



Ready or Not: Why Treating Children as Small Adults Endangers Th

Kay S. Hymowitz

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"Children today grow up so fast!" How often we hear those words, uttered both in frustrated good humor and in dumbfounded astonishment. Every day the American people hear about kids doing things, both good and bad, that were once thought to be well beyond their scope: flying airplanes, running companies, committing mass murder. Creatures of the information age, today's children sometimes seem to know more than their parents. They surf the Internet rather than read books, they watch *South Park* instead of *The Cosby Show*, they wear form-fitting capri pants and tank tops instead of sundresses; in short, they are sophisticated beyond their years. These facts lead us to wonder: Is childhood becoming extinct?

In *Ready or Not*, Kay S. Hymowitz offers a startling new interpretation of what makes our children tick and where the moral anomie of today's children comes from. She reveals how our ideas about childrearing itself have been transformed, perniciously, in response to the theories of various "experts" -- educators, psychologists, lawyers, media executives -- who have encouraged us to view children as small adults, autonomous actors who know what is best for themselves and who have no need for adult instruction or supervision. Today's children and teenagers have been encouraged by their parents and teachers to function as individuals to such an extent that they make practically every decision on their own -- what to wear, what to study, and even what values they will adhere to. The idea of childhood as a time of limited competence, in which adults prepare the young for maturity, has fallen into disrepute; independence has become not the reward of time, but rather something that our children have come to expect and demand at increasingly younger ages.

One of the great ironies of turning our children into small adults is that American society has become less successful at producing truly mature men and women. When sophisticated children do grow up, they often find themselves unable to accept real adult responsibilities. Thus we see more people in their twenties and thirties living like children, unwilling to embark on careers or to start families. Until we recognize that children are different from grownups and need to be nurtured as such, Hymowitz argues, our society will be hollow at its core.

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