

Book Review

Under Pressure: Rescuing Childhood from the Culture of Hyper-Parenting

By Carl Honoré (2008) Canada: Knoff

Reviewed by Gloria Simonot

Carl Honoré is a Canadian writer living in London, England. According to information on the back cover, his first book, *In Praise of Slow*, was published in 28 languages and was an international bestseller!

For *Under Pressure*, he has done research all over the world! So this phenomenon is not just American or European, but international. His examples in the introduction left my eyes popping and my mind boggled, so don't miss reading the introduction!

Two interesting quotations are:

- “Most of us know that hyper-managing kids is absurd, BUT it's easy to get caught up in the frenzy!” (p.14)
- For the kids, “Freedom to be oneself is missing AND the kids know it!” (p.13)

Reading *Under Pressure* gives one the sense that children and teens are often being thwarted in developing some of the “Positive Goals of Behaviour,” particularly the goals of Power and Autonomy. (As explained in *Respectful, Responsible Parenting: A Facilitator's Guide*).* Parents often seem to “control” and make decisions which, I believe, should instead be discussed and mutually decided upon with their children and teens. Without this mutual respect parents are, in some cases, inviting extremes of rebellion such as suicide or major withdrawal where the child or teen becomes a hermit in his/her room.

Some other children will go along with parents' plans but then end up with less autonomy, creativity, and initiative. Many others seem to be developing an increased level of signs of “elevated narcissism,” as indicated by surveys done in 1982 and 2006 with US college students (p.11). This appears to be a result of “pampering to the nth degree!”

The many chapters explore the different arenas where parents may try to influence or even “take over!” The author states that this is NOT a parenting manual, but it is certainly an eye-opener! Some of these things ARE happening here in our own community and in the rural communities around us. One young woman decided that she would be unable to enroll her grade-three child in 4-H activities (along with her skating and dancing) because her teacher believes in three hours of homework every night. It is not just parents who are into this culture of pressuring! Another woman I spoke with has found that she needed to change her expectations of her 30-year-old son. He seems happy running the family business rather than getting a university degree and a “career” as she had hoped. I personally find that my children and I are happier when I give up expecting to have any control over their work/life choices.

I really like the concrete examples that Honoré cites. They are one of the many things that excited me about this book! *Under Pressure* helps to create an awareness about what is going on around us and challenges us to let up on the pressure on young people to “perform and achieve to the nth degree.”

* Johnson, B., & Solem, J. (Eds.). (2007). *Respectful, Responsible Parenting: A Facilitator's Guide* (Rev. ed.) Saskatoon Adlerian Society.

Gloria Simonot is a mother of seven grown children and grandmother of seven (grandchildren and step-grandchildren). She was Resource Centre Coordinator for SAS from 1994 to 2005.