





structure, it can carry out several functions. Tulving (2002) separates the memory into two. One as episodic memory which stores events with their time and place that people experience and secondly as semantic memory which stores symbolic information about the world. The autobiographical memory consists of personal semantic information: where the person was born, knowledge about the self and personal memory information. This can also be called as the memory for the events of one's life (Holland & Kensinger, 2010, pp. 88-100).

In short, the autobiographical memory is called as a memory type which stores the knowledge about the self of a person (Brewer, 1986). The answers to the questions that individuals mostly ask themselves like "What kind of a person am I?", "Who am I?" and "Where am I?" are found in the memoirs which are stored in the autobiographical memory. The individual builds their own history by joining a group of events which he believes that define him in a way that will create an individual story (McLean & Pratt, 2006, pp.714-717). Information stored in the autobiographical memory is personal, specific, long-lasting and generally are about self-respect (Setliff and Marmurek, 2002; Conway & Rubin, 1994). The autobiographical memory tries to find the knowledge that individuals need in the present day by using their former experiences. Therefore, former experiences become an important stimulus for the present life (Singer, 1995, pp.429-435).

The beginning of the autobiographical memory is based on childhood years. With the storage of events into the memory that the child experienced starting from the infancy, the number of the memories increase and clusters are created. However, the distribution and the density of the autobiographical memories throughout the life differ in various periods of the life cycle. To give an example, when adults are asked to remember their experiences belonging to their childhood, it is seen that most of them remember nothing or too little a thing about their infancy and early-childhood (Rubin, 2006). Some of the models developed on the topics of encoding, storing and recalling the information in the autobiographical memory have focused on the subjective experiences during the process of recalling information that is stored in the memory. There are two basic metacognitive processes in remembering and delivering autobiographical recollections. Firstly, while remembering a specific event, the emotion of experiencing it *again* or the feeling that the person is *like really going through* it predominates. In this way, remembering and renewing subjective past events become possible. Another important element is believing its truth. There has to be a kind of awareness which depicts that the remembered event actually happened, which means it is not an imagination or a dream (Barclay, 1986; Harley, & Reese, 1999; Baddeley, 1992 ).

### **Functions of the Autobiographical Memory**

Functions of the autobiographical memory is a concept which includes the reasons why individuals need the autobiographical memory (Er&Yaşın, 2016, pp.61). There have been many studies conducted to determine and measure these needs (Er et al. 2008; Holland&Kessinger, 2010; Conway et al. 2002; Howe et al. 2003; Myers 2002). Many studies conducted over the recent years are based on the three functions suggested by Harris et al. (Harris, Rasmussen and Berntsen, 2014). Based on these three functions, there are also studies to develop Scales to Measure the Functions of the Autobiographical Memory (Er&Yaşın, 2016). These three functions are as follows:

*Directive:* This function of the autobiographical memory involves individuals' turning to the past in order to identify and solve the problems, to foresee the future events and to act goal-oriented. This function also governs the behaviors of present and future via personal experiences. In other words, it directly influences the motivation of the individuals against the events.

*Self:* The autobiographical memory enables individuals to obtain information regarding their own biographical identity and to protect the self which is developed with the effects of past experiences. Therefore, the autobiographical memory provides consistency for the self of the individuals.

*Social:* This function includes sharing of autobiographical memories with others. Sharing of autobiographical memories enables people to establish intimacy with others, to begin new relationships, to maintain and strengthen these relationships.

### **Social Media, Autobiographical Memory and Photograph**

Through the technological developments, mass media have started to influence both social and individual life faster and more than ever. McLuhan (1964) emphasized that the communication devices we use directly shape our messages and thus our environment by saying that the device is the message. Correspondingly, there have been many studies conducted on individual and social effects of social media. In particular, topics regarding the society and the individuals, social movements during the crises being in the first place, have drawn the attention of the researchers. Other than such events that can be directly observed, in the recent years, there have appeared studies to determine how social media influences human memory. According to Wang (2017), social media, blogs, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and others provide us an important point of origin and new opportunities to remember and share the

