that are consistent with the directions undertaken here. Identity work involves, first, the role of memory that fashions self. Mead (1934) argues that the self is anchored upon past experiences where selective distillation of one's memory then results in the reformulation of self. In other words, identity is constructed from experience. As an extension, the act of recollecting one's past is also a sense act (Waskul *et al.*, 2009), given that 'sensuous experience . . . is grounded in previous experience and expectation' (Rodaway, 1994: 5). Through memory recall, the self is thus contextualized within a particular place, time and situated vis-à-vis social others where odours form a medium that defines both individuals and groups (Synnott, 1991; Waskul *et al.*, 2009). I discuss later, how smells and other senses function as memory triggers (Almagor, 1990; Shulman, 2006) and show how sensory experiences connect to self and embodied identity work (Pagis, 2009; Vannini *et al.*, 2012).

The second idea has to do with the links between moral and aesthetic codes and identity work (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). Given that odours are usually appraised in either positive or negative ways, scents are therefore not merely physiological but moral phenomena (Synnott, 1993). When people are olfactorily perceived as pungent, the implication is that they are not only physically transgressive, but morally questionable as well (Low, 2009; Synnott, 1993). In this manner, the odour becomes, in Synnott's (1993: 190) words, a 'symbol of the self' where it concurrently represents the self as both a 'physical

and a moral being'. The narratives that informants offer in their scent-sual recollections indicate that one's identity and that of others are built upon olfactive recounts, thereby reiterating Largey and Watson's (1972) proposition concerning how moral identities may be explained vis-à-vis olfactory associations.

The final idea relates to how a comprehension of self is enacted in relation to others (Goffman, 1959; Jenkins, 2004; Mead, 1934; Watson, 2008). The attitudes of these other individuals are taken up through communication that brings about the experience of one's individual identity (see Mead, 1934: 138). How individuals formulate their own identity is dependent on others as 'necessary foils' (Jenkins, 2004: 49). This also means that identity work is an interactive process and involves the social environment of which an individual forms a part. In this environment, different dyadic relationships that individuals share in their familial and other circles therefore furnish social ties where identity work takes place through the management of relationships that include parent-child, significant partners and other social relations, to be explicated below. Essentially, theorizing the nexus of sensory experiences and memory reconstructions offers further insights into processes of 'embodied identity work' (Waskul *et al.*, 2009: 11) that are closely related to the maintenance and continuity of selfhood.

## Smells, memories and personhood

In the fields of physiology and psychology, scholars have attempted to study the relation between smells and memories (for example, Aggleton and Waskett, 1999; Cann and Ross, 1989; Herz et al., 2004; Rubin et al., 1984). Most argue that smells form effective cues in one's memory recollection, and draw references to the Proustian phenomenon (Proust, 1982), a famous episode whereby Proust waxes lyrical about his childhood and his auntie, after having dipped a madeleine biscuit into his tea:

An exquisite pleasure had invaded my senses, something isolated, detached, with no suggestion of its origin . . . And suddenly the memory revealed itself. The taste was that of the little piece of Madeleine which on Sunday mornings at Combray, when I went to say good morning to her in her bedroom, my aunt Léonie used to give me, dipping it first in her own cup of tea or tisane. (1982: 48, 50)

He goes on to explain the evocative power of the merging of smell and taste which elicited such vivid recollections (1982: 50–1):

But when from a long-distant past nothing subsists, after the people are dead, after the things are broken and scattered, taste and smell alone, more fragile but more enduring, more unsubstantial, more persistent, more

faithful, remain poised a long time, like souls, remembering, waiting, hoping, amid the ruins of all the rest; and bear unflinchingly, in the tiny and almost impalpable drop of their essence, the vast structure of recollection.

Proust's anecdote does possess biological bearings, as Winter notes (1976: 17–8):

Our olfactory ability is ten thousand times more sensitive than our sense of taste . . . Unlike the signals of the other senses, which first go through the brain's relay system, the thalamus, smell messages go directly to the behaviour centres and are therefore least subject to rational self-control. Aromas, as a result, can bring back memories or move us to actions without our even realising it.

