

The Anthropology of Childhood: Cherubs, Chattel, Changelings. *David F. Lancy.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008. 466 pp.

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David Lancy's new book is a welcome addition to the fast-growing literature on children's lives, bringing together ethnographic accounts of childhood from every region of the world, both past and present. It is a finely nuanced, beautifully written, and comprehensive account of children's lives, the meanings that adults give to childhood, the reasons why childhoods are so varied, and why the duties and expectations placed on children are so different.

Lancy starts with an analysis of why parents have children, and the different meanings with which childhood is imbued. He examines the value of children, from the unwanted newborn who may be abandoned or exposed, through to more positive valuations in which children are actively desired, although variously conceptualized as "cherubs," "chattel," or "changelings." He then goes on to look at the effects of family structure on the different, and sometimes contradictory and inconsistent, strategies that parents use when raising their children. Combining ethnographic detail and evolutionary theory, Lancy focuses on the differences between fathers and mothers and the various conscious and unconscious decisions that are made about infant care. In doing this he cleverly debunks the myth that childrearing outside the West is more relaxed, less anxiety inducing, and more charmingly communal—that it

"takes a village" to raise a child. Instead, he shows how, in the majority of settings, children are not raised by the village but by whoever can be spared from productive work, sometimes the mother, but much more likely the child's siblings.

The central chapters of this book are concerned with learning, what and how children should learn and who should teach them. While acknowledging children's competence and agency, Lancy recognizes that childhood is a time of preparation for the adult world and that language, gender, kinship, social norms, or economic activities must be actively acquired so that children grow up to be socially competent adults capable of cultural, economic, and, indeed, physical reproduction.

The final three chapters turn to the impact of change as children grow older. Starting with adolescence, Lancy examines the ways in which rites of passage around puberty are marked and understood in different contexts. He shows convincingly how such rites are changing in response to globalization and the increasing acceptance of the idea that school is the universal right of all children. Such reasoning has a profound effect on contemporary transitions to adulthood, and the importance of schooling in shaping modern childhoods is incisively analyzed. The final chapter looks at children on the margins of the new globalized ideal of childhood, those who work as prostitutes, soldiers, or in factories, for whom universal protection is an impossible and inconceivable dream. These children's lives are not simply the product of culture and biology but also of socioeconomic and political inequalities. While there is great adaptation in childrearing by parents and the possibility of agency on the part of children, there is little defense against extreme poverty that can overwhelm these children despite their best efforts and those of their parents.

There are several overarching themes that run through this book: the importance of understanding the interplay between biology and culture, the variations in parental childrearing strategies and the necessity of analyzing learning as a central way of looking at children's lives. Each theme is teased out through a wealth of ethnographic detail and careful commentary. Most striking of all is the skill with which this book reveals the abnormality of modern, Westernized childhoods. Lancy coins the term *neontocracy* to describe the situation in the contemporary West where "kids rule" and where children are worshipped, venerated, and society is ordered around them. From conception onward, Western children are fussed over, shaped, and molded into acceptable forms by parents who believe that their input is central to their child's later behavior, temperament, life chances, and psychological makeup. Children are expected to grow up in a safe environment, ideally with two related parents, before entering the school system and emerging at 18, having been largely sheltered and segre-

gated from the adult world. This "neontocracy" brings with it, however, a strong sense that parents (and mothers in particular) are not getting it right when it comes to children and need help from experts who must step in and stipulate the correct way to raise a child. It is this model of childhood that is becoming globalized, and yet it is one that remains deeply peculiar and, in the context of all the other childrearing practices in the world, an aberration.

Lancy wears his erudition very lightly, but the scope of this book is vast, bringing in findings from primatology, as well as ideas from evolutionary and biological anthropology, to give a well rounded and comprehensive guide to children's lives in many parts of the world. In doing so Lancy challenges many taken for granted assumptions about childhood, breathes new life into the stale nature-nurture debate, and reminds us of the many different ways of raising children while also suggesting reasons for these differences. In doing so he refutes the accusation, once leveled by Lawrence Hirschfield, that "anthropologists don't like children." In this warm and witty book, Lancy shows that not only does this particular anthropologist like children, but that he also likes writing about them, conveying an infectious enthusiasm for a subject that fascinates him.