

**POSTMODERN REJUVENATION OF GROWN-UPS: WHO KIDULTS ARE?**

*Abstract.* The paper is dedicated to the kidult figure – childish adult – as a generation of postmodern reality. It is postulated that 20-35-year-old people escaping from their biological age by desire to dress up into teenage clothes, by anti-aging treatments, by searching of extreme experiences, by the lack of investments in long-term relationships and properties is a logical process of youth lifestyle standardization and juvenile society of postmodern times. The parallelisms for kidult definitions as the symbols of immaturity, responsibility avoidance and escaping from adult identity are investigated. There are also highlighted the major approaches to understanding kidults as the age and activities group, as well as determined the interpretation of their appearance from the economics, culture, social domains, anthropology, age psychology viewpoints. The typical traits and psychological characteristics of kidults starting with immaturity and ending with a high level of suggestiveness and anachronistic features are outlined.

*Key words:* adolescence, adult, anachronisms, baby-boomers, boomerang kids, Carlson syndrome, childhood, discontinuity, escapism, hedonism, immaturity, infantilism, kawaii, kidult, juvenile, Peterpandemonium, postmodernity, presentism, youth.

**Introduction.** Contemporary personality is influenced by the growing availability of knowledge, information overload, transformation of socio-economic conditions, globalization and other significant social mechanisms, that change its essence which greatly differs from the previously dictated rules.

Postmodern worldview, that is quietly and inevitably involved in today's scientific and everyday reality, sets new requirements to the understanding of ancestral imperatives.

Postmodern efficiency of the individual is no longer measured in stability, balance and self-consistency, now the dominant features are self-improvement, search, constant changing of made and unmade decisions, flexible life practices.

The identity of the person at the postmodern times is dynamic and variable, personal strategies more often are based on the tireless search in order to overcome the contradictions, create prognoses, social games.

Today personality goes by subjective feelings, exercising their basic ability to search activity and civilizing tries to withdraw from the responsibility for the results. The things that were considered to be acts of rationality and maturity and were assumed to be markers of life milestones and age limits are no longer the attributes of prevalence and norm. Such postmodern nonlinearity of life path, ages swapping, further delaying of ageing created the concept of "kidults", when the adults follow the children's values, thus prolonging a sense of youthfulness to the full.

**Previous researches.** History has a tendency to move in a spiral, and so-called modern age differentiation reverts back to medieval lack of distance between the definition of children and adults [12]. Currently there are increasingly observed processes of erasing the gap between generations and "youthification" of mankind, rejuvenation of the needs, values and behaviour. The American National Academy of Sciences as far as in 2003 marked the completion of the teenage phase in the life of the average citizen at the age of 30, and USA Society for Adolescent Health & Medicine even offered to mark the beginning of adulthood after 34 years [10].

The largest number of socio-humanitarians now focuses on the study of the factors of delayed adulthood that are associated with competitiveness and instability in the labour market and extending terms of education and training [5], with increasing confidence to gay marriage and simplifying the

procedures for adoption, rising cost of housing, popular culture of consumerism [4]. The so-termed by Z.Bauman [1] fluidity of the social, cultural and economic world can be considered the absolute factor of problems of identity formation and delay in the young people to assume the adult role, that entails making choices and taking responsibility for them considering the positive/negative, expected/unexpected, desired/undesired circumstances [4, 238].

Now the research of needs of those who live, enjoying the pleasures of youth, and questions the legitimacy of the canonical responsibilities is becoming more and more popular [8, 45]. In the United States, Australia and the UK such individuals are termed as “kidults”, “adultescents”, “rejuveniles”, ‘KIPPERS’ (Kids In Parents ' Pockets Eroding Retirement Savings), in Canada – “boomerang kids”, in Germany – “Nesthocker”, in Italy – ‘mammone’, in Japan – “kawaii” [4].

Actually, the most common term “kidult” is a combination of the words “kid” and “adult”, and applies to adults that have children's taste and children's sensitivity. In fact, kids and teenagers, who are at the epicentre of consumer society, gradually become a model to follow for the older generations. That resembles the interpretation of prefigurative culture by M. Mead which replaces the postfigurative one, where the children followed the adults, or even the cofigurative one, where contemporaries learned from each other.