The Proustian episode, coupled with Winter's explanation, point not only to the effectiveness of olfaction in evoking memories, but also illustrate the contention that odours evoke memory recollection which are usually emotionally loaded (Cann and Ross, 1989; Chu and Downes, 2000a, 2000b; Ehrlichman and Bastone, 1992). This is similarly suggested by Herz *et al.*, who argue that 'when a cue is presented in its olfactory form, memories are more emotional as indicated by self-report and physiological responses, such as heightened heartrate, than memories evoked by the same cue presented in other sensory forms' (2004: 371).

I now turn to other areas of debate concerning how smells and the other senses become embroiled in recollections of past events. I shall pay particular attention to the notion of embodied experiences, and how this reflects upon the need to re-evaluate the nature of conducting qualitative research. Such research, I contend, ought to encompass the senses as ways of knowing and constructing social experiences and realities. Sutton (2001) explores the relationship between food and memory on the island of Kalymnos, Greece. He proposes that food possesses the ability to evoke memories, and deliberates upon the interrelationships between food, memory, embodiment and culture. Locating the receipt of food packages by Kalymnians across transnational borders (cf. Abdullah, 2010), Sutton suggests that the senses of smell and taste act as triggers of memories; specifically for people who were away from their homeland. The senses therefore become messengers of one's past experience (in this case, of 'home'), evoking at the same time, 'emotional/embodied plenitude' (2001: 82).

Additionally, Seremetakis argues that memory 'cannot be confined to a purely mentalist or subjective sphere. [Instead, it] is a culturally mediated material practice that is activated by embodied acts and semantically dense objects' (1994: 9). Understood this way, memory 'is the horizon of sensory experiences, storing and restoring the experience of each sensory dimension in another, as well as dispersing and finding sensory records outside of the body in a surround of entangling objects and places' (1994: 9). Through her fieldwork in rural and urban Greece, Seremetakis (1994: 28) clarifies:

Sensory memory is a form of storage. Storage is always the embodiment and conservation of experiences, persons and matter . . . The awakening of the senses is awakening the capacity for memory, of tangible memory; to be awake is to remember, and one remembers through the senses.

In sum, literature on the senses and memories exemplify the salience of locating embodied ways of remembering. Hence, it is pertinent to draw out and analyse the ways by which memory and the senses point towards our embodied ways of being, in both contexts of the past and present that in the process reflect upon identity work.

## Olfactive frames of remembering

This part of the paper discusses olfactive frames of remembering in relation to (1) childhood memories; (2) familial relationships; (3) relationships with partners; and (4) memories of difficult times and hardship. These four dimensions will then be discussed vis-à-vis different themes of memory narration in the next section, where I show how memories evoked by smell are often linked to different emotional states of being, and how they are also intertwined with the other senses.

The first two frames of childhood memories and familial relationships often contain themes involving nostalgia, comfort and freedom. These are exemplified as follows:

Judith:

Like for example, my grandmother is a *Teochew*, and now that she is not around anymore, whenever I walk past a person's house who happens to be cooking some *Teochew* dishes, it reminds me of her . . . It is just simple dishes like steamed fish and braised duck especially. In the past, my granny used to stay in Bedok where we will gather every week. At that point of time, all the cousins are young and we had lots of fun playing together at the old house. Ever since my granny moved house to Pasir Ris, and we cousins started growing older, we hardly have so much fun. So when I smell *Teochew* dishes it just reminds me of times in Bedok.

Keith:

Example of my experience with smell is that of the bathing soap. The soap can make me recall the different stage of my life . . . Once I came across a shop carry these soaps in Malaysia, it immediately rekindled the memory I had with this soap in my younger days . . . The green soap was very popular in the early '70s and '80s . . . In its heydays, every household in my *kampong* would boast of owning it. Thus it reminds me of my childhood memories in the *kampong*. I used to walk barefoot and had a crew-cut hair. I had a few childhood friends and we used to play

marbles and catch fish in the drain ... The soap has a unique smell unlike the perfume soap. Its smell is very close to antiseptic lotion.

