

TEXT 2

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Joe Pinsker

The New Boomerang Kids Could Change American Views of Living at Home

Moving in with your parents is often seen as a mark of irresponsibility. The pandemic might show the country that it shouldn't be.

Before the coronavirus came to the United States, many of the country's young adults were working, studying, and building lives on their own. Now a great deal of them are back to living with their parents.

5 The number of American adults who have returned to living at home is enormous. A recent analysis of government data by the real-estate website *Zillow* indicated that about 2.9 million adults moved in with a parent or grandparent in March, April, and May¹, if college students were included; most of them were 25 or younger. Their sudden dispersal² into their parents' homes is, for some, the result of the suspension of spring classes on college campuses and, for others, the result of miserable economic conditions. A survey from the *Pew Research Center*³ in March found that the younger an American adult is, the more likely that the pandemic has deprived⁴ them or someone in their household of work or earnings. Rent and other expenses got harder to cover, or simply to justify, for a large group of young people, so they moved home.

15 In many segments of American society, living with one's parents is seen as a mark of irresponsibility and laziness. The wave of young adults who have recently relocated is a symptom of a grave economic and public-health catastrophe, but living at home is not in and of itself a bad thing. In fact, one could even argue that it's been unjustifiably stigmatized⁵. Perhaps the pandemic is an occasion – an unwelcome one, sure – to reappraise⁶ a living arrangement that is often maligned⁷, yet has become more and more common [...].

20 In 2014, living with one's parents became the most common living arrangement for Americans ages 18 to 34, finally overtaking living with a romantic partner. By 2018, about 25 million young adults in that age range were living at home, per⁸ a *Pew* analysis of data from the *Census Bureau*⁹. [...] This

¹ 2020

² (her) indflytning

³ *Pew Research Center*: uafhængig amerikansk interesseorganisation, der indsamler data og foretager meningsmålinger om samfundsmæssige emner

⁴ frataget

⁵ *unjustifiably stigmatized*: uretfærdigt sat i bås

⁶ (her) genoverveje

⁷ (her) nedgjort

⁸ ifølge

⁹ *Census Bureau*: statslig organisation, som afholder folketælling i USA hvert tiende år

“boomerang generation” of young people returned home during that period for many reasons. The economic ones probably got the most attention [...].

25 In normal times, when people move in with their parents, their choice is typically planned out at least a little while in advance. But this spring, decisions about where to live were made “in the midst of a crisis,” Karen Fingerman, a human-development and family-sciences professor at the University of Texas at Austin, pointed out. “There was no thought – there was no, *Gee, I want to live with my parents.*” The decision to move back out probably won’t be made so quickly. The high up-front¹⁰ costs of moving into a new apartment alone or with roommates, Fingerman said, might encourage
30 people to stay put even when the threat of the pandemic wanes¹¹, especially if the economy is slow to recover.

Public-health crises aside, the rise in the share of young people living at home in the past decade and a half has coincided with¹² an important development in family life. “We were already shifting as a society toward stronger intergenerational bonds¹³,” Fingerman said, pointing to research indicating
35 that today’s young adults are in more frequent contact with their parents, and receive more guidance from them on emotional and financial matters compared with young adults several decades ago. In general, Fingerman said these strengthened connections represent a rewarding, welcome shift. They bring new closeness, though they can also bring up old tensions. [...]

Parents’ homes do have their charms, though. Eric Rivera, a 30-year-old in Brooklyn who moved in with his parents in New Jersey last weekend¹⁴, has been looking forward to “weirdly enough, having a dishwasher and laundry – all these things that we don’t normally have in New York City.” Marielle Brenner, a 25-year-old who recently relocated from Chicago to her parents’ house on Long Island, is pleased to regain access to a backyard. [...]

The pandemic has interrupted many young people’s sense of progress by forcing them to move
45 home. During emerging¹⁵ adulthood, Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, a psychology professor at Clark University, told me, young people lay the groundwork for the rest of their adult lives and generally aim to “get liftoff.” “The crisis throws a wrench into¹⁶ whatever you were doing, whether it’s work or school,” he said. “That’s got to be deflating¹⁷.” [...]

Whatever their family relationships might be like, young people who have moved home can struggle
50 with the symbolism of no longer living independently. “I was already clocking in¹⁸ for the obligatory mid-20s existential crisis right before the pandemic started,” Marielle Brenner told me. She is 25 and, until recently, was living in Chicago, working a job that didn’t inspire her or pay particularly well. She had student-loan debt and started cat-sitting to supplement her income.

¹⁰ indskud

¹¹ aftager

¹² *coincided with*: faldet sammen med

¹³ *intergenerational bonds*: bånd mellem generationer

¹⁴ June 2020

¹⁵ begyndende

¹⁶ *throws a wrench into*: stikker en kæp i hjulet på

¹⁷ (her) nedslående

¹⁸ *clocking in* (her): på vej mod



Marielle Brenner, age 25, in the living room of her parents' house in Melville, New York, in June. She moved back in with them after the economic fallout¹⁹ from the pandemic made her rent in Chicago unaffordable. Photography by Caroline Tompkins.

55 Her parents – who live in Melville, New York – raised the possibility of her moving home. “I was very resistant to that, just because of the idea that’s been ingrained²⁰ in so many young Millennials²¹ that moving home with your parents is a step back,” she told me. “It’s the ideal to be self-sufficient²² and live on your own, have your own place, have a successful job.” [...]

60 “I never imagined living at home as a 25-year-old,” [Brenner] told me the day after she moved in. “That sentence just feels like a failure.” Many of the other young adults I’ve interviewed recently feel the same way about moving back in with their parents, even though they recognize that the circumstances that led them to do it were entirely beyond their control. [...]

That said, Brenner wonders what people will think of living at home after the pandemic. “If and when things get back to some sort of normal and unemployment goes down,” she said, “I have the fear that I will continue to stay here and it will be perceived as lazy.” [...]

65 But maybe [...] people will really start to embrace the new timelines of emerging adulthood. “More than ever, there’s no reason to hurry into adult life and set artificial deadlines,” Arnett said. “The norms for when you get married, have children, become fully employed, are a lot more relaxed than they used to be. Now we can use that to our advantage and take some of the pressure off.” Maybe this unhurried and understanding mentality will be the one that guides the people currently living at home when, 20 or 30 years from now, their own children are the ones doing the same.

(2020)

¹⁹ konsekvenser

²⁰ indgroet

²¹ generation født mellem 1980 og 2000

²² (her) selvforsørgende