memories with other people. The reason for this is that sharings other than these might not be natural and such social media devices could be considered as some kind of digital diaries of people. People tend to remember their experiences more strongly about which they write, think or talk. The process of writing about an individual's own experience on a public platform is followed by social feedbacks. These might let people reflect their own experiences and personal interests. We are in an emotion of self in the process of sharing our personal experiences and memories in life with others and of evaluating and remembering them. When we use social media, this happens without our realization of it. We just think that we are sharing our memories with friends. However, this situation shapes our identity as well as our style of remembering our experiences. The memory is generally selective. On the other hand, our mind does not make this selection while we are on social media. An outer source makes this selection. Therefore, interaction functions on social web sites might shape our experiences and the way we see ourselves (Wang et al. 2017). According to Huyssen (2003), our way of thinking the past is constantly changing simultaneously with the improvements in technology and our memory becomes a limitless memory. The reason underlying this is the communication devices we use and changes in our perception of self. Our perception of time and place is evolving rapidly through the developments in technology. In particular, time and place confusion on social media is directly influencing our memory. In order to keep up with this rapidity, our memory has incurred hypertrophy. People have nothing to do but to tend towards their memories in order to find their self in such an environment. Different from the encounter of the present and the past that we were used to due to the increase in the rapidity of communication technologies in the 1980s, future of the present have started to change present past. Now, our memory is in a constant mutual interaction process with social media (Huyssen, 2003, pp.1-23). In another study, it is determined that Facebook creates a social memory by gathering friendships together. Autobiographical memories are also used during the social relations on Facebook (Richardson & Hesse, 2009).

When social media devices are analyzed, it can be seen that their first aim was to communicate and create a network yet today, with a craziness of selfie and application of Instagram, visuality has restructured social media. The photograph is a process of forgetting and remembering experiences. Within this context, examining the memory in terms of the existence of photograph, its use and functions and determining relationships between them is vital. The effects of publication of photographs on the digital world and memories about these publications on the memory do not have limited borders but rather is a continuous and organic

process. When it comes to the relationship between the photograph and the memory, the photograph is an integral part of the triggering\producing\reproducing cycle through the sharing\circulation culture which has changed with the internet, especially with social media. From now on, all of these products on the internet and social media are there to exist and be sustainable and not to die out. The structure of collecting and thus sharing have changed. The individual collects while sharing and, from a viewpoint, he shares to collect. The photograph, whose action and effect power is increased when circulation network become limitless, does not keeps users away due to its panoptic audience. The place of the photograph, which is a trigger, creator and restructuring element for the memory, on sharing and circulation has been expanded and become rapid especially with social media devices. The photograph has gone beyond just being a simple photograph and have become processes and narratives which create its own space, place, and memory (Şendeniz, 2015, p.30). The photograph is seen as a strong foundation of the memory; similarly, a family memory, which appears as a result of a collective structuring, benefits from the aforementioned strength of the photograph. The memory and photographs also include a fictional situation that has its own time and memory. The reasons such as the matter of being a family and maintaining the family influence the family memory, shape family photographs which play a part in the creation of the family memory. Most of the childhood photographs shared on Facebook include an image of the family. Therefore, photographs which bear memories are actually a narrator. They are narrators that tell the stories of individuals, the society and the culture that people live in (Erkonan, 2014).

### **Methodology of the Study**

This study aims to determine how childhood photographs shared on social media influences the functions of the autobiographical memory. The studies conducted until now used empirical psychological methods (Boyacıoğlu, 2006; Sayar, 2011). This study is based on the experiences of the people who shared their childhood memories on social media in order to acquire different data. Therefore, this study achieved a natural data acquiring environment in which people do not feel under any pressure. Within this framework, among the qualitative research methods, a semi-structured interview method was used. The aim of the interview method is to perceive the inner worlds of the people who make up the sample of the study and to understand and interpret events from their perspective (Patton, 1987:109).

Regarding these research methodologies, a literature review was made primarily by analyzing sources and documents about the topic. Subsequently, a semi-structured interview

technique was used. A semi-structured interview is “*A data acquisition method that is commonly used in qualitative research as an interviewing method, and in which researchers can ask formerly-prepared or new questions on the topic that arise during interviewing.*” (Güler et al, 2013). Within this context, the interview protocol about the questions to be asked which was planned before was prepared. According to this protocol, the questions were grouped in an order and in line with their topic. Thus, a systematic way was followed during the interviews.

