

After good or bad events, people forget how they thought they'd feel

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People aren't very accurate at predicting how good or bad they'll feel after an event -- such as watching their team lose the big game or getting a flat-screen TV. But afterwards, they "misremember" what they predicted, revising their prognostications after the fact to match how they actually feel, according to new research.

These findings appear in the November issue of the [Journal of Experimental Psychology: General](#), published by the American Psychological Association.

Although the process of predicting emotions seems imprecise from start to finish, misremembering predictions might actually be motivating. Trust in one's [emotional instincts](#) could be "nature's feedback mechanism to steer us toward actions that are good for us," said psychologist Tom Meyvis, PhD, of New York University. Our ignorance of this tendency might help keep us motivated to avoid what we expect to be awful and work for what we hope will be great, he suggested.

Four studies compared an actual and recollected prediction to post-event feelings for each of four different scenarios:

- Before the 2005 Super Bowl football game, 19 Philadelphia Eagles fans were asked: How happy will you be if they lose to the Patriots? After the loss, they were asked: How happy are you? How happy did you think you would be?

- Before the 2008 presidential election, 73 supporters of John McCain were asked: How upset will you be if Obama wins? After his win, they were asked: How upset are you about Obama's win? How upset did you think you would be?
- Before making an important purchase, 40 participants were asked: How happy will it make you feel? After the purchase, they were asked: How happy are you? How happy did you think you'd be?
- Before they ate a jelly bean in two separate sequences (after eating a more preferred or less preferred flavor), 53 participants were asked: How much will you enjoy this jelly bean in each sequence? After eating both sequences of jelly beans, they were asked: How much did you enjoy the jelly bean in each sequence? How much did you think you would enjoy it?

Across the studies, participants inaccurately predicted their feelings and wrongly recalled their predictions. Indeed, whether an event had been anticipated or dreaded, peoples' revised predictions shifted toward how they actually felt. For example, Eagles fans said in advance they'd hate it if the Patriots won but afterward, they shrugged off the loss and said they always knew they'd be OK.

The results reveal a bias toward using current [feelings](#) to infer our earlier predictions. People don't realize they made a mistake, so they don't learn from that mistake -- and keep making the same errors, said the researchers. "So, next time, Eagles fans will again expect to be devastated after their team's loss," Meyvis predicted.

More information: "Why Don't We Learn to Accurately Forecast Feelings? How Misremembering Our Predictions Blinds Us to Past Forecasting Errors," Tom Meyvis, PhD, New York University; Rebecca K. Ratner, PhD, University of Maryland; and Jonathan Levav, PhD,

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