

Why Is the Toy Market Targeting Adults?

It is easy to dismiss adult toy-buying as a craze of little significance. But the appearance of the “kidult” is troubling from several perspectives, for it speaks of the state of a decadent culture that embraces childish and immature things. The kidult idea also participates in the postmodern desire to be what one is not. It is a revolt against the Creator and the desire to be the fantasy designer of one’s own identity.

Some years ago, people criticized the tendency of young people to defer adulthood and live as eternal adolescents. Youth were encouraged to engage in “adulthood” by assuming at least some of the duties and responsibilities expected of fully developed individuals. Now a new word is circulating describing another postmodern absurdity: the “kidult.”

This curious mixture of kid and adult is the contrary of the “adulthood” adolescent. It consists of grown-up adults who assume some of the attributes of children. A new niche market has opened up to cater to these now “grown-downs.”

A hot new trend for this demographic is the adult purchase of toys—for the adults’ own entertainment.

Kidult-Toys “R” Us?

It’s not just adult coloring books anymore, but all sorts of stocking stuffers. Toy companies are expanding special lines of products that appeal to kidults. Legos now has more than one hundred kits explicitly designed for grown-downs. Stuffed animals, dolls, and action figures are all the rage among those 18 and up. McDonald’s recently jumped on the bandwagon by offering Happy Meals for kidults, complete with a free toy

inside.

Many claim the new trend is an effect of the pandemic. The stress and insecurity of withdrawal from society caused many Americans to want to reconnect with their past. They longed for the distant past of a childhood when things are often simpler. But unlike past adult toy sales based on nostalgia, the new toy buyers are actually playing with them.

The surge in sales is also connected to a feeling of entitlement. Adults gift themselves toys to make up for what they never had as children. They sometimes indulge in purchases as a means of satisfying the fantasies of their inner child. Doll owners like to appear on social media in matching outfits. Toys are finding their way into celebrations like birthdays, showers, and corporate events. Toy companies are right behind the kidults, meeting the demand with new teddy bears and Captain Marvel figures.

A Significant Chunk of the Toy Market

According to the market research company NPD Group Inc, toys for those over 18 now account for 14 percent of the U.S. toy market, up nine percent over 2019. A [Wall Street Journal article](#) reports that kidults rang up \$5.3 billion in sales, nudging out even toddlers in sales value. Only customers 12 to 17 years of age bought more toys. Manufacturers like kidults because they tend to buy more expensive items and keep more extensive collections. They spend freely since they are not limited by allowances.

It is easy to dismiss adult toy-buying as a craze of little significance. In a free market, people can buy what they please. How people entertain themselves is their business. Moreover, if the toys reduce stress among those traumatized by the pandemic, then the trend should be encouraged, not

opposed.

Childhood as a Time of Transition

However, the appearance of the kidult is troubling from several non-economic perspectives. It speaks of the state of a decadent culture that embraces childish and immature things.

Childhood is a transitory state through which all pass. It can be a time of innocence and happiness where everything is full of wonder and freshness. However, it is not meant to be eternal. Children are shielded from many dangers, so they might have the occasion to build character, establish good habits, and grow in the love of God that comes naturally to them.

These formative years also have a negative side, in which children display immaturity, irresponsibility, and weakness. Children experience whims, moods, and tantrums that must be overcome. Childhood is a time of intense preparation for life, and its lessons must often be learned in the school of hard knocks.

Before toys were decreed gender-neutral, playthings served as serious tools through which children could imagine their future lives. Girls often imagined their dolls as children. Boys envisioned their future professions with tool kits or uniforms.

However, the goal of childhood should always be maturity and dignity. The child aims to be a responsible adult capable of taking things to their final consequences without the silliness of youth. It falls upon the adult to set the example for the child by setting standards of excellence, establishing families, developing arts and worshiping God. In times past, young teenagers were given responsibilities or odd jobs as “little adults” to hasten the process of reaching the fullness of their human development.

Kidults reverse this process of maturity by thrusting themselves back into a world that is no longer theirs.

Being What One Isn't

The kidult expresses the postmodern obsession to leave everything undefined. All must be an amorphous blend without commitment or clarity. The kidult is neither a kid nor an adult but something in-between.

Ironically, such pastiche arrangements reflect few qualities and most defects from the mixture. The metaphor of a large adult inside a child's clothes highlights the tragic illusion of kidult life that cannot fail to lead to frustration and stress.

The kidult idea also participates in the postmodern desire to be what one is not. It is a revolt against the Creator and the desire to be the fantasy designer of one's own identity.

Happiness comes from being true to self. This might entail suffering and trials. It often requires giving up past attachments like toys. However, those who live according to their nature will always sense the satisfaction of finding purpose and meaning.

Indeed, life is a process in which each phase has its purpose. Saint Paul expressed this truth well when he said, "When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child. But, when I became a man, I put away the things of a child (1 Cor. 13:11)."

The world is falling apart and in dire need of adults. It's time to put away the toys.

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