

# Your present self is your best future self, according to new research

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Credit: CC0 Public Domain

When thinking about the future, some people think they will change, and others expect they might remain the same. But, how do these predictions relate to happiness later on in their lives? According to new research

from the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), expecting ourselves to remain mostly the same over the next ten years is strongly related to being happier later in life. The research is published in *Social Psychological and Personality Science*.

Researchers have consistently found that people who are connected to their future selves are better able to save for the future, delay gratification, and take care of their health, compared to people who feel less connected to their future selves.

So one would assume that if people make optimistic predictions about the future, such as "thinking they will become more compassionate and intelligent in the future," as Joseph Reiff (UCLA) suggests, "they would end up becoming happier in the years that follow." What Reiff and colleagues found however, surprised them.

"The more people initially predicted that they would remain the same—whether predicting less decline or less improvement across a number of core traits—the more satisfied they typically were with their lives ten years later," says Reiff.

Reiff, Hal Hershfield (Anderson School of Management, UCLA), and Jordi Quoidbach (ESADE) analyzed a ten-year longitudinal dataset ( $N = 4,963$ ) to estimate how thoughts about one's future self in an initial survey predicted [life](#) satisfaction ten years later.

They found that people who expected to be better off in ten years and those who expected to be worse off both reported less satisfaction ten years later. However, people who expected to remain the same typically were the most satisfied ten years later.

Their research builds on a growing body of psychological literature suggesting that perceiving similarity to the future self is generally

beneficial for long-term decisions and outcomes.

When it comes to future research, "We are now interested in understanding why some people think they will remain the same and why others think they will change," says Hershfield. "What [life events](#), for example, cause people to shift the way they think about their future selves?"

**More information:** Joseph S. Reiff et al, Identity Over Time: Perceived Similarity Between Selves Predicts Well-Being 10 Years Later, *Social Psychological and Personality Science* (2019). [DOI: 10.1177/1948550619843931](#)

All data, materials, and code are publicly available on Open Science Framework ( [osf.io/yqxme/](https://osf.io/yqxme/) ).

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