The coined term “kidult” was first used by the New York Times columnist P.Martin back in 1985, A. Calcutt in his paper “Arrested Development: Pop Culture and the Erosion of Adulthood” in 1998 launched the popularization of the term “kidult” as a middle-age person of a high social status, often successful in career but who continues to take pleasure in such attributes of childhood as tales, cartoons, toys etc. [19].

Scientists, speaking of immaturity about objectively adult, use such concepts as “adult children”, “individuals locked in a high school of the mind”, “adultescents”, “boy-men”, “twixters”, “thresholders”, “BigBabies” [2]. Accordingly, one should mention the Peter Pan syndrome or Jungian Puer aeternus (eternal boy) and Carlson syndrome that promote the idea of infantilism.

Kidults, despite their age, make themselves free from the obligation and responsibility that makes them incompetent partners in interaction, unlike constituted adults who formally and informally are positioned as equal participants in the interaction [4]. Having adult appearance, kidults continue to cast themselves as children that is observed not only in external attributes and behavior, but also becomes internal, mental characteristic.

The values of “postadolescence”, nested in the concept of kidults, represent Freudian prototype of children's fears, insecurities, instinctive behavior, endless search of themselves and the inability to love and work. According to J. Huizinga, it is the archetype of “Man the Player” or *homo ludens*, who is constantly hiding from reality in the play. Those are boomerang children that return to the parental home after trying independent life and demonstrate the emotive, activity and possessive instability [2].

According to F. Furedi, the category of maturity loses its value and it indicates the devastation of an adult identity which is the unwillingness to make long-term investment, both financial and emotional [13]. H. Mackay echoes the view that adulthood is being dangerously delayed by a generation who are overstimulated by a media-saturated society and overwhelmed by choice, which makes them unable to settle down, capable only of temporary alignments before they grasp onto the next bright opportunity [8, 47].



J. Coté offers to consider the phenomena of “arrested childhood” and “emerging adulthood”, paying attention to the fact that inadequate social pressure on young people enables them to grow up in a right way, intensifying “teenaging”, which negates the need for participation in building efficient society and economy instead lavishing resources and perspectives [7].

The purpose of our article is a theoretical outline of the sources and limits of configuration of kidult figure in postmodern reality.

**Case analysis.** Today, more and more adults are showing a tendency to represent the features of kidults to distance themselves from a complex reality and stress [15]. Kidults no longer follow the time-honoured rituals of age and responsibility. And they are partly seen as responsible for the problem, auguring ill for the future continuation of a civil society. Moreover, the phenomenon of prolonged youth concerns mainly the representatives of the middle and upper classes – essentially those who form the public opinion [5, 240]. And those movements are particularly fascinating now, as institutions that were once the lynchpin of adult security experience a spectacular slump [8, 45-46].

A large number of researchers believe that kidults are a product of the modern consumer society, where market relations impose the fashion for products primarily intended for children and teenagers upon adults (J. Bernardini, F. Furedi, K. Crawford).

Media communication, and especially advertising, nowadays seems to promote a kind of collective regression: needs should be satisfied immediately because it is imperative to take here and now everything that life, or rather the consumer’s society, promises to give us. And youthfulness – like beauty, success and money – becomes an object that is possible to own. In other words, youth, a biological condition,

seems to have become a cultural definition. One appears young not because he is a certain age, but because he is entitled to enjoy certain styles of life and consumption [3]. This is brightly illustrated by “Peterpandemonium” (as a fusion of “Peter Pan” and “pandemonium” – the abode of demons), term used in media, to describe people aged from 20 to 30, interested in products that supposedly return them to the carefree days of their childhood – namely books, games, gadgets, animated films, etc.

J. Bernardini provides 4 reasons why such goods are commercially attractive and are actively promoted by marketers: 1) the needs of children and young people are ideally and potentially infinite, ephemeral, superfluous, devoid of any practical or utilitarian value, in contrast to the needs of adults who appreciate the practical importance of things; 2) nostalgia effect, trying to find stability in past experiences, because adult already knows how it is to be a kid or a teenager; 3) demographic increase of the older generation in comparison to youth; 4) standardization of youth life style, because real and legally constituted youth is an optimal target for sales in reality and virtuality.

