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New Psychological Research Advises Us To Tame Our 'YOLO' Mindset

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Here's what more than 200 people think counts as a 'good life,' according to a new study. [GETTY](#)

A new [study](#) published in the *Journal of Research in Personality* explains how nothing puts one's life into perspective more than the awareness of mortality and finitude. The study suggests that people who bring awareness to their own mortality are more motivated to live virtuous and fulfilling lives while rejecting a 'you only live once' mentality.

Psychologists Susan Bluck, Emily Mroz, and Kiana Cogdill-Richardson refer to our mortality “as a significant, if not the single most paramount motivator for how we organize our lives.”

“Adults understand that life is finite, and we believe that this awareness is what motivates seeking out a good life,” they explain. “Because, if not for death, we’d have no motivation to curate our best version of a good life in the present.”

To study the effects of finitude on peoples’ lives, the researchers examines people’s internalized life stories or ‘narrative identities.’ A narrative identity can be understood as a unified sense of what one’s life has looked like so far and what it might be like in the future.

The researchers split study participants into three groups and asked them to recount self-defining memories that represent their innermost selves.

1. The first group was asked to describe a self-defining memory for their present selves
2. The second group was asked to describe a general self-defining memory
3. The third group was asked to describe one exemplifying how they want to be remembered after death

They found that:

1. Participants tended to share self-defining memories that portrayed them as virtuous more often when they were told to share a memory of how they wanted to be remembered by
2. Participants tended to share virtuous self-defining memories less often when told to just share a memory that

describes them in the present

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These findings fly in the face of the 'YOLO' way of life and make a strong case for the 'eudaimonic' idea of a life well-lived, one focused on virtuosity and leaving behind a legacy.

The researchers explain that when people adopt 'YOLO' or other similar mindsets, it is possibly because they want to justify their risky, self-indulgent, or silly behavior to 'live life to the fullest' while they can.

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However, the researchers point out that in the over 200 self-defining memories participants shared for this study, no one shared a memory of a needlessly risky or self-indulgent activity; participants were more concerned with portraying other important self-characteristics.

Therefore, for anyone who occasionally adopts a YOLO mentality,

the researchers advise to make sure that they balance that lifestyle with other features (pursuit of long-term goals, care for others, appreciation, and gratitude).

“If you only live once, what do you want that life to look like in the eyes of others who remember you after you’re gone?” they clarify.

Finally, the researchers note that young, middle-aged, and older adults all follow the same self-defining memory sharing pattern, where memories more often involve virtue when people are asked to imagine how they will be remembered in the eyes of others.

“One takeaway we’d offer, especially to younger adults, is to recognize that older adults are often still striving to become the best versions of themselves before death,” they explain.

They hope this article contributes in its own small way to breaking down social barriers between age groups and to help leaders recognize that core life motivations (i.e., living a good life before death) are shared among people across the lifespan.

“One day you and I, and all reading this will die — it is inevitable and inescapable. We share that with humans across time, just as we share the want to be remembered and to remember those we love virtuously,” they conclude.

A full interview with Psychologists Susan Bluck, Emily Mroz and Kiana Cogdill-Richardson can be found here: [How thinking about death can help you figure out what to do with your life](#)



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