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CAN YOUR HOROSCOPE PREDICT YOUR SUCCESS?

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That Zodiac-based guide to how your day will go can influence your attitudes and behavior.

By Tom Jacobs

(Photo: Amayzun/Flickr)

Did you check your horoscope this morning? I did, and it was highly encouraging: At some point today, you will come across something wonderful that you didn't even know you were waiting for. No matter what it is, it will bring a lot of fun into your life.

Needless to say, I didn't take it seriously. But if this post is unusually sharp or creative, you can thank the stars—or, more specifically, how they were interpreted by the good folks at astrology.com.

A newstudy finds a positive or negative horoscope can impact one's subsequent attitude and achievements in measurable ways. What's more, it can give you a boost even if you don't believe a word of it.

Astrology-based predictions “influence our performances, even among present-day Americans and Europeans who might be thought to be more scientifically minded, and less subject to superstitions,” writes a research team led by Stanford University psychologist Magali Clobert. “Opening newspapers and searching for daily horoscopes have more consequences than one may initially think.”

In the journal *Personality and Individual Differences*, Clobert and her colleagues describe three experiments that demonstrate this dynamic. One featured 189 students at an American university who were instructed to summarize a short text. Some of them read and recapped a technical text about the process of brewing beer.

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But most were told that, to make the exercise more fun, they were to scan and summarize their own horoscope for the day. These were manipulated, so that half were given a positive message (sample summary: “Everything is in my favor today”), while the others received a negative one (“I’m basically going to fail at something”).

A final group read and summarized a horoscope from a Zodiac sign other than their own. All participants then completed “three different tests designed to assess numerical, non-verbal, and verbal cognitive performance.”

After calculating their scores, the researchers found “people who read positive compared to negative horoscopes tend to perform better in cognitive tasks.” They report this effect “seems to mainly occur when participants are exposed to the horoscope of their own sign,” rather than someone else’s.

Another experiment, featuring 193 American adults recruited online, was similarly structured, except, rather than cognitive skills, the participants completed tasks designed to measure their creativity. These included the well-known Remote Associates Test, in which they were presented with three words and instructed to come up with a fourth that was associated with each of them.

The results were consistent with those of the previous experiment: “Participants who summarized their positive horoscope demonstrated higher creativity” than those who summarized a negative one, or a neutral text.

Not surprisingly, the effects of the horoscopes varied from person to person.

“People who generally explain events as being due to their own efforts and skills are less influenced by daily horoscopes, probably because they are less likely to rely on faith and destiny,” the researchers write. “Furthermore, reading horoscopes was found to affect negative emotions only among participants who believe in astrology.”

Overall, however, these results provide evidence that the information we ingest can influence us, whether we realize it or not. “Because horoscopes provide information about what one’s day will look like,” Clobert and her colleagues note, “expectations can be formed, and surreptitiously influence actual thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.”

“Our main point,” they conclude, “is that people who are led to believe that their circumstances will be good will actually make those positive circumstances happen.”

Of course, that famous Taurus William Shakespeare said something similar 400 years ago, when he wrote “the fault lies not in our stars, but in ourselves.”

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