Ostensibly, the above accounts illustrate the evocative powers of smell that elicit respondents' narrations of their childhood, providing hints of nostalgia with regard to missing a dear family member, or recounting experiences of the 'good old days'. Waskul and Vannini argue that nostalgia 'is a form of attachment to habits . . . which play a powerful role in sense-making . . . as a form of sentimental selective attention' (2008: 59). Such reminiscences are filled with positive and pleasant events, as Leigh describes:

I do remember smells that have stuck in my mind from when I was young which used to bring back memories of really positive times such as my granny's homemade soup. Thinking of that made me think of the times I went to visit her in Aberdeen . . . My granny's soup probably smelt salty. It was fresh vegetable soup probably made with meat stock. I probably wouldn't even like the smell of it now but as a child I rarely had fresh food. Cooking was not my mum's strong point so we mostly ate frozen goods such as burgers and fish fingers. So I associated the smell of my granny's soup just with visiting her which was on rare occasions. I think the smell becomes a positive association for me because my home life was very chaotic. I lived in a tiny council house with my parents who didn't have a lot of money and didn't particularly get on. Then there [were] my three older brothers and little sister. We are all very different. So I rarely had space or time to myself or to get away from the tensions. When I was old enough I began to visit my granny in Aberdeen alone ... so the thought of her soup definitely stimulated memories that were happy. If I were to smell it now, and once a few years ago I caught a whiff of a similar smell, it would conjure lots of feelings and memories.

In Leigh's case, it is interesting to note that the smell of her grandmother's soup characterized not only her recollection of her childhood days, but acted as an avenue of solace and comfort, given her 'chaotic' life back home with her parents and siblings. Such a smell is also effective in drawing forth Leigh's accounts of her relationship with her immediate family, as compared to her grandmother and cousins. Smell, in this case, allows Leigh to re-experience her life in different familial settings, displaying an obvious case of positive/negative associations with paying her grandmother a visit, and living with her immediate family respectively. In sum, 'smells can be memory releasers for the reconstruction of one's childhood' (Porteous, 1990: 22), where the above precision of recollection contexts demonstrate the evaluative aspects of one's identity that is reconstructed through nostalgia. Leigh's well-being, in retrospect, was located not within her natal family but through her extended kin ties that were mediated and recalled through smell and fresh foods. As Davis

(1979) and Wilson (2005) both note, nostalgia serves as a channel through which one's earlier self may be located and employed to assess the present self in the continual process of identity construction. Sensory perception in memory making therefore represents a 'significant form of identity work' where a 'past sense of self' connects to a present one (Vannini *et al.*, 2012: 96). Such identity work has to do with 'old selves' (*ibid.*) that are evoked through olfactive recollections.

Where the frames of childhood memories and familial relationships show up issues of freedom, nostalgia and pleasant/unpleasant experiences, the third frame of smells eliciting experiences with one's former partners/relationships also elucidate upon similar emotions, though in some cases, they may also provoke less positive encounters and attitudes. It seems as if perfumes are powerful triggers for reminding one of his/her ex-partners, and that different scents characterize different relationships. For instance, Kate recounts:

When I smell *Calvin Klein Eternity* for men, I have an emotional attachment to it, because that was what my ex-boyfriend used to wear. And when I smell erm . . . *Escada* for men, that triggers off another chain of memory, because that was what some other guy I used to go out with used to wear.

The ways in which specific scents evoke memories of one's former partner is also relevant for male respondents:

Horace: Smells also remind me of my first love. Whenever I catch a

whiff of white musk, I remember her instantly! Same goes for another girl I had a crush on in University . . . if I smell *Clairol* 

shampoo on someone, I remember her.

Jerome: Davidoff Cool Water for women to be exact. Every time I smell

this smell it will remind me of my past relationship as this girl used to put this particular perfume. As for the perfume smell, whenever I smell that particular scent, it always reminds me of my ex-girlfriend's face. No particular events come to my mind,

but just her face.