So, infantilization of an adult as a financially reliable buyer is a profitable competitive process to undermine the evaluation of the product quality and the purchasing logic by replacing those things with high suggestibility, irrationalism, individualism, involvement in the game and ignorance of the needs of others. Kidults are a perfect target for the seller. They have a large number of desires and the real ability to make purchases [3].

In the specifically institutionalized areas the encouragement toward kidults is manifested through attention to individualism, privatization, narcissism and profitability. Political leaders take the role of teacher and father figure toward their electorate. Sports are starting to resemble plays

more and more. The banking system simplifies the language and its activities for customers. In the religious sector, there are processes of secularization as means of freeing society from the influence of the church on one hand, and the proliferation of religious sects that combine modern culture with superstition to plant a seed of irrationality in people's minds. Similar trend towards devolution can be observed in symbolism, linguistics, law enforcement, management, event planning, etc.

In our information-cluttered world media becomes the lifesaver and means to propagate values, trends and principles that comprise the symbolic universe of ethical choice. Such communications legitimize immaturity or childish behaviour and promote youth life style [16].

In terms of popular culture, the infantile ethos has filled sociomedia contexts: TV programs lose their pedagogical and cultural depth in favour of entertainment content; film industry increasingly produces remakes, comedies and animated superhero movies; literature is limited to motivational books and young-adult novels; Internet space is intensively used by adults as a game environment due to social networks and blogosphere; not to mention the popularization of video games among adults as an escape from everyday obligations and responsibility for making decisions [6].

Kidults for the most part operate by ambivalent information – reality and unreality that exist alongside each other in the usual for them space of virtual communication, where the numerous image I's for various social networks are constructed (attention and reception are genuine, but the measures of their expression are artificial) [22, 114].

For kidults the mass culture is the air, which is impossible to survive without, it is the channel of creation and distribution of values. And the main value there is a hedonistic worldview, the aesthetics of leisure with its corporeality, sensuality, temptations and eroticism [22, 114]. Postmodern

communities demonstrate acceptance of leisure and pleasure as of keys to development and happiness. As one of the respondents of the A. Mary study noted, “people don’t work for achievement, but for self-development and leisure culture” [18, 55].

The spiritual component of the personality in such type of culture degrades to the level of the appendage of the physical shell, thus promoting dominance of physicality and carnal pleasures [22, 115].

A cultural space for kidults is made bigger by a quite specific space: for example, the annual Seoul Kid&Adult Fair, various exhibitions and even a Museum of kidult toys. Mentioned events are not occasional in kidult community, they are distributed as a pop culture, thus extending kidult industry even more [15].

Fragmented freedom of the individual characterizes our society, a freedom that has everyone choosing based on desires and ambivalent feelings, alike demanding and fearing of living up by one's own ambitions at the same time. This freedom authorizes any possibility – with the help of the media – but also entails frustration and anxiety, because everyone knows that he could never choose and try everything. Prohibitions and limitations have the advantage of allowing us to believe that our dissatisfactions could be attributed to them; knowing that we are the only builders of our own lives leads, instead, to a constant sense of insecurity. Freedom means also knowing that eventually you will have to make an account of things undertaken and successfully completed. This worries the adult and leads him to a psychological escape from his own condition by taking refuge in the world of young people where the possibilities are increasingly vast [3].

According to other researchers, the culture of immaturity is associated with the historical factors of the struggle of generations. Baby boom generation denies and



rejects the culture of elders, not being able to propose a new model of maturity, but creating a model of pleasure and freedom from nostalgia for boyhood [9]. From an anthropological point of view, the new generation of adults is seeking better ways to become partners and parents by refusing a culture based on authoritarianism, patriarchy and masculinity. However they fail to find the alternative way of reaching maturity, thus losing the identity of the adult [2].

The problem of kidults is also lying in the deconstruction of notions about age and shifting boundaries of adulthood. According to T. Titarenko, new stages of life are organized from a variety of broad and personal contexts, life journey is irregular, with some rhythmic variations that can lead to the beginning of substantive manifestations of a certain age, then their climax and recession. In the personal history of an individual it's hard to keep track of the ongoing continuous movement from the past through the present to the future, because the display of teenage behaviour can happen in old age and old-age wisdom can come to a person in their adolescence [22, 62-69].

