



Playing to Win: Raising Children in a Competitive Culture

By Hilary Levey Friedman

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Playing to Win: Raising Children in a Competitive Culture follows the path of elementary school-age children involved in competitive dance, youth travel soccer, and scholastic chess.

Why do American children participate in so many adult-run activities outside of the home, especially when family time is so scarce? By analyzing the roots of these competitive afterschool activities and their contemporary effects, *Playing to Win* contextualizes elementary school-age children's activities, and suggests they have become proving grounds for success in the tournament of life—especially when it comes to coveted admission to elite universities, and beyond.

In offering a behind-the-scenes look at how "Tiger Moms" evolve, *Playing to Win* introduces concepts like competitive kid capital, the carving up of honor, and pink warrior girls. Perfect for those interested in childhood and family, education, gender, and inequality, *Playing to Win* details the structures shaping American children's lives as they learn how to play to win.

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Playing to Win: Raising Children in a Competitive Culture By Hilary Levey Friedman Bibliography

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Editorial Review

Review

"Impressive. . . . This study is vital reading for parents and educators interested in how the American idea of winners and losers is trickling down to the next generation."

(*Publishers Weekly* 2013-09-02)

"If you are interested in after-school activities and the future prospects of the children who participate in them, *Playing to Win* by Hilary Levey Friedman is a must-read. An astute, well-researched and clearly written account, the book examines the ins and outs of today's competitive youth culture across three different arenas: chess, soccer and dance."

(*Brain, Child* 2014-01-13)

"Given the considerable competitive pressure on even young children to prepare for elite colleges and lucrative careers, this study is timely and provocative...Nonspecialists who have read both Amy Chua's *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother* and Lenore Skenazy's *Free-Range Kids: How To Raise Safe, Self-Reliant Children (Without Going Nuts with Worry)* may find it of interest."

(*Library Journal* 2013-10-01)

"In leading up to her examination of the characteristics and motivations of modern-day chess families, Friedman delights lovers of historical and global context by tracking the evolution of competitive chess among young people in the United States."

(*Chess Life* 2013-11-01)

"Top 12 Must-Read Education Books Harvard sociologist Friedman follows children involved in chess, dance and soccer, showing the differences among these sub-groups, how and why these competitive activities work and the resulting implications for inequality and gender in the educational system."

(Alison Krupnick, ParentMap Education Editor *ParentMap Magazine* 2013-09-26)

"This book is a must-read for scholars interested in family, childhood, and stratification. It would also be a thought-provoking text for undergraduate students, many of whom may have participated in competitive activities throughout their lives."

(*Sociology of Sport Journal* 2015-11-11)

"Richly textured... insightful."

(Erendira Rueda *Contemporary Sociology*)

From the Inside Flap

"Beautifully written, relentlessly insightful, and methodologically innovative, *Playing to Win* expertly captures the perspectives of parents and children regarding the importance of after school activities for socialization and childhood in contemporary American society. Hilary Levey Friedman has produced a sociological gem."--William A. Corsaro, author of *The Sociology of Childhood*

"Hilary Levey Friedman has written an instant classic about parents, children, and the fervent pursuit of

competitive honor in American society. Richly descriptive, terrifyingly honest, and beautifully written, *Playing to Win* is a must read for anyone who cares about the happiness and fulfillment of our children, the values we celebrate as a country, and the very foundations of our social world."—Francesco Duina, author of *Winning: Reflections on an American Obsession*

"Hilary Levey Friedman's *Playing to Win* is an essential social science volume that transcends the boundary between scholarship and popular critique. Levey Friedman successfully explains how upper-middle class Americans think about their children's engagement in serious leisure: competitive chess, dance competitions, and youth soccer. Listening carefully to both parents and children, she reveals the tensions and contradictions, benefits and drawbacks of intense competitions, and provides a perspective necessary for researchers who examine child development and for parents who wish to raise happy, healthy children."—Gary Alan Fine, author of *With the Boys and Gifted Tongues: High School Debate and Adolescent Culture*

"The world of 21st century childhood has found its superb interpreter. With sparkling arguments and fascinating evidence, Hilary Levey Friedman's *Playing To Win* introduces us to one of America's most remarkable contemporary innovations: the proliferation of organized, competitive after-school activities. An important contribution to the sociology of culture and inequality."—Viviana A. Zelizer, author of *Pricing the Priceless Child*

"Hilary Levey Friedman has written a book of Tocquevillian dimension. Her insights into the worries and hopes of the many gendered facets and class-bound manifestations of America's contemporary middle class are not only brilliant but presented in a lucid style that makes this book a real page turner. "Competitive Kid Capital" will rightly enter the vernacular of contemporary sociology."—Andrei S. Markovits, co-author of *SPORTISTA: Female Fandom in the United States*

"Hilary Levey Friedman has managed to convince numerous upper middle class parents and their children to pause from their mad dash between extra-curricular activities to explain why they have chosen this lifestyle. Using information from detailed interviews across a variety of activities, she provides a revealing account of the motivations that lie behind the dramatic rise in competitive children's activities. This fascinating book forms a key part of an emerging body of research that links the increase in time devoted to childcare to parents' worries about their children's economic futures."—Valerie Ramey, Professor and Chair of Economics, University of California, San Diego

"It is a valuable study and an excellent, highly readable report. I recommend the book to anyone who wishes to understand the mental set of many modern parents, which leads them to turn what should be playtime into work time for their kids."—Peter Gray, *American Journal of Play*

About the Author

Hilary Levey Friedman, PhD is an affiliate of the Malcolm Wiener Center for Social Policy at the Harvard Kennedy School. She recently completed a postdoctoral fellowship at Harvard University as a Robert Wood Johnson Scholar in Health Policy and she received her PhD in Sociology from Princeton University.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Walter Berry:

Have you spare time for a day? What do you do when you have considerably more or little spare time? Yep, you can choose the suitable activity intended for spend your time. Any person spent their spare time to take a wander, shopping, or went to typically the Mall. How about open or perhaps read a book entitled Playing to Win: Raising Children in a Competitive Culture? Maybe it is to get best activity for you. You know beside you can spend your time together with your favorite's book, you can cleverer than before. Do you agree with its opinion or you have some other opinion?

Harriet Dupree:

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