The experiences of both Horace and Jerome, similar to Kate, show that memories of smells – in this case, specific fragrances – denote and bring forth recollections of their individual experiences with different individuals as aesthetic codes (Waskul and Vannini, 2008). Furthermore, Jerome shares that the perfume would not only conjure up memories of his ex-girlfriend, but also, an image of her face. This thus hints at the workings of the olfactive and the visual sense.

While different fragrances lead one to recall memories of experiences with various individuals whom one was close to, another respondent, Hazel, stressed that she would not want future partners to put on the same scents as her ex-partners. She emphasized the need for an olfactory-memory demarcation:

Certain fragrances remind me of people too, like ex-boyfriends ... Ok, I remember one of my ex-boyfriends using a certain *Hugo Boss* perfume, and another, *Davidoff's Cool Water*. So every time I catch a whiff of these fragrances, I'd be reminded of them at once. I'm quite neutral to the perfumes my ex-boyfriends wore actually. But I wouldn't want future boyfriends to wear the same scents because of the association. I don't fancy the idea of reminders of ex-boyfriends when in a new relationship, so ... yeah.

Hazel's need to have boyfriends who wear different scents point to the ways in which particular memories with specific individuals are characterized by certain smells, and hence, the olfactory-memory demarcation is necessary so as not to be reminded of one's past relationships while being with someone at the present moment. For her, there should preferably be no intermingling, or rather replication, of scents associated with her partners in her life. This indicates how smells become distinctive signifiers for social actors' different phases in their life trajectories, where olfactive memories of self and significant others form part of the process of identity work.

The fourth frame concerning memories of difficult times and hardship is apparent in Reichen's and Horace's cases. Reichen shares his memory of being at the hospital where his grandmother stayed, which evoked a strong emotional response. For Horace, the smell and taste of *Oreo* cookies brought him back to his army days that were fraught with immense unpleasantness. Reichen shares:

[P]erhaps smell, along with sight would go hand in hand in triggering one's memories about a certain place . . . by hospital smells, I am thinking of the smells of medicine, a very disinfecting smell cos maybe to kill the germs and bacteria? But it has a distinctive smell that one can instantly recognise . . . the smell reminds me of the time when my grandmother was in the hospital, such that I would instantly associate hospital smells to the time when my grandmother was in hospital . . . and certainly the feeling was not pleasant . . . the hospital smells give me the greatest impression because it was directly related to my dearest family member, that's why I have such a strong feeling about this.

#### Horace recalls:

*Oreo* cookies smell remind me of extreme tiredness, loneliness and no freedom, because I always ate *Oreo* before doing the Standard Obstacle Course (SOC) in National Service. Somehow the association got established with SOC and all the associated unpleasantness. I have never eaten *Oreo* cookies since [army days]. The one time when I tried it again – *Oreo* ice-cream – I couldn't finish it and felt like throwing up. Hmmm ... since that the unpleasant association caused something physical too ... so I remember being very tired, sad, no freedom, discomfort and stuff.

Where Reichen points out that the sense of sight, alongside smell, is also involved in evoking one's memories of place and/or event, Horace talks about his bodily state which was provoked by the smell of *Oreo* cookies. More pertinently, his narrative discloses an explicit aversion to the cookies as a result of them being associated with his army days, an attitude which he carries into the present day context. In both cases, it is apparent that the sense of smell works alongside sight, and taste respectively, in one's reconstruction of past experiences. This goes to show the multi-sensorial nature of memory recall, where synesthetic processes become involved in one's narration and re-experience of the past. On top of that, both their memory reconstructions emplace them within specific social roles that are emotionally revisited through olfactive recall, situated within embodied social contexts. I take up this point on emotions in the next section, where I deliberate upon the four frames in relation to different dimensions of memory recollection and affect.

## Framing olfactive memories - emotions, affect and habitus

The four frames of olfactive remembrance above indicate not merely different episodic memories (Vroon, 1994: 95) as reconstructed by social actors, but they are certainly intertwined with other notions of emotional association, multi-sensoriality and nostalgia. Filled with emotional weight, odours are said to 'influence mood, evoke powerful experiences of pleasure or displeasure, produce alertness or relaxation, and evoke long-forgotten emotional memories' (Ehrlichman and Bastone, 1992: 411). Ostensibly, the relation between smells and emotion makes it profitable to include them in a study of affective experience and identity work. Following this, I offer a heuristic conceptualization of affect, relating olfactive memories, affect and emotion.