### **The Sample of the Study and the Limitations**

In order to create a homogeneous sample while determining it, extra attention was paid to select people living in different parts of Turkey and who have different demographic features. Within this context, as a result of the examinations and ethnographic research, a sample consisting of 26 people, 13 of them are males and 13 of them are females, between the ages of 18-50 who shared their childhood photographs on Facebook was created.

The research is limited to 26 people who shared their childhood photographs only on Facebook among other social media devices.

### **Findings**

Within the framework of the study, various questions were asked in order to determine which of the functions of the autobiographical memory is influenced by childhood photographs on social media and what kind of influences they are. Acquired data is classified and categorized under 3 most accepted functions of the Autobiographical Memory.

#### **Self**

Information stored in the autobiographical memory is personal, specific, long-lasting and generally is about self-respect (Setliff and Marmurek, 2002). Self-respect is the result of the expectations of an individual about how he sees himself and being accepted or rejected by the society. In other words, the individual values himself and he perceives both the world and himself depending on this value. Therefore, self-respect consists of learned experiences and is a process which continues for a life time (Karaaslan, 1993). Most of the participants of the research stated that “*the reason why they shared their childhood photographs is that these photographs express who they really are, where they come from and their self*” (F1, F7, F3, F13, F8, M2, M1, M5, M13, M9). This is based on the basic self-concept. The sharing on social media in this context is directly influencing the autobiographical memory’s staying alive, which is related to the self. Some of the participants stated, from a different point of view, that “*I am now a senior executive in a public bank. Most of the people around me see me as a serious and*

*tough person. Yet I am an innocuous person who was born and raised in Anatolia... Of course, the photographs I share is primarily for sharing with myself and my family but I also want people to know me when it comes to people's accepting or rejecting me...*" (F4). Another participant stated that *"This is a situation about my system of values... It reflects my will to carry my past, memories, family, children to the present and to the future... all of which I value... I want the values I have to stay alive..."* (M12). The participants put forward the concept of self with their childhood photographs and as the process goes on, they refer to more detailed and profound information like self-respect. The phenomenon of self among the functions of the autobiographical memory is originated as a result of the individuals' reviewing and evaluating their own past experiences. Therefore, individuals protect their own past experiences and tend to evaluate them. Thus, the individuals can have an opinion about themselves. This supports the idea that the past experiences of the individuals could influence their perspective on the present and the future events (Er & Yaşın, 2016). Another participant: *"... I smoke a cigarette on my childhood photograph... There are my elder brother and sister... I always try to be like them, I remember now. That is, old and powerful... That is why I put the cigarette in my mouth... It actually was a traumatic process. Because I was always feeling weak and isolated when I am with them and I kind of tried to draw their attention... The good thing is that now we look at these photographs and just smile... and we talk a lot about these moments with my family."* (M9). When the photograph is shared on Facebook, the recollections in the autobiographical memory directly influence not only the past but also the present relationships.

Another important topic about the concept of self is empathy. Empathy is the ability to understand both yourself and others (Goldstein and Michaels, 1985). The concept of self and the ability of empathy nourish each other and enriches one's abilities (Barnett, 1990). The participants stated that they develop empathy through sharing their childhood photographs: *"When I look at the photograph, it makes me pleased to see the sacrifices my mother and father made for us... Now I have a child and I think that maybe he also want to keep our memories alive just like me... I can guess what my father felt like when he liked the photograph I shared..."* (F12). Autobiographical memories on social media are influencing individuals' emotional experiences from various aspects. This increases the role of the autobiographical memory in self-development.

The autobiographical memory shows a tendency to regulate and balance emotions of the individuals (Kuhl, 2000). One of the participants: *"I lost my elder brother in a traffic accident... This was very sad for my whole family... Losing him is like disregarding him... I*

*shared the photograph that I was with him when I was younger. This is the only photograph about my childhood I shared on Facebook...*” (M12). In a study to develop a scale of the functions of the Autobiographical Memory, emotional regulation is determined as a sub-factor (Er&Yaşın, 2016).

