



Slouching Toward Adulthood: Observations from the Not-So-Empty Nest

By Sally Koslow

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A witty and insightful report from the parenting trenches by the mother of two "adultescents"

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By delving into the latest research and conducting probing interviews with both frustrated parents and their frustrated offspring, Koslow uses humor, insight, and honest self-reflection to give voice to the issues of prolonged dependency. From the adultescents' relationship to work (or no work), money (that convenient parental ATM), or social life, *Slouching Toward Adulthood* is a provocative, razor-sharp, but heartfelt cri de coeur for all the parents who sent their kids to college only to have them ricochet home with a diploma in one hand and the DVR remote in the other.

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Editorial Review

Review

“Excellent.... At last, a serious, well-researched book about raising children which also includes that crucial characteristic every parent needs—a sense of humor.” —Deirdre Donahue, *USA Today*

“An eye-opener.... Koslow writes wittily about the infantilization of American youth as increasing numbers treat getting a job and moving out as just an option.” —*People*

“Smart, with plenty of insights and a lively prose style that should keep readers, especially the book's target audience of parents wondering why their grown-up kids are back living in their basements, engaged.”
—*Booklist*

“Koslow casts a keen eye on the 'not-so-empty-nest' phenomenon that besets today's baby boomer parents . . . and provides plenty of food for thought for parents and adolescents who want to understand each other and perhaps change things for the better.” —*Publishers Weekly*

“This book is hilarious! I burst out laughing on page one, and it just got funnier and funnier. But *Slouching Toward Adulthood* is also hard-hitting and painfully insightful—I found myself wincing with recognition. Backed by the latest research, Sally Koslow's thought-provoking new book should be required reading for today's parents and young adults.” —Amy Chua, professor of law at Yale University and author of *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*

“Full of research, insight, and hilarious examples of what life is like for the long-suffering parents of 'adultescents,' *Slouching Toward Adulthood* is one of those invaluable books that identifies and illuminates a new phenomenon in our culture.” —Gretchen Rubin, author of *The Happiness Project*

“Sally Koslow has really hit on something with her incisive *Slouching Toward Adulthood*. Memorable books that struck a chord about the path of life or the dissonance between parent and child—Gail Sheehy's *Passages*, Nancy Friday's *My Mother/My Self*—all had a kind of kitchen-table humanity and an ability to limn the unnamed conflicts of a particular moment. Beneath its jaunty two-drinks-with-your-coolest-friend ebullience, this book, as of its moment as those books were of theirs, has that resonance, too.” —Sheila Weller, author of *Girls Like Us*

“*Let go*, Sally Koslow exhorts indulgent parents who lovingly enable their adolescents to postpone the rigors and responsibilities of being a grown-up. Koslow's wit and wisdom wake us up to the hidden costs of hanging on too long to our kids, to our youth, and to the past. A great read!” —Maggie Jackson, author of *Distracted*

“In her trenchant book on twenty-first-century life with our adult children, Sally Koslow offers us wit,

awareness, and, most important, a sense that we are not alone. From the first pages, the reader feels right at home, comforted by Koslow's confessions, research, and wisdom.” —Susan Shapiro Barash, author of *You're Grounded Forever . . . But First Let's Go Shopping*

“Sally Koslow has written a funny, shrewd, and true account of a problem the boomer generation didn't know it had created: the consequences of helicopter parenting. We've pampered our kids so much they don't want to grow up. Who can blame them? *Slouching Toward Adulthood* is the book that explains why 'the guest bedroom' is a thing of the past.” —James Atlas, author of *My Life in the Middle Ages*

About the Author

Sally Koslow is a journalist, and an author, and the former editor in chief of both *McCall's* and *Lifetime*. She has written for *O, The Oprah Magazine*; *More*; *Real Simple*; *Ladies Home Journal*; *Good Housekeeping*; *Reader's Digest*; and *Huffington Post*. She lives in New York City with her husband; her kids have finally moved out.

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Excerpt from *Slouching Toward Adulthood* by Sally Koslow

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Chapter 1: A PUBLIC DISPLAY OF REFLECTION

Everyone is kneaded out of the same dough but not baked in the same oven.

—Yiddish proverb

The clock struck noon. It was a weekday, bright and shiny. I gently knocked. “It's late—sweetie, shouldn't you be getting up?” A few minutes later, Sweetie staggered out of his childhood bedroom in boxers, stubble, and a Beastie Boys T-shirt cherished since tenth grade. Five months before, Jed had moved back home after a two-year post college spin working at a San Francisco record label. A few months earlier the plans for my son to open an East Coast branch of the company had fizzled—not that this development appeared to have cramped his style. A weekly unemployment check was financing more late-night eating and drinking than my husband and I had done in the last two decades.

