

Leave them kids alone!

Modern parenting is stunting our kids, finds Shaoni Bhattacharya

- 1 PARENTING is a terrible invention. Spontaneous loving care, informed by tradition and human experience, has now become a "management plan". So says child developmental psychologist and writer, Alison Gopnik in *The Gardener and the Carpenter*. Alongside Gopnik's scientific new



tome comes a fascinating historical and cultural journey through American childhood by social historian Paula Fass, *The End of American Childhood*. Together the books present a view of Western parenting in crisis as we emerge from the seismic shifts of the 20th century, a world away from our evolutionary roots.

- 2 As a parent of young children, I'm often overwhelmed by advice. After reading these books, I'm no clearer on what to do. But I am clearer about what not to do: don't "over-parent" or micromanage your child. In short:
- 24.
- 3 Gopnik in particular stresses parents should stop stultifying their kids with endless schedules and heavy expectations, quit the helicoptering and let them get on with it. Fair enough. The idea that some parents now look over their millennial offspring's university assignments or talk through the minutiae of their kidult's work issues is mad to a Generation X-er like me. Gopnik's book seems a welcome burst of common sense.
- 4 Parents, she writes, should be like gardeners, tending young shoots and providing fertile ground. Instead, many resemble carpenters, chiselling away at them to create an image of success that has little to do with their kids' wishes, talents or needs. 'Parent' is not actually a verb, she writes, not a form of work... and shouldn't be directed toward the goal of sculpting a child into a particular kind of adult.
- 5 This model causes Western parents untold anxiety, while the kids wilt under an "oppressive cloud". Worse, Gopnik argues, it's a "poor fit to the scientific reality". We used to learn from tribes, or large extended families and communities. Now we have small, geographically scattered families, often with parents who work long hours. Some transfer skills they learned

over years in a goal-oriented job to raising their children in the hope this will give them the resources to withstand unpredictable futures.

6 "Gardening," says Gopnik, can create robust and resilient children with the resourcefulness to adapt to an unpredictable world. She draws on current research to build a view that balances the tensions inherent in growing up with intergenerational conflicts.

7 Take play, something that is fundamental to learning. By filling their time with packed schedules of enriching activities, parents may rob their kids of a vital formative window. And while 5-year-olds play-fighting may not look as valuable as ballet classes or Kumon maths, rough-housing is something many animals do. Rat experiments suggest it is vital for honing social competence.

8 If you chain children to desks, and demand focused attention in a life so different from our evolutionary past, you can expect trouble. As she writes, there's "a close connection between the rise of schools and the development of attention deficit disorder". In the US, 1 in 5 boys have an ADD label by 17.

9 It's all fascinating, but I'm left with many questions. Gardening children sounds intuitively better than chiselling, but are there risks? ADD aside, it isn't clear. Gardens can face north, too. When must you intervene? And can gardening turn into chiselling?

10 Then there's culture. What works in one place may not elsewhere. Some carpenter-like behaviours – say, the expectation of filial obedience – can work in other cultures if underwritten by love. Gopnik doesn't mention it, but a long-term study in nine countries shows this approach works in Kenya, but not Sweden, and among European Americans in the US.

11 Fass's book helps with the cultural picture science needs to fully grasp the complexities of Western childhood. She recalls the sheer brutality of the past, when there was a simple goal: child survival. Fass tells extraordinary tales of children who worked the farms, helped raise their families from the dirt, and absorbed the pain of slavery and the Civil War.

12 For her, this made American children more independent and able to hold their own with adults compared with their European counterparts. This may no longer be the case, for reasons similar to those Gopnik cites. "American parents ... (I do not exclude myself) worry too much and provide their children with too little space to grow," writes Fass. The free-spirited American childhood is no longer possible for Fass, as overparenting in the face of rapid societal change has ensured that, in a sense, childhood does not end.

13 There is still no one magnum opus floating on the ocean of books on parenting, but maybe if Fass and Gopnik got together they would be a force to reckon with.

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Tekst 7 Leave them kids alone!

“*The Gardener and the Carpenter*” (paragraph 1)

1p 23 Judging from the article, how can the title of this book be characterised best?

- A as a euphemistic phrase
- B as a hyperbole
- C as a metaphorical expression
- D as a personification

1p 24 Which of the following fits the gap in paragraph 2?

- A back off
- B don't kid yourself
- C negotiate
- D practise what you preach

“This model causes Western parents untold anxiety” (paragraph 5)

1p 25 According to Gopnik, which of the following best describes this model?

- A community-based
- B free choice
- C personality-oriented
- D results-driven

2p 26 Geef van de volgende beweringen aan of ze overeenkomen met de opvattingen of observaties van Gopnik (alinea's 5 tot en met 7).

Noteer “wel” of “niet” achter elk nummer op het antwoordblad.

- 1 The “carpentering” model is clearly supported by scientific findings.
- 2 A nuclear family is the ideal environment in which to raise a child.
- 3 Parents who wish to nurture their children's talents often resort to strategies they picked up in the work environment.
- 4 Parents who have high ambitions for their children may act in a manner that is detrimental to their child's development.

- 1p 27 Which of the following opinions on children's play agrees with Gopnik's view as expressed in paragraphs 7 and 8?
- A "During play, ideas and skills become meaningful tools that are practised. Concepts are understood and qualities are developed that are the same required to succeed in school and life, such as thinking, problem solving and communicating." (www.straitstimes.com)
 - B "For safe play, children should always be supervised by an adult. Make sure children are in a safe place to play, such as a backyard, fenced park or recreational area." (roadsafety.transport.nsw.gov.au)
 - C "I learned this the hard way; I never did well in school because I never saw the point of studying or doing homework. I played video games and skateboarded. It caught up to me in the end and as I've gotten older I'm filled with regret." (www.reddit.com)
 - D "Integrating yoga into public schools helps develop children's strength, flexibility, balance, and cardiovascular systems, and even strengthens their ability to focus and concentrate." (www.philly.com)
- "childhood does not end" (final sentence, paragraph 12)
- 1p 28 Which of the following claims is an accurate explanation of this quotation?
- A A constantly changing world will not rob children of their innocence.
 - B Adults tend to idealise their own childhood experiences.
 - C Nowadays children are not given the chance to develop into competent adults.
 - D When circumstances are difficult at home, children may be burdened with adult responsibilities.
- 1p 29 Which of the following is true of *The Gardener and the Carpenter* and *The End of American Childhood* according to the article?
- A Both books explore the downsides of modern child-rearing practices in the West.
 - B Both books fail to address the influence of cultural heritage on Western parenting methods.
 - C The two books put forward opposing points of view on the subject of modern parenting.
 - D The two books recommend integrating old-fashioned child discipline with emotional bonding.

Bronvermelding

Een opsomming van de in dit examen gebruikte bronnen, zoals teksten en afbeeldingen, is te vinden in het bij dit examen behorende correctievoorschrift, dat na afloop van het examen wordt gepubliceerd.