Affect, according to McKay, is understood as a 'deep-seated physiological change written involuntarily on the face as emotion' (2005: 77). By extension, the 'senses are generators of affect, whether it arises through interactions with the environment or other people, as a necessary precursor to emotion' (*ibid.*). In this sense, affect is first experienced as a bodily encounter, and later named and re-experienced through social relations and culture (Leavitt, 1996). In order to bridge a connection between emotions, smells and memories, it is necessary to locate how physiological experiences of affect which elicit emotional responses are situated within everyday life encounters. To address this, I refer to McKay's discussion concerning emotion and Bourdieu's habitus. She explains (2005: 78):

Habitus works as a practical sense of moving through place, producing the embodied, sensual rituals of everyday life. The visibly embodied aspect of habitus is called hexis. Together, habitus and hexis make up our habitual patterns of understanding and inhabiting the world, creating the places we

inhabit and acting as the ground for subjectivity. Habitus – as this practical sense of place and subjectivity – maps emotion onto experiences of affect.

McKay proposes a model where 'stimulus produces bodily responses (affect) that are then filtered through habitus into emotions (as self-perceived) and emotional performances' (2005: 78).

I find McKay's model useful as it relates poignantly to what respondents have shared with me based on olfactive recounts of experiences of places, thereby allowing a theorization of how smells frame one's experiences and memories. In particular, respondents' characterizations of memories of place involve olfaction as a medium of recognition and placement:

Russell: I would relate . . . a certain smell to being in England . . . when

I was in UK, you can actually tell . . . I mean most UK houses smell of bacon anyway. You know, er, because the carpeting, the upholstery . . . the kind of fabric that they use in the living

room, it absorbs all the bacon . . . the fine bacon smell.

Horace: Lavender essential oils remind me of my New Zealand trips

because that was when I used it. It's interesting because once that association is formed, the memories get mixed up with all my previous 2 New Zealand trips taken 12 years and 5 years ago. There's the same association with my *Nivea* men's face wash. I used it everyday in New Zealand, and now, whenever I feel like I wanna remember, I use that face wash to trigger and

indulge.

Sybil: When I was in Paris last year, I bought a little bottle of perfume

from Zara. When I wear it back here, memories of shopping at the wonderful Galleries Lafayette would spring to mind. Not to mention how badly I want to jet back to Paris for more shop-

ping and glorious cheese!

These recollections demonstrate how smell acts as a conduit by which it characterizes one's experience in a particular place and time. Smells offer a demarcation of specific experience in an olfactively pinpointed locale. Hence, olfactive 'trips' to these places would throw light upon the ways in which one's memories and experiences are demarcated by olfactive-spatial associations, and in these three cases, mainly overseas encounters.

The notion of relating smells to space is not a new exercise. Porteous coins the term 'smellscapes' to suggest that

smells may be spatially ordered or place-related . . . Smellscape, moreover, cannot be considered apart from the other senses . . . In combination with vision and tactility, smell and the other apparently 'non-spatial' senses provide considerable enrichment of our sense of space and the character of place. (1985: 359–60)

Additionally, Urry points out that the 'power of smell can be analysed in terms of the diverse "smellscapes" that organise and mobilise people's feelings about particular places' (2000: 96–97). Where Porteous and Urry talk about smells that are situated within specific locations as real and experienced, my examples drawn from respondents differ in the sense that instead of picking up smells they described from the actual locales, their experience with these places is brought about by the smells which they use or encounter at these places. This difference can be explicated by referring back to McKay's model of habitus, affect and emotions.

