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Does Anyone Want to Be an Adult Anymore?

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Adam Sternbergh raises a very good question in the pages of *New York Magazine*. Why do so many adults want to look like kids?

This is an obituary for the generation gap. It is a story about 40-year-old men and women who look, talk, act, and dress like people who are 22 years old. It's not about a fad but about a phenomenon that looks to be permanent. It's about the hedge-fund guy in Park Slope with the chunky square glasses, brown rock T-shirt, slight paunch, expensive jeans, Puma sneakers, and shoulder-slung messenger bag, with two kids squirming over his lap like itchy chimps at the Tea Lounge on Sunday morning. It's about the mom in the low-slung Sevens and ankle boots and vaguely Berlin-art-scene blouse with the \$800 stroller and the TV-screen-size Olsen-twins sunglasses perched on her head walking through Bryant Park listening to Death Cab for Cutie on her Nano.

And because this phenomenon wears itself so clearly as the convergence of downtown cool and easy, abundant money, it is also, of course, about stuff—though that's not all it's about. It's more interesting as evidence of the slow erosion of the long-held idea that in some fundamental way, you cross through a portal when you become an adult, a portal inscribed with the biblical imperative “When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: But when I became a man, I put away childish things.” This cohort is not interested in putting away childish things. They are a generation or two of affluent, urban adults who are now happily sailing through their thirties and forties, and even fifties, clad in beat-up sneakers and cashmere hoodies, content that they can enjoy all the good parts of being a grown-up (a real paycheck, a family, the warm touch of cashmere) with none of the bad parts (Dockers, management seminars, indentured servitude at the local Gymboree). It's about a brave new world whose citizens are radically rethinking what it means to be a grown-up and whether being a grown-up still requires, you know, actually growing up.

The article is worth a look. Sternburgh sees the problem through a New York City lens, but the problem is found across the country. The issue of dress isn't what's most important — it's the fact that adulthood is disappearing as a recognizable mark of maturity and responsibility.

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