



### The Quarter-Life Crisis

By Maggie Higgins

The quarter-life crisis is the experience many of us go through as we exit college and enter the “real world.” All of a sudden, there is no one telling us what to do, when to do it and how to do it. Suddenly we are adults and there is a looming feeling that someday someone is going to find out that we don’t really belong in the adult world and we have been faking it all along. Maybe that’s a bit dramatic or maybe that’s completely accurate. For me, at the age of 26, I feel very much like someone is going to show up one day and out me for pretending to be an adult.

I was visiting a good friend a while back and she was so proud of herself because she had “a couch with arms,” which signified being a real adult. “Look, it even has a bed, that’s hidden under the cushions! It’s like futon but you can’t even tell!” This may seem ridiculous, but for many twenty-somethings having a couch with arms, paying rent and cooking dinner for

ourselves each night are major life accomplishments.

So, why talk about this phenomenon? Well, for one because it’s real. Twenty-somethings are struggling to carve out their place in the world and they are facing some seriously tough questions in some seriously tough economic times. Questions like these:

- Do I want go to grad school to further my education? Or to delay the inevitability of getting a job?
- Do I move in with my parents if I can’t find a job? Or live in an apartment I can’t afford to maintain my independence?
- How will I ever save enough money to buy a house? A car? Pay for a wedding? Travel across Europe?
- How come all my friends seem to know what they are doing? How come I didn’t know I was supposed to buy a house? A car? Get married? Travel across Europe?

The 1990s saw the invention of this the term quarter-life crisis, but the struggles themselves have existed for years before that. Alexander Robbins and Abby Wilner, twenty-somethings at the time of its publication, wrote *Quarterlife Crisis: The Unique Challenges of Life in Your Twenties* to illuminate the very real issues young adults face in their daily life.

The questions outlined above bring attention things many of us worry about. I know I put off grad school for a few years after college, but many of my friends went right away because they were scared of finding a “real job” (not that graduate school is not a ton of work). Robbins and Wilner suggest that continuing education is one way that young adults delay the inevitable, and we can really blame them? As much as we have complained about school throughout our lives, it is a familiar,

comfortable and safe environment – it’s what we know, it’s what we have always done. The most important thing is to ask yourself, and be really honest with your answers, about why you want to continue going to school. Is it because you need a masters or additional certification to do what you want to do for a living? Or is it because you are afraid of a life that is not broken up into manageable 16-week increments of time?

Given the current economy and challenging job market, the second question seems more applicable now more than it did in the nineties when this Robbins and Wilner’s book came out in the nineties. More people are choosing to stay in school and return to school because finding work is incredibly challenging right now. It’s important to remember that there are lots of people looking for jobs but there are also lots of jobs. Again, you should really evaluate your options and your reasons. Maybe moving home is what’s best for you; perhaps you will get to have a closer relationship with your siblings or your dog or you will be able to help your parents around the house. If those things are appealing to you don’t discount it just because it’s not what’s “supposed to happen.” However, if you really feel like you cannot move back home, like your relationships with your family would suffer or you would be unhappy, don’t do it. You might find yourself living in a small apartment and struggling financially instead, but that might be better for your emotional health. The most important thing in is to think about your well-being, both financially and emotionally as you make decisions about where to live.

The last two questions and almost all the concerns that arise in this time of your life come down to comparing yourself to others.

Sure, it may seem like everyone you graduated with has it together and seems to have an agenda for their life. Maybe your best friend from high school just bought a house, and your roommate from college is planning her wedding, but that doesn’t mean you should be doing those things too. Chances are they are having just as many doubts as you about their career, home and relationships choices.

The quarter life crisis is characterized in large part by the feeling of isolation that no one else is struggling with seemingly normal parts of growing up. Robbins and Wilner wrote their book to bring this phenomenon to light and to start a conversation. I hope people on University Life Café will reach out to their friends and this online community to talk about these very real issues many of us are grappling with right now.

### Reference

Robbins, A. and Wilner. A. (2001). *Quarterlife Crisis: The Unique Challenge of Life in Your Twenties*. New York: MJF Books



© All staff articles are used by permission of the respective author(s). Copyright belongs to

## Staff Article

---

the University Life Café. No part of this may be used without authorization.