The authority of adulthood is traditionally associated with such social markers as independence, stable work, marriage, fatherhood, family property [2; 4]. On a psychological level the standard model of maturity involves more self-understanding and self-confidence as a result of experience and obtaining of skills in a process of social validation. And the failure of young people to become adults, overstaying in parental homes, changing the place of work, delaying marriage and parenting, doesn't necessarily indicate immaturity, egotism or infantilism. Youth treats career, relationships, property and culture as recurring problems, so they reserve the right not to satisfy external expectations as if rebelling against the imposed worldview [8, 46].

As G. Debert notes [11], until the 1970s images of rebellion and the subversion of cultural patterns were strictly associated with young figures. Since the 1990s these images have also been associated with older people. Young people, on the contrary, even tended to be depicted as individuals striving to control their irresponsible parents and remind them that they need to grow up. The blurring of age boundaries intensifies in events when mother and daughter simultaneously share events such as dating, marriage and pregnancy. The third age replaces old age; active retirement opposes sore retirement; old people's homes are now called residential centres; social workers become social animators; and gerontologists investigate not the elderly people, but gain new designations, such as "new youth" and "the leisure age".

J. Bernardini believes that the contemporary adult follows a sort of thoughtful immaturity, a conscious escape from the responsibilities of an anachronistic model of life [2]. We live in the age when people increasingly refuse to act their age. The young yearn to be older, while the older yearn to be younger [20]. Escape from one's biological age is realized through desire to dress in teenage clothes, use of anti-aging procedures, seeking new sensations, not investing in long-term relationship. The actor-consumer of this system tends to childishness without eventfulness, dresses without formality, having sex without reproducing, working without discipline, playing without spontaneity, buying without a purpose, living without wisdom, humility and responsibility [17].

In such arguments "real" adulthood is located somewhere in a golden era of the past, when maturity was coextensive with unwavering adherence to a life path geared around the ideals of career, marriage and child-bearing. Nowadays traditional ideas of adulthood as maturity, independence, responsibility and commitment sound

particularly ironic considering the rule of kidult-generating postmodern discontinuity [8].

O. Kotchubejnik argues that the basis of the so-called “new maturity” lies in a refusal of a linear development and matrimonial stability, relief from competitive syndrome. Such a play-oriented society creates a new practice of age experiences, that inevitably leads to making mischief and prolongation of childhood the global consumer trend. [22, 124-125].

Kidult becomes a product of juvenalized society, where the behaviour of its representatives relies on youth values. Such infantilism in a certain way is accordant with the collective regression, and it can be explained as a logical socio-psychological reaction to the processes that take place in the postmodernity. According to J. Bernardini, the liberal, liquid, individualistic and presentist connotations that gave shape to postmodernity seem to have gradually led to a real psychological rejection of the condition adulthood. [3].

Postmodern time flow forced a modern person to choose the moment of present as a single value of life, because of their unwillingness to conflict with uncertainty. In a society of globalisation and presentism bearing a motto “right here, right now” the past is erased from the memory, and the future is ignored, because it makes one think about dysfunctionality. Life of a postmodern human becomes nomadic, a constant drift in relationships and activities, values and priorities, space and time [22, 62]. The person itself becomes the central tool of their own biography, destiny and social relations, and their identity is associated with individual choice, self-monitoring and self-reflection [21].

Abstract ideas about adulthood being a sphere of fixed employment, a stable family life, and a white picket fence often mentioned in political rhetoric have anchored in collective consciousness as a synonym for success, but in fact it is never a

practical matter, considering difficulties of job hunting and buying property, multiple forms of family, sexuality and commitment.

Moreover, many of the claims made about kidults, such as their inability to settle down, their desire for new experiences and general disobedience – characteristics that are condemned for being childish – may also point to new conceptions of the adult [8, 51-53]. Abilities to savor the pleasures of irresponsibility, search their souls and choose their life paths definitely look more attractive as opposed to conventional difficulties of adulthood [14]. As a result, kidults have all the privileges of adults, but only some of their duties.

