

Liberation's Children: Parents and Kids in a Postmodern Era

Kay S. Hymowitz

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Parents complain about it every day: today's kids are growing up faster than ever, with grade-school girls dressing like Britney Spears and boys joining gangs before their age hits double digits. Why is this happening, and what should parents do about it?

The author has some strong opinions on the subject. A senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute (a think tank focused on the economic and social ramifications of personal responsibility) and contributor to The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, and The Washington Post, Hymowitz feels that parents have abdicated their own responsibility with regards to their children. In a series of essays, she discusses the trend of letting children develop naturally, without moral guidance or consequences. She also examines parents' drive to force children to excel as miniature adults rather than the children they should be allowed to be.

In a caustic essay about New York City's rush to find "baby ivies" (mini Ivy League schools) for their children's preschool, Hymowitz illustrates the often irrational fears parents have that their children won't succeed in life if they haven't demonstrated significant potential by the age of three. In another essay, she decries the loss of authority in schools today, detailing the horrific violence and apathy engendered by that loss of authority. Most of all, she points to parents' losing their own authority as parents, citing that as a major source of trouble: "[Children] hear endless moralizing about the virtues of tolerance and open-mindedness. These virtues ... cannot help the young person build a self... . They tell kids not to judge, but not what to believe... . In short, liberation's children live in a culture that frees the mind and soul by emptying them."

The structure of the book may be problematic for some readers, since a series of essays does not read as cohesively as a book developed with a single unifying theme. Another potential difficulty with this book is its sharp tone; there is no doubt that Hymowitz is passionate about her topic, and it shows. However, even readers who fully agree with her theories may be put off by the sarcasm she frequently uses to make her points.

Whether or not readers agree with Hymowitz's assertions, however, they cannot fail to see the concern and passion behind them. Hymowitz raises difficult questions that should not be ignored, and she presents them with a befitting urgency. Agree or disagree, this is a thought-provoking book that deserves attention and discussion.

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