

# People Neglect Who They Really Are When Predicting Their Own Future Happiness

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Humans are notoriously bad at predicting their future happiness. A new study published in *Psychological Science*, a journal of the Association for Psychological Science, suggests that part of the reason for these mispredictions lies in failing to recognize the key role played by one's own personality when determining future emotional reactions.

The new evidence comes from Jordi Quoidbach, a psychological scientist at the University of Liege, Belgium. Quoidbach and Elizabeth Dunn, his collaborator at the University of British Columbia, found that our natural sunny or negative dispositions might be a more powerful predictor of future happiness than any specific event. They also discovered that most of us ignore our own personalities when we think about what lies ahead—and thus miscalculate our future feelings.

Quoidbach and Dunn call this phenomenon “personality neglect,” which they tested in connection with the 2008 U.S. presidential election. In early October 2008, a large sample of Belgians predicted how they would feel the day after the U.S. presidential election if Barack Obama won and how they would feel if John McCain won. Then the day after the election, they reported how they actually felt, and completed personality tests. Nearly everyone in the study supported Obama, so most predicted they would be happy if he won.

Although participants' personalities did not influence their predictions—with both neurotic and cheerful Obama fans saying a victory would bring them equal happiness—people's actual feelings the day after the election closely lined up with their personalities. That is, the grumpy supporters remained relatively grumpy, despite the celebratory event. They “forgot” their own tendency for malaise and overestimated how happy they would be. The positive individuals were more accurate in their forecasting because their natural *joie de vivre* prevailed. So, ironically, positive people seem less likely than negative people to see the world in an overly rosy light.

“It might be worthwhile, before you make a big decision, to think about your personality and how you usually react,” Quoidbach says. Think about planning a vacation, for example. If you have a happy disposition, you probably don't need to waste a lot of money and effort finding the perfect location (because you will be happy with most vacations anyway). By contrast, if you have a less happy disposition, you might be more prone to regret the slightest annoyance, so carefully planning every detail of the trip might be the best strategy for your future happiness. “Don't focus too much on the event; think about who you are,” advises Quoidbach.