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# Can You Grow Up, But Not Be a Grown-up?

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Michael Bywater is concerned that the present generation is growing up, but not becoming grown-ups. Writing in *The Telegraph* [London], Bywater bemoans the infantilism of the culture and the immaturity of so many young adults.

“My grandfather was born in 1888 and he didn’t have a lifestyle. He didn’t need one: he had a life,” Bywater observes.

Yes, his grandfather’s life was almost assuredly very different than his own. Previous generations did not think of life as an endless experiment, and they saw their grown-up role as a matter of responsibility, not a lifestyle choice.

He adds:

*I suspect that my grandfather’s life was real in a sense that my father’s life hasn’t quite been, and my life is not at all. The crucial difference is my grandfather’s lack of self-consciousness, and that self-consciousness is a hallmark of the perpetual, infantilised adolescents we have all become, monsters of introspection hovering twitchily on the edge of self-obsession, occasionally aware that the life that exists only to be examined is barely manageable; barely, indeed, a life.*

The invention of adolescence as a major stage of life was a major mark of the twentieth century. The twenty-first century seems destined to be the generation of extended adolescence – *really* extended. A significant number of post-college young adults are moving back to live with parents. Many others delay marriage well into the late twenties or thirties.

More:

*My grandfather wasn’t nagged. Once he turned 21, he was a man, and a grown-up, and nobody battered him round the clock with opportunities he was missing, miseries he didn’t know he had, aspirations ditto, inadequacies doubly so.*

*Nobody told him about being good in bed, grooming tips, what his car said about him, what he should have to eat, how much he should drink, what his house said about him, how Benares brassware was so over, where he should go on holiday, what this season’s must-have product would be, how his suits should look.*

*He knew some of these things, and didn’t care about the others because nobody was drawing them to his attention. He knew what his suits should look like: trousers, waistcoat, jacket, all made out of the same material.*

*He knew about grooming: you shaved. He knew what he should eat: breakfast, lunch, dinner. He probably had no idea that good-in-bed even existed, or that furniture did anything except furnish, or that where he went on holiday was of any significance, or that his car said anything about him at all, except ‘Oh, here comes Dr Bywater; I recognise his car.’*

It is surely interesting that Mr. Bywater finds his grandfather’s life so different from his own — and yet is fascinated with this difference. This is the voice of generational yearning, and it may well be most pronounced in young men. The extension of boy culture into the years of early manhood is not without consequence. These consequences are not merely

external matters of education, marriage, achievement, work, and economics. Indeed, the most significant consequences are almost surely internal — rooted in a confused sense of manhood and adult male identity.

This represents a significant challenge for the culture, but also for the Christian church. There are obvious implications for parents here. We must help this generation of promising young people to grow up to be grown-ups.

BONUS: Read Michael Bywater's [article](#) and see his humorous and insightful list entitled, "[How to Be an Adult.](#)"

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