

There Used to Be No Such Thing as 'Adolescence' in America

The startling statistic of the day comes from a *New York Post* [article](#) written by Naomi Schaefer Riley. Riley highlights a new study from the University of Michigan which discovered that the number of young people age 20-24 with driver's licenses had dropped from 91.8% to 76.7% in the last 30 years.

Puzzling over the decline, Riley rules out environmental concern, high costs, and busy schedules as the main drivers behind this phenomenon. Instead, she believes that parental coddling is largely to blame:

"A clue to solving this mystery lies in the title of a 2002 book by clinical psychologist Anthony Wolfe: 'Get Out of My Life, but First Could You Drive Me & Cheryl to the Mall.' Wolfe tries to offer parents a key to understanding adolescents today. The fact that they are hormonal and obnoxious is nothing new. But parents' reaction is. When confronted with the question in the title, a surprising number of them will say, 'Sure.' Whether it's because we want to shelter them from the harsh realities of walking someplace or riding their bikes, or whether it's because we're just pushovers, we have become our kids' chauffeurs.

And now that kids have access to constant electronic entertainment in the back seat, not to mention a steady supply of snacks, riding in Mom's car is like flying on a private jet. Door-to-door service and you don't even have to pass through security first. No need to put away your devices for takeoff either. It's much easier to just devote your full attention to Instagram than try to text while driving anyway."

Such words represent an even sharper indictment when compared to [comments](#) made by Alexis de Tocqueville in the 1830s. Tocqueville praised the rapidity with which American parents allowed their children to become adults, responsible for their own well-being and care:

“In America, to tell the truth, there is no such thing as adolescence. When boyhood ends, the man stands forth and begins to set his own course.

It would be wrong to think that this comes about as the result of an intestine struggle in which the son, exercising a kind of moral violence, takes what his father has refused to grant him. The same habits and principles that impel the former to reach for independence dispose the latter to look upon its exercise as an incontestable right...

The son knows beforehand the precise hour when his will is to become his rule, and he takes up his freedom without haste or effort, as that which is his due and of which no one seeks to deprive him.”

Judging by Tocqueville’s words, America has somehow gone from being a country with virtually no adolescent period to one in which adolescence lasts long into official adulthood. Would we see a return in the ingenuity and enterprise which once made America great if today’s parents were quicker to cut the apron strings and let their children take responsibility for themselves?