**Conclusion.** Fluid, changing, flexible conditions of postmodern reality no longer require an individual to be confined in rigid limits of life stages. The transition to adulthood today has a psychological sense rather than gaining social status. Concept of maturity changed from an idea to follow into the ideal, which is difficult to achieve, so one of the stages of postmodern scientific research was taken by the kidult figure – an adult child. Despite the adult age (20 to 35 years), the kidults have children's and teenage values that symbolize the rejection of responsibility and duties. The culture of consumerism has brought up in kidults a high suggestibility, irrationality, individualism, involvement in the game and ignoring the needs of others.

The appearance of kidults in the social sphere was triggered by the orientation on privatization and profitability that intensified development of individualism and narcissism. Media encourages immaturity and youth life style by making popular the hedonistic worldview that reassures leisure, pleasure and physicality. Prohibitions and restrictions of previous eras have made modern adult leave authoritarianism and masculinity behind, rejecting the obligatory presence of a stable job, marriage, parenthood and family property.



Infantilism, anachronism relief from competitive syndrome, presentism and the motto “right here, right now” postulate the kidult phenomenon in the postmodern space.

Kidults are underexplored figures, especially in Eastern-European science, that is why exploration of their psychological peculiarities and characteristics, development of research instruments for their diagnosis, creation and introduction of technologies for resolution of society juvenation processes are perspective for further researches.

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#### **ПОСТМОДЕРНЕ ОМОЛОДЖЕННЯ ДОРΟΣЛИХ: ХТО ТАКІ КІДАЛТИ?**

*Анотація. Роботу присвячено розгляду особистості кідалтів – дорослих дітей – як «соціального продукту» постмодерної реальності. Вказано, що втеча 20-35-річними людьми від біологічного віку є закономірним процесом у споживацькому суспільстві, де молодіжний стиль життя набуває якості високого стандарту, і нормою стають бажання вдягатися у підліткові речі, використовувати омолоджувальні процедури, шукати екстремальні враження та не інвестувати у тривалі стосунки і власність. Встановлено паралелізму у визначеннях постаті кідалт як символу незрілості, уникання відповідальності та втечі від ідентичності дорослого. Висвітлено основні підходи до розуміння кідалтів як вікової та діяльній групі з ракурсу різних галузей знання: економіки, культури, соціальної роботи, антропології, вікової психології. А також досліджено типові риси кідалтів – від незрілості до високого рівня сугестивності й анахронічності життєтворення.*

*Ключові слова: анахронізми, бєбі-бумери, гедонізм, дисконтинуїтет, дитинство, діти-бумеранги, дорослість, ескапізм, інфантилізм, кїдалти, лихоманка Пітера Пена, молодість, незрілість, постмодерн, презентизм, синдром Карлсона, ювенальність.*

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## **ПОСТМОДЕРНИСТСКОЕ ОМОЛОЖЕНИЕ ВЗРОСЛЫХ: КТО ТАКИЕ КИДАЛТЫ?**

*Аннотация. Работа посвящена рассмотрению личности кидалтов – взрослых детей – как «социального продукта» постмодернистской реальности. Указано, что бегство 20-35-летними людьми от биологического возраста является закономерным процессом в потребительском обществе, где молодежный стиль жизни приобретает качество высокого стандарта, и нормой становятся желания одеваться в подростковые вещи, использовать омолаживающие процедуры, искать экстремальные впечатления и не инвестировать в длительные отношения и собственность. Установлены параллелизмы в определениях фигуры кидалт как символа незрелости, избегания ответственности и бегства от идентичности взрослого. Освещены основные подходы к пониманию кидалтов как возрастной и деятельной группы с точки зрения разных отраслей знания: экономики, культуры, социальной работы, антропологии, возрастной психологии. А также исследованы типичные черты кидалтов – от незрелости до высокого уровня суггестивности и анахроничности выстраивания жизни.*

*Ключевые слова: анахроничность, бєбі-бумеры, взрослые, гедонизм, дети-бумеранги, детство, дисконтинуїтет, инфантильность, кидалты, лихорадка Питера Пена, молодежь, незрелость, подростки, постмодернизм, презентизм, синдром Карлсона, эскапизм, ювенальность.*