

**VITALITY**

The Quarter-Life Crisis: 'Peter Pan' Generation Prone To Blues In Real World Transition

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By

Lizette Borreli

@lizcelineb



The life crisis that no longer just affects 20-somethings, and how it can actually be a positive thing for the future. *Behzad No, CC BY-SA 2.0*



On graduation day, you walk down the aisle, go up on the stage, and receive the paper that says you're ready to take on the world. The curtain drops and life as you know it fades to black. You find yourself back home, stacked with student loans, and resumes that lead to no interviews. This is supposed to be the time of your life, but instead you're in a constant contemplative state asking "who am I?"

Welcome to the identity crisis that leaves recent college grads depressed, anxious, and full of doubt — the quarter-life crisis. This adult journey is filled with thought-provoking questions about existence and choosing the right life path. It's not simply about making money, but making an impact with your career.

OVEREDUCATED AND UNDEREMPLOYED

Millennials, also known as the "Peter Pan" generation, find it harder and harder to identify themselves career-wise and decide what their values are in the most defining decade of their lives. [Dr. Toni Coleman](#), a psychotherapist, dating and relationship coach in Virginia, believes too many kids are being raised with the idea that college or post-secondary education is the end point.

“People this age now were often not tasked with real problem-solving while growing up, and they are often uncomfortable with unknowns and expectations to suddenly be independent and be able to make a life plan,” Coleman told *Medical Daily* in an email.

College used to be seen as a shoe-in to the dream job you'd attain from an internship you did senior year. Now, college students are simply just college students in a larger pool of other students. Some get lucky and some get the boot.

Unemployment of young graduates is extremely high due to the Great Recession and its aftermath. During periods of labor market weakness, young workers always experience disproportionate unemployment. Currently, the unemployment rate among young college graduates is 8.5 percent, according to the [Economic Policy Institute](#), while underemployment rate is 16.8 percent. These young adults are overeducated and underemployed.

The stress of jobs, relationships, and expectations are just among the few contributing factors in this identity crisis. Young adults are just as vulnerable to suffering a quarter-life crisis as their older counterparts are to suffering a mid-life crisis. The discrepancy creates anxiety, depression, and paralysis.

A [survey](#) by trading and advertising website, [Gumtree.com](#), found the quarter-life crisis is sending many young adults into turmoil. Out of 1,100 young people, 86 percent confessed to feeling under pressure to succeed in their relationships, finances, and jobs before hitting 30. Two in five were worried about money, saying they did not earn enough, and 32 percent felt under pressure to marry and have children by the age of 30. Six percent were planning to emigrate, while a whopping 21 percent wanted a complete career change.

QUARTER-LIFE CRISIS PHASES

The employed college grad can also be plagued by the crisis when it comes to career. [April Masini](#), author of four relationship advice books, the “Ask April” advice column and the free Q&A forum AskApril.com, told *Medical Daily* in an email: “They’re four years out of school in many cases, and if they’re not employed, they’re competing against shiny, new college grads. If they are employed, they’re either happily on their way, or they may realize that they’re in a job they don’t like and life isn’t as easy as they thought it would be.” The latter can lead to crisis.

This panic is provoking the beginning of reflection, which was seldom done during the transition from high school to college. School doesn’t teach you how to live your life beyond the grounds of education. Your successes and failures are no longer ranked by As or Fs, leaving many unable to know what they’re doing.

While the quarter-life crisis is associated with 20-somethings, however, it doesn’t happen literally a quarter of the way through your life. A [study](#) presented at the 2011 *British Psychological Society Annual Conference in Glasgow* found the majority of these quarter-life crises occur in the period between 25 and 35, although they cluster around 30. The researchers identified a quarter-life crisis as a difficult separation from a job, relationship, or both, and tends to take a total of two years on average.

Dr. Oliver Robinson, lead researcher and Senior Lecturer in Psychology at the University of Greenwich’s School of Health & Social Care and his colleagues found there is a quarter-life crisis model young adults go through in four phases:

Phase 1 is defined by feeling “locked in” to a job or relationship, or both.

Phase 2 is a rising sense that change is possible, along with a mental and physical separation from previous commitments.

Phase 3 is a period of rebuilding a new life.

Phase 4 involves developing new commitments that are more in tune with personal interests, aspirations, and values.

The findings highlight that the quarter-life crisis can be a positive experience once the four phases are resolved. It leads to a range of emotions while facilitating the exploration for new possibilities that are related to your sense of self. Eighty percent of the participants looked back on their crisis as a positive change that needed to be made. Moreover, Robinson believes that those who go through the quarter-life crisis are much less likely to fall into a mid-life crisis.

CAN A QUARTER-LIFE CRISIS BE AVOIDED?

A quarter-life crisis may only be mitigated. Masini believes parenting style could heavily influence the likelihood of a quarter-life crisis. "There's should be no surprise that there's a direct correlation between parents who let kids live at home for extended periods of time after graduation, and quarter life crises," she said. Her philosophy is if young adults who are expected to work hard and succeed, are treated in ways that match those expectations, there's less of a likelihood to be in a crisis.

If that still doesn't convince you, a quarter-life crisis could be perceived as just another rite of passage that ironically reassures 20-somethings they are on the right path to wherever they expect their journey to take them.

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LIZETTE BORRELI

Liz is a Senior Reporter at Medical Daily who is an outdoorsy sports enthusiast focused on sexual health, relationships and healthy living. [read more](#)

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