

Project title: Reactivity of positive emotions in borderline personality disorder

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Function: Assistant professor

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Proposal (250 words):

Introduction: Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) is characterized by a deeply embedded pattern of impulsivity and instability of emotions, self-image and interpersonal relationships. Current research suggests that emotional dysregulation is central to BPD. According to Linehan's biosocial theory, emotional dysregulation in BPD reflects a broad dysregulation of every aspect of emotion that applies for both positive (e.g. love and interest) and negative (e.g. fear, anger and shame) emotions. Various self-report studies support Linehan's theory, yet these studies have primarily focused on negative affect. The role of positive emotion reactivity in BPD remains largely unexamined. **Hypothesis and Objectives:** The objective of the current project is to shed light on the relationship between BPD traits and reactivity of positive emotions to pleasant and to unpleasant experiences. Our hypothesis is that in daily life, in contrast to Linehan's theory, BPD traits dampen - rather than stimulate - positive affect reactivity. **Setting and Methods:** Mixed methods approach including: (1) exposure to positive stimuli and stressors in the lab, measuring stress reactivity (2) experiments in which we induce stress and then offer an exercise to increase positive emotions; (3) analyses of daily-life data from an experience sampling study in which participants with BPD traits register emotions as well as pleasant and unpleasant events. **Impact:** Knowledge about the relationship between BPD and positive emotion reactivity may point to currently underused possibilities for enhancing mental health and psychological treatment in individuals with BPD. Purposefully inducing positive emotions in therapy may contribute to better well-being and improved stress-regulation.

Requirements candidate: Highly motivated student with good English communication skills and proactive and resolute attitude.

Keywords: Health, Borderline Personality Disorder, Emotion Reactivity, Positive Emotions, Experience Sampling Method

Top 5 selected publications:

1. Geschwind, N., Peeters, F., Drukker, M., van Os, J., & Wichers, M. (2011). Mindfulness training increases momentary positive emotions and reward experience in adults vulnerable to depression: a randomized controlled trial. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 79*(5), 618–28. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0024595>. [241 citations]
2. Geschwind, N., Peeters, F., Huibers, M., Van Os, J., & Wichers, M. (2012). Efficacy of mindfulness-based cognitive therapy in relation to prior history of depression: randomized controlled trial. *British Journal of Psychiatry, 201*(4), 320–325. <https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.bp.111.104851>. [67 citations]
3. Geschwind, N., Nicolson, N. A., Peeters, F., van Os, J., Barge-Schaapveld, D., & Wichers, M. (2011). Early improvement in positive rather than negative emotion predicts remission from depression after pharmacotherapy. *European Neuropsychopharmacology, 21*(3), 241–247. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.euroneuro.2010.11.004>. [69 citations]
4. Geschwind, N., Meulders, M., Peters, M. L., Vlaeyen, J. W. S., & Meulders, A. (2014). Can experimentally induced positive affect attenuate generalization of fear of movement-related pain? *The Journal of Pain : Official Journal of the American Pain Society*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpain.2014.12.003>. [19 citations]
5. Geschwind, N., Peeters, F., Jacobs, N., Delespaul, P., Derom, C., Thiery, E., ... Wichers, M. C. (2010). Meeting risk with resilience: high daily life reward experience preserves mental health. *Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica, 122*(2), 129–138. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1600-0447.2009.01525.x>. [77 citations]