McKay's take on habitus relates to the experience of place, intertwined with affect and emotions. The notion of embodied rituals of everyday life (such as olfactive encounters) in different habitus-locales or sensoryscapes (in this case, London, New Zealand and Paris), end up producing olfactive-affect bodily knowledge mapped through emotional associations. In Horace's case, his account of New Zealand clearly shows the association of positive emotions of enjoyment in his experience of the country. As he puts it, 'whenever I feel like I wanna remember, I use that face wash to *trigger and indulge*'. For him, he links his experience in New Zealand with the particular scent of *Nivea* face wash, and shares that using the same brand of facial wash allows him to re-enact this overseas experience. He opines:

I think the association and resulting recollection is automatic, not a conscious 'remembering'. It's like a knee jerk reaction. I can't control the initial flood of memories or feelings, but after the initial flash, then it's a choice – do I choose to go on indulging and thinking of the past, or just choose to think of something else.

Horace's emotional attachment to New Zealand shows up with smell as an elicitor of memory and place. In this respect, the triadic relationship between habitus, affect and emotions stands, contributing towards a clearer understanding of spatial perception and emotions, to which I add the role and influence of olfactive memories on affect and emotions. Aesthetic notions of nostalgia, familiarity and comfort also emerge when one recollects the embodied past. These are seen in the following cases:

Gretchen:

Hmmm, perhaps smells of food which reminds and translates into my grandmother's cooking. I think one of my friends mentioned about her grandmother's cooking also sometime not long ago. Her grandmother is not around anymore though. If I remembered correctly, we were in some shopping mall and happened to smell a whiff of something. Then she started telling me about her grandmother's culinary skills, how nice her food was, and how none of her family members could make that kind of food anymore.

Abbv:

Years ago I used to carry around a little square of paper with a squirt of X's aftershave on it, and smell it to remind me of him. Particularly if we were distanced from each other for any period of time. As soon as I sniffed it I felt happy, as I thought about him. It sounds incredibly corny, but my heart would do a little flutter! Smell was a power memory tool that took me back and inserted me into a different time or event. I miss the feeling of smelling him and having that happy feeling come back from the familiarity of his smell and of the memories associated with it. Does that make sense?

Zachary:

I do remember loving the smell of my high school girlfriend's clothes, and the odours always reminded me of adventures we'd have together, both in public and private. I can still remember thinking of her many, many years later after realising the same odour around me; too bad it was in the laundry detergent isle at the local market. I did have quite an infatuation for her, and that may have had a lot to do with it . . . Other experiences would include the smell of chickens that reminded me of my childhood; burning leaves we've covered, dirt from childhood play, exhaust and burning rubber from races, smoke from fireworks, the odour in the air just after rain has started falling, autumn leaves, spring flowers, horse barns . . .

In these three accounts, a common theme of the good old days, notions of comfort and felicity emerge as respondents recount their pasts with smell as an intermediary of memory reconstruction. Furthermore, these sensory narrations also indicate a confluence of sensory memory, time and space that remain etched in these social actors' reconstructions of their biographies, demonstrating a somatic maintenance of self that culminates from one's sensory encounters. Through such evaluative encounters, respondents situate and evaluate their social experiences within a particular phase of their lives, and in relation to specific individuals that throw light upon their various relationships. These nostalgic recollections of particular scents therefore contribute to how the embodied self relates to others (cf. Rosenwald and Ochberg, 1992) in a manner that illustrates the meaningfulness of both intimate ties and sensation. As Vannini et al. (2012: 89) likewise argue, sensations engender 'feelings of attachment' that are integral towards the establishment and continuity of selfhood and identity vis-à-vis significant others. In Zachary's case, he hints at the workings of the other senses tactility, sight and sound – which also contribute towards his reconstruction of nostalgia and familiarity.

