

An infantilised generation: two thirds of graduates come back to live with mummy and daddy.



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"Brideshead Revisited", the Charles Sturridge TV adaptation of Evelyn Waugh's novel, had caused a sensation the year before I went up to Oxford. Predictably, a couple of fey undergraduates modelled themselves on Sebastian Flyte, and took to taking their teddy bears with them everywhere they went. To me they looked like big babies, and I blamed the series for infantilising a generation.

Now I blame the recession for doing the same: youth unemployment, a contracting economy and a limited supply of affordable housing are forcing youngsters back home with mummy and daddy (teddies optional). Two thirds of those graduating this summer are having to shelf any plan for independent living and head back to stay under their parents' roof – for a year, or ten. They will be looking for work. But as they sleep in the bed that was theirs when they were ten, and eat "a proper" breakfast made by their mother, they must wonder how to reconcile their return to a childish life with appearing autonomous and ambitious in job interviews. It's a tricky one: a boss wants to know you're capable of grown-up determination; being mollicoddled at home is not a great preparation for working life.

But if their would-be employers are worried about this state of affairs, teenagers and 20-somethings seem totally resigned to it. In our home, the 19 year-old and 17 year-old shouted me down when I dared suggest that I turn the eldest's bedroom into an office: what?! Where was Johnny expected to go?! Didn't I want him living with us?! I was setting a dangerous precedent, the younger brother sniffed: he, too, saw his immediate future in terms of the family home.

I know they're doing it out of financial necessity rather than delight in our company, but I am secretly pleased: I love cooking, caring, cooing, and for me, the more the merrier. Moreover, I'm used to this with my Italian relatives: most of them lived at home with Mamma well into their 30s. In Italy, the housing shortage was so acute, couples either lived with their in-laws or postponed getting married for ages. This explained, I was told, the numerous parked cars whose windows were lined by newspapers: couples were snatching a few minutes of privacy away from parental monitoring. It also explained, I fear, the spoiled brats I found when I lived in Rome for a year in my 20s: my contemporaries expected

to be served on hand and foot, listened to attentively, and admired. After all, that's what they got at home from ageing, doting parents.

Soon we may find the same is true of 20 and 30-somethings here. The teddy bear will be a giveaway.

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