

We stop our children being childish – that’s why they’re anxious

Rod Liddle

Our young children are, apparently, very anxious. They are either terrified of Sats tests or of being shot in the head by a work-experience Yardie. They worry that their parents will divorce or, that if they make it across the road without being mown down by a 4x4, a drooling nonce with a bag of bonbons will jump out of the bushes and spirit them away to Paedoland.

Their innocent dreams are invaded by the awful figure of Al Gore telling them they’re all going to drown in the near future, or get burnt to death, or be eaten by crocodiles. They have a “generalised fear of strangers”. Truth be told, they have a generalised fear of everything, from international Islamic terrorism to Lembit Opik MP.

This stuff all comes from The Primary Review, an independent report into children’s education, and has been kicked into touch with that usual reflexive arrogance from the government. Kids, they assert, are better off than they have ever been and Sats are quite wonderful.

You would have thought that with all this poll-watching the government might be better acquainted with the meaning of the word “anxiety”. Because no matter how materially better off our children might be these days, we have stolen from them one thing: their childhood. We have removed from them the simple things they once worried about and were able to deal with and replaced them with our own anxieties about which they can do absolutely nothing.

At primary school age they are no longer allowed to play outside unchaperoned as a result of our exaggerated fear that they will be stabbed, run over or abducted. At school they are inundated with tests from the age of four and festooned with stupid wristbands warning them against hate crimes.

Teachers prevent them playing the games they like in case a child hurts himself and the parents sue. All the real pleasures of childhood – beating other children in competitive activities, fighting, running very fast over concrete, spitting at girls, etc, have been outlawed by the education authorities.

Meanwhile, having been saved from the exaggerated threats beyond the walls of the school and the family home, inside it children are spectacularly indulged. Their views are accorded with, no matter how stupid or immature they may be; they are deprived of the existential privilege of boredom and every hour is filled with safe, moronic, prepackaged activity. They are unchastened and ill-disciplined.

They slump on the sofa eating the food they want – nuclear brown stuff, fried in liquid salt – because that’s their human right. Fat, deluded, constrained, regulated, indulged and deprived of real fun – the truth is our children should be even more “deeply anxious” than The Primary Review suggests.

Too many middle men ruin politics

‘If you’re trying to find clear blue water just for the sake of it,’ David Cameron said in America, having been bowled over by the intellectual brilliance (and electoral success) of Arnold Schwarzenegger, “you’ll probably drown in it.” A nice soundbite, that, even if when examined it loses all meaning and becomes a vaporous thing of the air.

So to be clear: the only two parties which can win a general election in Britain now have policies which are either identical or completely interchangeable, on a weekly basis. Which is why the opinion polls show such wild fluctuations; the slightest slip will tip the balance the other way.

It’s like a weird parody of democracy – more institutions than ever to vote for – councils, MPs, MEPs, regional authorities – but pretty much nothing in the way of real political choice. The next election will be won by whoever looks least like a jackass in the last week before polling day; whoever resists the temptation to glide down the wrong glacier in dog sled, or pretends that there is something socialist about slashing inheritance tax.

Ken opens up a race divide with black cabs

Perhaps this should be a weekly feature, targeted specifically at those few of you still living in London: reasons not to vote for Ken Livingstone as mayor but instead to put your cross beside Boris Johnson or Brian “the Odd Copper” Paddick, whom the Liberal Democrats have put up.

Last week it was revealed that Ken has decided that people from ethnic minorities who want to become hackney cab drivers will get free childcare, free fuel and lessons in how to swear properly – all paid for by London’s citizens, of course, through council tax. White people who want to be cab drivers won’t get a penny, no matter how desperately poor they might be.

And to make it ever so slightly more unjust, a Jewish chap who wanted to be a cabbie and claimed for financial support under this new scheme was told that he wasn’t a proper ethnic minority and therefore wouldn’t get a penny. There you have it: a scheme that embodies the very essence of racism – plus a dose of antisemitism thrown in for good measure.



Have you noticed that cash machines are getting a bit bloody gobby these days, a bit above themselves? I don't just mean the sneering way they tell you you're broke and can't get any money out . . . you're a disgrace to your family, etc. They've started lecturing you about stuff and disseminating pointless information.

On Friday an ATM asked me, before I could key in my pin, if I knew that this was National Identity Fraud Prevention Week. Well, no I didn't. But I wasn't sure what the machine wanted me to do about it. Steal someone's identity and drain their bank balance, I assume. So I pretended to be Alistair Darling for a bit, which drew some odd looks, just to get into the spirit of things. He seemed the right choice.

Every day, these days, is a Day or part of a Week. Some overweening corporation or pressure group has bought up our days and turned them into their days, 24 hours when they can harangue us about things or put their hands in our wallets or just bore or confuse us.

Did you know that there's an International Tampon Alert Day? God alone knows what you're meant to do then: doesn't really bear thinking about. And going back to the Weeks: if you're interested, you've just missed the seven days set aside for National Continnence Awareness.



You can say what you like about the CIA, at least they got rid of Che Guevara. Forty years ago last week, to be precise, in some squalid hovel in Bolivia, where the psychopath was involved in more revolutionary mischief.

Having fought alongside Castro and overthrown the Batista regime in Cuba, Guevara disdained the offer of a cabinet post because he preferred killing people to governing, and wandered off into the jungle with his semi-automatic.

Would he have adorned so many T-shirts and posters in the 1970s if he had kept his real name, Ernie? Whatever was there to commend this Marxist thug, other than a cute beret and a fashionably greasy bob?

<mailto:rod.liddle@sunday-times.co.uk>

[Contact our advertising team](#) for advertising and sponsorship in Times Online, The Times and The Sunday Times.

© Copyright 2007 Times Newspapers Ltd.

This service is provided on Times Newspapers' [standard Terms and Conditions](#). Please read our [Privacy Policy](#). To inquire about a licence to reproduce material from Times Online, The Times or The Sunday Times, click [here](#). This website is published by a member of the News International Group. News International Limited, 1 Virginia St, London E98 1XY, is the holding company for the News International group and is registered in England No 81701. VAT number GB 243 8054 69.