The processes about sharing childhood photographs on Facebook is just not only about expression and refreshment of the autobiographical memory. Problems about insecurity towards social media and protecting personal data are also directly influencing the process. One of the participants: *“... I upload so few childhood photographs. Because I think people might be prejudiced against me and my family. For example, your mother is playing with you on the seaside in a swimsuit or you are reading the Koran with your mother... Since I abstain from social judgments, I am shy about sharing childhood photographs... But of course, everyone in the family is talking about such memories and having fun in the WhatsApp group that we created for our family.”* (F1).

### **Social**

This function of the Autobiographical Memory is based on establishing new relationships by sharing memories with others (Williams et al. 2007; Morgan, 2010; Rubin, 2005). One of the participants of the research: *“I shared the photograph on Facebook in which we were playing games in our summer house when we were younger... Normally, we had a little conversation between us with the person in the photograph... However, we found a childish sincerity with this photograph and started to see each other.”* (F3). Another participant: *“... I shared my childhood photograph taken in Ankara on Facebook... After that, I and a colleague who is 7 or 8 years younger than me discovered that we were raised in the same district... The memories belonging to different times of two different people began to live on Facebook again...”* (M11). Most of the studies about the functions of the Autobiographical Memory emphasized that the memories enable people to establish intimacy with others, to begin new relationships and to strengthen these relationships (Bluck & Alea, 2011). Another participant: *“I do not share too much childhood photographs... But I feel that I trust people who share their childhood memories. I mean, when someone adds me as friends on Facebook and I see childhood photographs of that person, I find it more sincere and warm... I feel various emotions for that person and his memories...”* (F6). Another participant: *“I was sharing my childhood photographs because I liked it and it made me happy at first... After some time I realized that my wife was more interested in these photographs than me; she was always commenting and sharing them on her own profile... When she showed that much interest, my awareness about*

*my memories was increased highly. I realized that I tried to find old belongings and to remember past memories more strongly when I went back to my family's house..." (M8).*

### **Directive**

The autobiographical memory highly influences the decisions and tendencies of people in their lives. When people face problems in their lives, they first try to find a solution by focusing on their past memories (Evans et al. 1992; Goddard et al. 1996; Raes et al. 2005). A vast majority of the participants stated that *"they were not trying to solve a problem or focusing on a past experience by sharing childhood memories or the memories of the recent past."* (F1,F2,F8,F9,F10,F12,M2,M3,M4,M8,M11,M12). However, some of the participants stated that they restructured their family relationships through their childhood memories. One of the participants: *"... We were facing problems in my family due to private reasons and this was really upsetting me. Thinking that the past memories would connect us, I shared old family photographs on Facebook... Each family member seeing the photographs commented..."* (F7).

### **Conclusion**

This study analyzed functions and using processes of the autobiographical memory through sharings of childhood photographs on social media. It is determined as a result of the study that the most important 3 functions of the autobiographical memory which are directive, self and social are directly related to childhood photographs shared on social media. However, it is also determined that there are many differences in terms of explaining and detailing these functions. The data acquired from the self-function demonstrates that the most significant function is the self. The aspects of self-respect, emotional development, emotional regulation, empathy, and protecting and evaluating one's own past are observed in the self-function of the autobiographical memory. The importance of the self-respect and thus the importance of presentation of the self on social media are already known. The presentation of self in daily life and the dramaturgic analysis put forward by Goffman (1959) can be observed with its all aspects in today's social media. It is actually a fact that the individuals on social media play the self that they want to present to those who follow them with their sharing on social media. We present who we are, what kind of an environment we live in, what we like and do not like with posts shared, likes and photographs to the audience, yet actually what we present is often our desire to be what we want to be or our will to be accepted. Since this study does not aim to analyze the presentation of the self, this aspect of the subject is not included. However, the influence of these representations of the self-appeared in the research by itself from the answers of the participants. In the photograph sharings which are discussed as the autobiographical

memory in the study, it is revealed in the expressions of the participants that the photographs chosen to be shared on social media among other childhood photographs are chosen in accordance with the presentation of the self. While only one participant mentioned the fact that the insecurity towards the protection of personal data on social media affects sharing choices, one should also pay attention to the fact that the aforementioned insecurity is a common emotion shared by most of the people on social media and that such an insecurity might influence the creation of the autobiographical memories. Thus, it is possible to mention about an autobiographical memory which is created with such influence.