As a corollary of the link between olfactive memories and emotions, I now locate the influence of such memories on one's present-day encounters. By arguing for a sense of affective continuity based on olfactory

identification of experience, it will be shown how such identification influences one's attitude in similar olfactory encounters. Kate's memory of her father has brought about the association of alcohol with men, thereby indicating her repulsion:

In clubs . . . the smell of liquor triggers off a lot of memories for me . . . Ok erm . . . because my father used to . . . beat up my mum ok, so when I was really young, not really young, when I was in secondary school, he drinks ok. So I remember like every single Sunday right, he will go drinking and then he will come back and then he will . . . he will reek of . . . erm . . . alcohol. And then, he will get all pukey and puke on the floor, and then he will start beating my mum up and all. So like the other day I went to a wedding dinner . . . and . . . they had red wine all over. And then the smell came out you know? And then straightaway like, I got very depressed after that. I got very upset, then I was grumpy . . . I was dressed so nicely and I was so excited for the wedding dinner, but then the minute the smell came out . . . [the] whole experience was negative, like . . . I felt crappy, and then like I thought of what happened . . . it's a bit far-fetched but it was really bad . . . So the smell of liquor is a bad thing. I don't like it, ya.

She further explains how the association of alcohol and men turns her off:

That's why like when I go to clubs right, I go with friends who don't drink. And when my friends drink right . . . I don't get close to them. And if the guys who come to me drink, I don't even bother talking to them, because I don't like the smell of alcohol . . . And I'm usually on the dance floor and you can't drink on the dance floor, so it's not too bad. But the minute like, someone speaks to me and he's got alcohol breath, I'm like, ok, ok, turn-off, take note. So every single guy I go out with cannot drink. The minute they drink, I say that's it. . . . The last time there was this guy he was drinking lah, and then ... basically he reasserted my point that all guys who drink are bastards. Because he was drinking obviously, but it wasn't so strong yet, so he was dancing with me, and then what he did was . . . straightaway when he got close to me, he put his hand up my skirt you know. And the minute he did that, because he was so close to me, his whole breath stank of alcohol. So I'm like, huh, bastard. I'm right again. You know that sort of thing? Ya. So alcohol is a big no no . . . More often than not, I'm right lah. I think guys who drink ... no I'm not saying like a little bit, I'm talking about like drinking, drinking. Heavy drinking. Ya I think they are all shit . . . And my father was the best example.

Kate's narration reflects the influence of her association of liquor and men, and how such encounters impact upon her moral judgement of men and alcohol in the present-day context. This demonstrates a sense of continuity of memories and olfactive links, whereby the process of re-remembering imposes

moral meanings onto the encounter behind the smell of alcohol, translating into an aversion to this particular smell that is associated with men in general. Her narration echoes Warin and Dennis' contention:

Remembering, forgetting and re-remembering can provide multiple ways of being engaged with the past, present and future. The memories with which these processes engage may be continually recycled to throw light on the present and may point to both continuities and discontinuities of memory (2005: 160).

Misztal (2003: 80–81) argues similarly that emotional responses as affective states are 'inscribed in the body' where recollections of past experiences in one's biography colour experiences of the present.

Kate's experience is akin to Horace's encounter with *Oreo* cookies in the sense that olfactive associations in personal encounters, and the recalling of these experiences, are not merely 'once-learned associations' (Howes, 2003: 44). This argument also corresponds to what Waskul et al. have suggested with regard to the process of memory recollection, where 'the act of recalling is a form of somatic work: a sensual practice actively deployed as a vehicle that individuals use in their efforts to maintain self continuity over time' (2009: 17). Ostensibly, there is a sense of perpetuity and development which affect social actors, carrying their past into the present and future by operating upon scent-sual memory recollections in their discussions of what Classen et al. call 'value-coded odours' (1994: 3). In Horace's and Kate's cases, they have assigned aesthetic and moral codes onto smells respectively. Both are also aware of how such symbolic associations as self-relevant meanings may persist in their identification of self and others. Where Horace iterates the nostalgic association between the scent of facial wash and positive experiences of New Zealand, Kate's reasoning suggests that the moral association of alcohol and men engenders a negative evaluation of men who drink.

