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less pretending, less perfection - more authenticity, more value

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Thriving At Adulting: Expectations Versus Reality

Adolescence has ended, adulting means that you are part of the material culture and all of your emotional issues have found a solution! But what if that isn't the case for you?

The cultural model of socialization often sets pressure over individuals to reach social adulthood goals in an expected time frame. In western societies, a lot of us are expected to reach emotional, mental, physical, and sexual maturity, all of us, at the same point in life, often pushing us to traumatic experiences failing at stably transitioning into adulthood.



13 *Going on 30* is a beloved 2004 blockbuster that opens with Jenna Rink (played by Jennifer Garner), a tormented, "unpopular," and unhappy girl on the morning of her 13th birthday. Jenna is glued to the latest '80s trends, religiously following the ultimate social media of her time: *Poise Magazine*. Her daydream? To be "thirty, flirty, and thriving."

After what she considers a disastrous birthday party (spoiler alert ahead), a combination of magical wishing dust and a desperate birthday wish turns her dream into reality. Jenna wakes up to find she *is* thirty, flirty, and—on the surface—thriving: she has a glamorous job, a walk-in closet, and is apparently “friends” with Madonna.

But as the plot unfolds, the audience begins to notice the cracks. Jenna’s expectations—shaped by media and the cultural ideals of her time—have led her to achieve everything she thought she wanted, at the cost of losing her values and the meaningful relationships she once cherished.

To me, the desire to fast-forward through life is often a response to not having the tools to face the present. Watching Jenna skip over pivotal moments of her life makes it almost impossible not to ask ourselves:

Why are we so desperate to hit cultural milestones? Why do we convince ourselves that certain achievements or material things equal success?

The truth is, we’ve been recycling the same success stories for generations. We’ve failed, over and over, to reach true individual happiness—and yet we keep handing down the same social blueprints to the next.

So, what if the goals you’re chasing aren’t even yours?

In *The Mastery of Love*, Miguel Ruiz writes that we spend our whole lives practicing to be who we are. We shape ourselves based on what we *believe* we are. According to him, our drama and suffering come from these repeated performances:

“You master your own personality, your own beliefs, you master every action, every reaction. You practice for years and years, and you achieve the level of mastery to be what you believe you are [...] All of us are masters. We are masters because we have the power to create and to rule our own lives.”

He goes on to explain that when a human is born, their emotional body and mind are completely healthy. Babies simply live in the present. The problems begin when adults teach them to “be like them,” to see the world through their eyes. That’s when we start wearing masks, fearing judgment, punishment, or heartbreak. That’s when we learn sadness.

We become experts in not being ourselves. We become experts in playing characters—performing versions of ourselves that fit into each social context.

Today, as people near 30 (especially women), the pressure to have “figured it all out” ramps up. Society whispers (or shouts) that 30 equals old. And if you forget, don’t worry—the system will remind you. No more free museum passes or discounted train fares after 25. (Kidding... but also not really.)

So, what’s the solution? Apparently, we need to *squeeze every drop* out of our 20s: Buy anti-aging creams. Earn your B.A., M.A., and Ph.D. Become emotionally and financially independent. Travel the world. Have the best sex of your life. Overcome your phobias. Heal your childhood trauma. Work your ass* out. Dream big. And do it *all* right now. Sounds easy enough, right?

Please do ignore my sarcasm and
remember the following:
Adulting is not a linear journey.
Practice what makes you feel good!

But the truth is: adulting isn't about rushing through painful experiences just to feel "complete." You don't need to reach a particular milestone at a particular age. You don't need to look a certain way, wear a specific outfit, or live a certain lifestyle to thrive. Most importantly, you certainly don't need to rush any experience, if you don't feel comfortable to take that extra step. You can begin your journey by acknowledging that what you want can be different from what other people want,

If you want to truly thrive in adulthood, start by being radically honest with yourself. Everything else will unfold, naturally, at its own pace—when you're ready.

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