“How's the job hunt?” I asked as he leisurely munched his bagel and paged through a magazine.

Mumble, mumble.

“No, really, how's it going?”

“Fine.”

“What does that mean?”

This time I got the same look I received years before when I'd heard our son had his first girlfriend. “Who is she?” I'd asked, stoked with motherly glee.

“I release that information on a need-to-know basis,” Jed answered, “and you have no need to know.”

As Sweetie sat across from me at the breakfast table, I realized that *You Can't Go Home Again* wasn't on my son's English major syllabus.

All around us, sometimes in our own homes, we see young, well-educated Americans postponing full maturity and its attendant responsibilities. The beloved offspring to which I refer is most likely well over a decade into deodorant, partnered sex, and, depending on gender, tampons or even Rogaine. He or she is way past having earned the legal right to vote, defend our country, drive, maintain private medical records, enter into a contract, marry, smoke, go to jail, and—if he or she has hit twenty-five—rent a car or be elected to Congress. If a parent of such a person tweaks the hair and clothes, when her loving eyes gaze upon this child she may see some version of herself or her partner at the same age. This 2.0 reflection may look down on the reader, literally, from a greater height or have boobs that are a cup or two bigger—or perhaps it just seems that way, with her décolletage so often on display. There might be tattoos and tongue studs, but given Brazilians, landing strips, and manscaping, there's possibly not much pubic hair, although the parent prefers not to think about that.

Who are these people sandwiching a chunky stage between adolescence and adulthood, these individuals who resemble adults but aren't, exactly? The Margaret Mead who lurks within every parent can't help but notice curious discrepancies between the boy or girl under consideration and the grown-up we swear we were at the same age. We've come to think of "adults" as people who "settle down." Adults are financially independent and fiscally solvent, albeit usually with debt and a mortgage, usually tethered to a steady job or its reasonable facsimile. Trust fund kids never have seemed very adult, even—like Brooke Astor's greedy old baby—when they're eighty.

An adult isn't in a state of constant improvisation. An adult isn't shackled to his or her mother or father by cell phone or purse strings or both in a three-legged race toward an undecided destination. An adult doesn't crave constant stroking from Mom and Dad.

In the eyes of most real grown-ups, a random five-or ten-year slice of adulthood does not include going to school, taking a break, going to school again—possibly again and again—starting a job, starting another job, moving in with Mom and Dad, traveling here and traveling there, taking out loans, borrowing from the parents, and imbibing their grandparents' cocktails while accumulating credit card debt and purchasing cunning yet quickly replaced electronics.

Adults tend not to post their romantic status online, pulling back the curtains on their private life and publicizing intimate secrets. They don't fall in and out of love so many times they need Excel to track the relationships before they start to serially cohabit, postponing marriage, kids, and getting fully established at jobs, much less careers. Adults may have sucked up the fizzy best seller *Eat, Pray, Love*, but they don't see Elizabeth Gilbert, its author, as their north star as they wing off for extended stays in Italy, India, and Indonesia. These young adventurers may also be unaware that Gilbert followed *Eat, Pray, Love* with *Committed*, where the author defends matrimony in pointillist detail. Adults feel that usually by the mid-thirties, they need to stop—and here I use the technical term—farting around.

WHERE WANDERING BEGINS

The road separating today's adult from yesterday's starts to diverge when parents drop off Jenny or Josh at college. For most of today's parents this is uncharted territory and not only because of Adderall replacing LSD, the unisex dorms and bathrooms, and the comfortably out same-sex relationships and transgender students. After visiting well over a dozen campuses during high school—Hogwarts, if the parents could afford it—taking thousands of dollars' worth of Sisyphean test prep courses, and perhaps enjoying a jolly

gap year in a faraway land, most American kids from solidly middle-class and upper-middleclass families enroll in an institution of higher learning. Every September, you can hear a transcontinental sigh as moms and dads among the privileged, anxious classes articulate immense relief, glad to be exorcised of their itchy need to deliver a droning loop about safety schools and *U. S. News & World Report* rankings, boring even themselves.

Mom and Dad accompany their newly minted first-years (“freshman” is 1969 pre-feminist Neanderthal argot and even “frosh” has landed in the linguistic compost heap) to a campus. There, they unload many, many boxes, perhaps ordered with the help of Bed, Bath & Beyond’s “Shop for College” service, where millions of college students quiz themselves to determine their decorating style and scrutinize a list of “recommended” products so they can mesh purchases with their roommates. Eventually families depart, perhaps after attending a misty ceremony designed to encourage Mom and Dad to bid their chickadee good-bye. Parents may delude themselves into thinking they are leaving kids to learn to fight their own battles—college is a growth experience!—and bushwhack through administrative obfuscation in order to land a coveted spot in Kick-Ass Poets 101. With that, Mom and Dad take their first deep, cleansing breath in eighteen years, and generally celebrate by having sex.