A final point that can be raised corresponds to Wieland's (2010) idea of how identity construction involves both 'saying' and 'doing'. In short, description and enactment account for the emergence of one's identity. For Horace, he is aware that a choice can be made to re-enact his experience of New Zealand by 'indulging and thinking' this previous episode as he explained to me. Where Kate is concerned, her account of alcoholism and moral lack leads to a conscious avoidance of male drinkers. In both contexts, they demonstrate active forms of identity construction as they are in effect answering the question of 'how should I act' (Alvesson *et al.*, 2008) in the process of communicatively constructing their respective identities. Mediated by smells and memory recounts, informants' varied narratives shed light on the processes of identitywork that is contingent upon time and place, and manifest in relation to social others.

#### Conclusion

Largey and Watson's (1972) work considers the social significance of smell that connects to different dimensions of identity and selfhood, where they suggested how one assumes and maintains an olfactory identity. In expanding upon their seminal ideas, this paper engaged with the main research question on how smells are important in memory recollections in relation to self-identity. By analysing how olfaction and other senses act as media of memory recollection, I have shown how the association of smells with particular past experiences have bearings upon one's social encounters in the present-day context. This therefore exhibits a sense of continuity in productions of selfhood vis-à-vis smell and the other senses as memory modes of embodied identity work. In this manner, such an experiential approach would generally avoid Cartesian dualisms of mind and body, thus enabling an acknowledgement of how bodily experiences and cognition are interrelated (Sutton, 2001). In addition, the data presented are also helpful towards elucidating how social roles, cultural norms and interactions are structured and negotiated through sensory experiences. Moral and aesthetic codes are evident in these processes of sensory recollections, which also involve a variety of familial and other relationship configurations, spatial characterization and relation to the environment, and both 'positive' and 'negative' emotive states. All of these shed light upon intentionality and agency through sensorial practices and how the self is continuously reconstituted (Pink, 2009). Employing olfactive frames of remembering as an organizing schema has therefore been useful in analysing patterns of socio-olfactory behaviour that social actors adopt in their processes of embodied identity work through different dimensions and in relation to social others.

Consequently, tapping into individuals' standpoint also reflects upon the social structure and order within which they are located (Mead, 1934). As Synnott (1991) has argued, odours are resources for which the individual and the group are defined. Smell and the other senses thereby form important indexes or discursive resources (Śliwa and Riach, 2012) for which social norms, moralities, emotions and aesthetics may be uncovered from the varied experiences of social actors. Furthermore, the paper has raised a need to re-embody qualitative inquiry, as sensuous ways of knowing can translate into social ways of knowing (Howes, 2003; Stoller, 1997). Warin and Dennis sum it up articulately: 'the experience of remembering is an embodied experience, which involves multisensual engagement with those places, objects, persons and experiences that are imbued with meaning and affect' (2005: 163). Further research on embodied reconstructions of the past through biographical narrations would therefore need to frame memory recollection within multi-sensorial dimensions, thereby indicating a need to interpret, beyond olfactive associations, other sensuous ways of remembering.

It is hoped that the paper has provided analytical purchase pertaining to the fields of social memory and sociocultural studies on the senses, by (1) theorizing through olfactive frames of remembering and their attendant thematic meta-narratives or 'sensory categories' (Pink, 2009), the intimate somatic connections and mediations between self, social others and social spaces (cf. Sparkes, 2009); and (2) by tabling a systematic methodological approach undertaken through narrative interviews and the documentation of sensory experiences. These approaches also indicate the importance of paying attention to how social actors know, experience and recollect their life experiences through sensuous biographical narrations as meaningful and embodied knowledge. Such knowledge fundamentally articulates how one's sense of self is derived on the basis of olfactive likes and dislikes, and how individuals also relate to one another (cf. Vannini et al., 2012) through olfactive encounters. In other words, biographical references to the senses form narrative resources through which the self is articulated and constructed over time within the context of sociality. Identity work is therefore contingent on scent-sual memory recall and the espousal of moral and aesthetic positions, accomplished through one's social relations.

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#### **Notes**

- 1 Goffman distinguishes the 'structure of experience' of individuals from the 'structure of social life' (1974: 13), where he is interested in the former notion in relation to any moment of an individual's social life.
- 2 This article is an extension of my previous research on sociocultural aspects of olfaction and the other senses in everyday life experiences (Low, 2009).

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