

# The Peter Pan generation



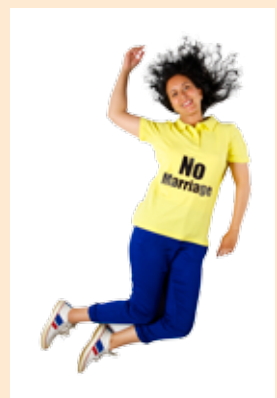
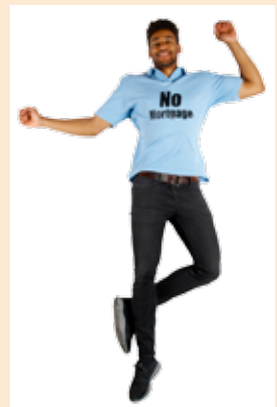
**No mortgage. No marriage. No children. No career plan. Like so many 30-somethings, Marianne Power admits she's one of them...**

The other day I had lunch with my father, who was in London on business. He took me to his favourite pub and started a conversation that he has, until now – miraculously – avoided. He coughed nervously, sank a glass of wine and got started – asking me about my plans for life: Did I see myself settling down and starting a family? Am I saving up to buy a house? What is the next step in my career?

There was a pause, I looked at him and shrugged, before muttering that immortal phrase, loved by teenagers: 'I dunno.' Except I'm not a teenager. I am 34!

## Life plans then and now

When my father was my age, he was putting my six-year-old sister and eight-year-old me through school, and had another three-year-old daughter at home. He had been running a business for ten years, he owned a house and had a pension.



I, on the other hand, live in a rented flat with my youngest sister. I have few savings to speak of. I certainly haven't got a pension. As for the idea of marriage and children, well, it's exactly that: just an idea – it's no closer to being a reality than it was when I was 23. My 'life plan,' as my father so sweetly called it, goes as far as this weekend.

'Don't you think you should start thinking about these things?' he asked. 'You're not 20 anymore.'

In many ways I am a fully paid-up member of adult society – I pay taxes, cast my vote and give money to charity – in other ways, I am in denial about my age. I behave in much the same way I did ten years ago. I am not alone. Last week, I read that there is a name for people such as me. We are the 'Peter Pan generation'; a sizeable group of 25 to 40-year-olds who are avoiding the responsibility of marriage, mortgage, children for as long as possible.

## The sociologist

Professor Frank Furedi, at the University of Kent, has been studying this phenomenon. He says:

'A word sometimes used to describe these people is "adultescent" – someone who refuses to settle down and make commitments, and who would rather go on partying into middle age. These people might live with their parents until they are in their 30s, continuing the life they had in their early 20s. Back in the 1970s, men typically got married at 24 and women at 22. Currently, the average age at which people marry is 32 for men and 30 for women. The average age for starting a family today is 28 for women, up from 24 in 1970.'

## Why has this come about?

Well, you could blame the economy. Buying or renting a house gets more and more expensive. Every day we see headlines about adults having to move back home with their parents. Three million 20-to-34-year-olds now live with their parents – one in three men and one in six women.



However, Professor Furedi, who is in his 60s, says we cannot blame the economy. He believes that the root of our refusal to grow up is fear. We are scared of getting old because all our cultural values are with youth.

And, young people today are spoilt for choice. We can decide whether to get married or not, start a family or not, travel the world or not, stay in a job or try to find a new one. However, are we happy? So many choices can make us anxious and depressed. And of course, there is one decision that a woman cannot put off for ever, and that is whether to have a child.

I talk about these issues with my 'Peter-Pan' friends, but I've noticed, recently, that we are getting fewer in number. I now have many more friends who have found ways to buy a house and start a family.

They are very happy in their new phase of their life, while I am still clinging on to the old one. Perhaps, finally, it is time to grow up.

