

Study shows people find well-being more so from special places than from mementoes

October 16 2017, by Bob Yirka



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(Medical Xpress)—A team of researchers at the University of Surrey has found that people experience a feeling of well-being when thinking about or visiting a place that holds special meaning to them. They also

found that such feelings are stronger than those induced by objects such as wedding rings or pictures of their wedding.

Most everyone knows that visiting a place that holds special meaning evokes emotion, but what happens in the brain to cause such [feelings](#)? The researchers with this new effort sought to find out by conducting a three-stage study.

The first stage involved asking 20 volunteers to look at various photographs while encased in an fMRI machine. The volunteers were asked to bring 10 photographs of objects that were important to them and 10 of places that held special meaning for them. The researchers then watched to see how the brain responded as the volunteers looked through the pictures—they report that there were three response areas—the left amygdala, which is known to play a major role in processing emotion, the [medial prefrontal cortex](#), which has been found to play a strong role in evaluating whether something is positive or negative, and the parahippocampal place area, which prior studies have shown responds to locations that are personally relevant.

The second stage involved asking 11 volunteers to take part in in-depth qualitative interviews, both at home and at a place that was meaningful to them. The third stage involved inviting people to take an [online survey](#) to which 2000 people responded.

After looking at all the data from the three stages, the researchers reported that the [brain](#) responds more strongly to meaningful places than to objects that represent something important. Visiting the place where someone got married, for example, elicited a more emotional response than looking at pictures of the event or even their wedding ring. They further reported that 64 percent of people involved in the study claimed their special place caused them to feel calm while 54 percent reported that their special place offered a respite from normal life.

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Citation: Study shows people find well-being more so from special places than from mementoes
(2017, October 16) retrieved 28 April 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2017-10-people-well-being-special-mementoes.html>

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