

Adulthood

Adulthood is a loose category, to describe the middle years of life, very roughly speaking between the end of adolescence and middle to old age. (The ages in question would of course depend not only upon the individual but upon race, culture, and the historical time period. It goes without saying that old age is constantly being revised upward in the western industrialized world. It is also the case that many privileges—voting, office holding, offering military service—kick in before twenty.) Death, of course wraps up the process, carefully refusing the limits careless mortality wishes to impose on it.

The notion of adulthood is enframed by qualifiers, like 'he's a real adult,' 'at least there's one adult in the family,' or 'stand up like n adult, Georgea' to a forty something who is refusing to fess up to domestic peccadillos. There are, in short, certain obligations that go with the status of 'adult,' adults only serving to intimidate many a wanton teen ager with an eye to squeezing in to a seat in the burlesque show.

Entry into adulthood—access to privileges like voting, serving in the military, holding public office—and into grown up roles—father, mother, daughter, son, and the vast collaborative of relations that goes to make a society—entry into adulthood is a momentous but more or less invisible component of the life cycle. There is no medal when you step into the cycle, no landmark driven into the turf where you depart the condition of adulthood, and step onto the magic land of the old.