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YOLO: Aging and the Pursuit of Happiness

As human beings, we expend a great deal of time, money, and energy in the pursuit of happiness. From exotic travel to simply spending time with our grandchildren, the things that make us happy change as we age. A new study in the [Journal of Consumer Research](#) explores the role of age on the happiness we receive from both the ordinary and the extraordinary experiences in our lives.

“We examine how age—and the perceived amount of time left in life—impacts the happiness people enjoy from both extraordinary and ordinary life experiences,” write authors Amit Bhattacharjee (Dartmouth College) and Cassie Mogilner (Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania).

Across a series of eight studies, the authors asked participants to recall, plan, or imagine happy experiences in an attempt to draw a distinction between experiences that are ordinary (common and frequent) versus extraordinary (uncommon and infrequent). The researchers were specifically interested in testing their theory that younger people will associate extraordinary experiences with greater happiness than ordinary experiences.

In one study, over 200 participants from across the United States and between the ages of 18 and 79 were asked to recall a recent extraordinary experience that made them happy. The researchers assigned the responses into 12 broad categories including spending time with others, life milestones, and travel. While responses from all age groups reported happiness in extraordinary experiences, study results indicated that happiness from ordinary experiences was more common in the older age demographic.

The researchers suggest brands using experiential marketing campaigns to reach a specific age group examine the type of experience and dimension of the connection they are looking to achieve. “Young people actively seeking to define themselves find it particularly rewarding to accumulate extraordinary experiences that mark their progression through life milestones. On the other hand, once people are older and have established a better sense of who they are, the experiences they view as self-defining are just as likely to include the routine daily events that reveal how they like to spend their time,” the authors conclude.

Amit Bhattacharjee and Cassie Mogilner. “Happiness from Ordinary and Extraordinary Experiences.” *Journal of Consumer Research*: June 2014. For more information, contact Cassie Mogilner (mogilner@wharton.upenn.edu) or visit <http://ejcr.org/>.

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