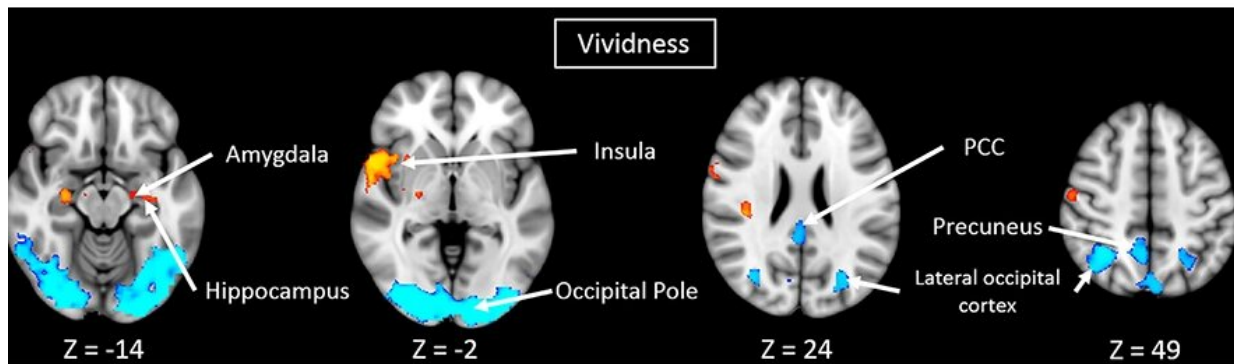


# Recalling good memories together

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Credit: Leiden University

Recalling positive memories can help you feel better about yourself. Charlotte van Schie is aiming to use this fact to help people with a borderline personality disorder become stronger. She has written about her research for Human Brain Mapping, and at the LIBC open day on 11 October she gave a "flash talk" titled "Coloured memories in the brain."

Positive memories are important for our well-being because they help us feel better when we're down and aid in finding solutions to problems. Friendships can also be strengthened by recalling memories together. Reliving those positive memories is useful to people who find it more difficult to feel good about themselves, perhaps due to [low self-esteem](#) or feelings of depression. Applying that in day-to-day life makes things

easier and helps you deal with setbacks.

## Comparing memories

So how can your memories make you happy? What works, and what doesn't? To answer these questions, the researchers compared the recall of positive memories with that of neutral memories. What they found is that the more vibrant the memories, the more [brain activity](#) is stimulated. What's more, that activity occurs specifically in the areas of the brain associated with memory and feeling: the amygdala, hippocampus and insula. Reliving these positive memories causes different sections of the brain to light up from when reliving neutral memories, which gets a reaction from more rational areas, as if you're looking at the situation from a distance. This means that the vibrancy can help us feel as if we're really back in the midst of that pleasant moment.

## What gives you a good feeling?

Van Schie came up with the idea because she wanted to support people with borderline personality [disorders](#) to improve their self-image by recalling positive memories. One question she asked was: "What gives you a good feeling?". When Van Schie realized that we don't actually know a lot about that, she decided to start by studying people who haven't received a diagnosis to see if reliving positive memories is associated with a better mood. She wondered how that would look in the brains of people who are reliving a [memory](#).

## People diagnosed with borderline personality disorder

Van Schie explains: "The effect of recalling those positive memories may be very different in people who have been diagnosed with [borderline personality disorder](#). It turns out that their memories have a

lot less vibrancy than those of people without that diagnosis. That means that they have a different starting point, as well as different activity in other areas of the brain. Van Schie would like to be able to link the results to a real-life intervention, to train people to recall those positive memories and to measure the long-term effects. "It's already yielded some good results in the short term."

## Applying knowledge

Van Schie is a post-doc associated with the University of Wollongong, Australia, where she hopes to study the memories of people who have been diagnosed with borderline personality disorder. She is currently working on a lab study and she would like to work with a colleague to zoom in on memories together. Achieving something together is an important part of therapeutic relationships, but it can also help people diagnosed with borderline personality disorder, who find it more difficult to maintain relationships. "It would be great to use this new knowledge to contribute to an intervention." That intervention might include the question: 'Can you look back to a time when things were good, together?' This is the subject of her flash talk "Coloured memories in the [brain](#): The importance of [positive memories](#) and the challenge for people with borderline [personality](#) disorder."

**More information:** Charlotte C. Schie et al. When I relive a positive me: Vivid autobiographical memories facilitate auto-noetic brain activation and enhance mood, *Human Brain Mapping* (2019). [DOI: 10.1002/hbm.24742](https://doi.org/10.1002/hbm.24742)

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