The factors of Facing the Past, Remembering the past based on the clues, Mood regulation, Self, Learning from the past were determined in the studies conducted to develop a scale to measure the functions of the autobiographical memory in our country (Er&Yaşın, 2016). This scale development study was analyzed by focusing on the memories. The subject was interpreted on a platform like Facebook which always keeps the memories alive and which enables bilateral communication with the comments. Therefore, the processes of social media's flow of bilateral communication were clearly revealed in this study.

In other studies about the autobiographical memory, the subject was interpreted with empirical psychological processes. The present study consists of people's sharings with their own will without an empirical environment. Therefore, processes about bad and negative memories were not completely analyzed. People always share their happy memories on social media. People's tendency to share only good and happy memories on social media reminds us the utopia or actually the dystopia titled *Brave New World* by Huxley in which everyone lives a happy life by taking the drug called soma. People's choice to share the memories in which everyone is happy causes them to create a digital diary that consists of only the happy memories and carries the risk of damaging their autobiographical memory which they will face in the future. As a consequence, people might have a memory consisting of unreal and artificial recollections. Such a memory will surely influence their psychology. Topics like the different presentation of the self of the individuals on social media, their artificial recollections, and artificial happiness are widely discussed in today's world. There are many studies conducted by professionals who examine psychological reasons behind social media sharings choices of the individuals and who work in this area. Thus, the present study included the autobiographical aspect of the shared photographs rather than their features and psychological reasons.

This study tries to bring a new dimension to the literature by using social media during the process of acquiring data about the autobiographical memory. With this study, it is determined that the autobiographical memory on social media directly influences people's present and future lives, and offers new opportunities in terms of usage and storage of the memory. Hence, our childhood memories have become an organic structure, which plays an important role in between the memory and the self. This study offers a foundation for further studies within this area. We are of the opinion that this study will be a basis for new studies which will yield beneficial results for the literature by increasing the number of the participants and including the opinions of various experts.

### References

Baddeley, A. (1992). *What is autobiographical memory?.* In *Theoretical perspectives on autobiographical memory*. Springer Netherlands.