Some students major in something solid, graduate, and hop onto the hamster wheel to high-powered jobs, destination weddings, early parenthood, and homes furnished from Design Within Reach, West Elm, and CB2. That’s the sunny side of today’s America.

The underbelly of family life is that in what seems like seven minutes, for many other students—perhaps the brother or sister of the oft-extolled young person pictured above—floats a concept. College may not be the promised land, no matter that the particular school he is attending was his first-choice “reach,” salivated over for three years while the school’s Web site home page served as his computer wallpaper. No biggie. He’ll transfer or meander along on the five-or six-year plan, possibly with a junior year in Zimbabwe. Most boomer parents graduated after four years. If they hadn’t, their parents—adults feared as much as respected—would have followed through on threats that scared the nonexistent sunscreen right off them. But it currently takes the average college student 4.5 years to get a bachelor’s degree, and six-year stays have become routine—on top of red-shirting boys to start kindergarten a year late to allow them time to earn their chops on the T-ball diamond and grab an edge. This adds two or more full years—and sometimes staggering expense—for boomer parents to have dependent kids. That is, if students graduate. The United States now has the highest college dropout rate in the industrialized world, reports the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

Tuition and fees at private, nonprofit colleges and universities have increased more than 4 percent per year for the last several years: at press time, Bates College in Lewiston, Maine—to throw a dart and see where we land—charges parents more than \$50,000 a year in tuition. Less expensive state schools add up, too: Penn State in State College, Pennsylvania, costs approximately \$15,000 a year for in-state students. If parents aren’t footing the bills, accumulated tuition becomes the adultescents’ albatross: for the class of 2011, the student loan burden is close to \$27,000. Adjusted for inflation, according to the National Center for Education Statistics, the cost of a public four-year degree nearly doubled between 1964 and 2009.

Longer stays in college grow partly from students wandering from major to major. Who wants to go to dental school when there are movies to write and direct? Snookums, how do you *become* a writer of screenplays or director of films, asks the sheepish parent. Snookums proceeds to accuse Mom and Dad of being bourgeois enough to suggest that college is about preparing for a job, not learning for learning’s sake and/or finding himself. At this point many parents retreat, chastened, just as some students announce that they will go beyond reversing direction to dropping out of the college they walked on water to enter. A conservatory or culinary school! Playing professional poker! Becoming an organic farmer! Keeping bees! Why not? They

don't require organic chemistry suffered through in a baccalaureate year, necessary to qualify for veterinary, dental, or medical school.

As parents watch the seeds of academic and social arrhythmia being sown, they start to wonder if in some way they enabled their kid's difficulty in finding himself and settling on a plan. Yes, I'm talking to you. Okay, me, too. Let's all be accountable; the fact that the term "enabled" hadn't joined everyday speech when baby boomer parents were the age our children are now is no excuse. And don't tell me you didn't realize WTF you were doing. Hey, you text. OMG, you were not born yesterday but probably in that buoyant post-WWII era.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Debbie Bennett:

Playing with family within a park, coming to see the coastal world or hanging out with pals is thing that usually you have done when you have spare time, subsequently why you don't try point that really opposite from that. One activity that make you not experiencing tired but still relaxing, trilling like on roller coaster you are ride on and with addition associated with. Even you love Slouching Toward Adulthood: Observations from the Not-So-Empty Nest, it is possible to enjoy both. It is fine combination right, you still wish to miss it? What kind of hang-out type is it? Oh seriously its mind hangout folks. What? Still don't buy it, oh come on its named reading friends.

Gregory Richards:

This Slouching Toward Adulthood: Observations from the Not-So-Empty Nest is great e-book for you because the content which is full of information for you who have always deal with world and possess to make decision every minute. This book reveal it info accurately using great manage word or we can point out no rambling sentences in it. So if you are read it hurriedly you can have whole facts in it. Doesn't mean it only offers you straight forward sentences but tough core information with attractive delivering sentences. Having Slouching Toward Adulthood: Observations from the Not-So-Empty Nest in your hand like keeping the world in your arm, data in it is not ridiculous just one. We can say that no publication that offer you world with ten or fifteen tiny right but this guide already do that. So , this can be good reading book. Hello Mr. and Mrs. occupied do you still doubt which?

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Marsha Cox:

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