- Barclay, C. R. (1986). *Schematization of Autobiographical Memory*. In D. C. Rubin (Ed.), *Autobiographical Memory*. Australia:Cambridge University Press
- Bluck, S. ve Alea, N. (2011). Crafting the TALE: Construction of a measure to assess the functions of autobiographical remembering. *Memory*, 19(5), 470-486
- Brewer, W. F., (1986). What is autobiographical memory? In D. C. Rubin (Ed.), *Autobiographical Memory* . Australia: Cambridge University Press.
- Conway, M.A. & Rubin, D.C. (1994). The structure of autobiographical memory. In A.F. Collins, S.E. Gathercole, M.A. Conway, & P.E.Morris (Eds.), *Theories of memory*. Hove: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.
- Conway, M. A., Pleydell-Pearce, C. W., Whitecross, S., & Sharpe, H. (2002). Brain Imaging Autobiographical Memory. *Psychology of Learning and Motivation*, (41), 229-263.
- Er, N., Hosrik, E., Ergün, H., & Serif, M. (2008). Duygu Durum Degisimlemelerinin Otobiyografik Bellek Üzerindeki Etkileri. *Türk Psikoloji Dergisi*, 23(62), 1-13.
- Er, N.& Yaşın, F. (2016).Otobiyografik Bellek İşlevleri Ölçeğinin Geliştirilmesi. *Turkish Psychological Articles*, 19 (37), 60-72.
- Erkonan, Ş. (2014). Aile Fotoğrafları: Aile Belleğinin Kurgulanmasında Fotoğrafın Rolünü Etnografik Yöntemle İncelemek. *Moment Dergi*, 1(2). 122-147.
- Evans, J., Williams, J. M. G., O'loughlin, S., & Howells, K. (1992). Autobiographical Memory And Problem-Solving Strategies of Parasuicide Patients. *Psychological Medicine*, 22(2), 399-405.
- Goddard, L., Dritschel, B., & Burton, A. (1996). Role of Autobiographical Memory in Social Problem Solving And Depression. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 105(4), 609.
- Goffman, E. (1959). *The Presentation Of Self In Everyday Life*. NY: Doubleday/Anchor Books.
- Güler, A., Halıcioğlu M. B. & Taşğın, S. (2013). *Sosyal Bilimlerde Nitel Araştırma Yöntemleri*. Ankara: Seçkin Yayınları.
- Harley, K., & Reese, E. (1999). Origins of Autobiographical Memory. *Developmental Psychology*, 35(5), 1338.
- Holland AC & Kensinger EA. (2010). Emotion And Autobiographical Memory. *Phys Life Rev*. (7), 88-131.
- Howe, M. L., Courage, M. L., & Edison, S. C. (2003). When Autobiographical Memory Begins. *Developmental Review*, 23(4), 471-494.
- Huysen, A. (2003). *Present Past, Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory*, California:Stanford Press.
- Karaaslan, A. (1993). Öğrenci Hemşirelerin Benlik Saygısı Düzeyleri ve Bunu Etkileyen Etmenlerin İncelenmesi. *Ege Üniversitesi H.Y.O. Dergisi*, 9(2): 21-29.
- Kuhl, J. (2000). A functional-design approach to motivation and self-regulation: The Dynamics of personality systems interactions. M. Boekaerts, P. R. Pintrich AND M. Zeidner (Eds.), *Handbook of self-regulation, inside* (111-169). San Diego, CA: Academic Press.
- McLean K. C. & Pratt M. W., (2006). Life's little (and big) Lessons: Identity Status And Meaning Making in Turning Point Narratives of Emerging Adults. *Developmental Psychology*, (42), 714-722.
- McLuhan, M. (1964). *Understanding Media*. Dresden.
- Morgan, J. (2010). Autobiographical Memory Biases in Social Anxiety. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 30(3), 288-297.
- Myers, L. B., Brewin, C. R., & Power, M. J. (1992). Repression and Autobiographical Memory. In *Theoretical Perspectives on Autobiographical Memory*. Springer Netherlands.
- Patton, Q. M. (1987). *How to Use Qualitative Methods in Evaluation* . London: Sage Pub.

- Raes, F., Hermans, D., Williams, J. M. G., Demyttenaere, K., Sabbe, B., Pieters, G., & Eelen, P. (2005). Reduced Specificity of Autobiographical Memory: A mediator between rumination and ineffective social problem-solving in major depression?. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 87(2), 331-335.
- Richardson, K., & Hessey, S. (2009). Archiving the self? Facebook as Biography of Social And Relational Memory. *Journal of Information, Communication and Ethics in Society*, 7(1), 25-38.
- Rubin, D. (2005). A Basic-Systems Approach to Autobiographical Memory. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 14(2), 79-83.
- Rubin, D. (2006). Autobiographical memory. *Encyclopedia of Cognitive Science*.
- Sayar, F. (2011). Otobiyografik Bellek ve Otobiyografik Belleği Etkileyen Değişkenler. *Cumhuriyet üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, 35(2), 20-33
- Setliff, A. E., & Marmurek, H. H. C. (2002). The Mood Regulatory Function of Autobiographical Recall is Moderated by Self-Esteem. *Personality and Individual Differences*, (32), 761-771.
- Singer, J.A. (1995). Seeing one's self: Locating narrative memory in a framework of personality. *Journal of Personality*. 63(3), 429-457.
- Şendeniz, Ö. (2015). Bakmak, Biriktirmek, Paylaşmak:Fotoğraf, Bellek ve Sosyal Medya ilişkisi. *Karadeniz İletişim Araştırmaları Dergisi*. 3(10), 21-31.
- Tulving E. (2002). Episodic Memory: From Mind to Brain. *Annu Rev Psychol*, (53), 1-25.
- Wang, Q., Lee, D., & Hou, Y. (2017). Externalising The Autobiographical Self: sharing personal memories online facilitated memory retention. *Memory*. 25(6), 772-776.
- Williams, J. M. G., Barnhofer, T., Crane, C., Herman, D., Raes, F., Watkins, E., & Dalgleish, T. (2007). Autobiographical memory specificity and emotional disorder. *Psychological Bulletin*, 133(1), 122.