

corporations" (p. 266). *The Second Life Herald* raises these provocative issues by citing important events in the history of two virtual worlds. It is the only one of these books that documents its sources, and its concern for accuracy and attention to historical detail sets *The Second Life Herald* apart in the still young literature of virtual worlds.

While Au's book is not quite in the same league as the other two, at least *Exodus to the Virtual World* and *The Second Life Herald* together with T. L. Taylor's *Play between Worlds: Exploring Online Game Culture* (2006) provide the basis for a triangulation of issues concerning governance in worlds built for play. As debate continues about the importance of virtual worlds as an escape from RL (real life) or as an inspiration for efforts to redesign it, we can certainly agree that these books put important issues into play.

—Henry Lowood, *Stanford University, Palo Alto, CA*

Under Pressure: Rescuing Our Children from the Culture of Hyper-Parenting

Carl Honoré

New York: HarperOne, 2008. Resources, notes, index. 291 pp. \$24.95 cloth. ISBN: 9780061128806.

A Nation of Wimps: The High Cost of Invasive Parenting

Hara Estroff Marano

New York: Broadway Books, 2008.

Notes, index. 307 pp. \$23.95 cloth. ISBN: 9780767924030.

Game On: The All-American Race to Make Champions of Our Children

Tom Farrey

New York: ESPN Books, 2008. Appen-

dices, notes, index. 383 pp. \$24.95 cloth.

ISBN: 9781933060460.

Some people believe that if the next generation is not, indeed, going to hell, it is on some kind of downward trajectory created by bad parenting. These days some of those expressing such opinions know how to write, how to organize their arguments, and how to present their facts, all in a way that makes the age-old complaint seem less sentimental and even, somehow, scientific. At least this is so of the authors of three recent books on, respectively, the culture of hyperparenting, invasive parenting, and parenting obsessed with raising star athletes. Let us consider all three books together because all three authors see the way so many parents raise children to satisfy their own egos as a growing worldwide problem.

Under Pressure, by Carl Honoré, is a pleasure to read, in part because it is so well written, but mostly because it takes us to so many different loca-

tions and provides us with a view of so many different disciplines that influence parenting. Furthermore, *Under Pressure* gives us not just the sorry image of overinvolved parents but also the hopeful picture of programs for children that protect them from the consequences of such overinvolvement. The Reggio-Emilia program in Italy, the Forest School in Taiwan, and the Secret Garden nursery in Scotland show us how to correct today's excessive parenting and schooling.

These excesses come from adults who micromanage their children's lives and try to shape them to become perfect—perfect as defined by adults, not children. The attempt almost always fails, as Honoré shows. However, Honoré expresses great empathy for parents because he himself is a parent, one who has struggled with the same tendencies. He confesses to the same need to tame the beast within. In fact, the book gets its punch from his having once tried to force his young son, who had an interest in drawing, into trying to become a great artist. He was brought up short in his efforts when his son asked, "Why do grown-ups have to take over everything?" In his book, Honoré answers this question, "They don't!"

Hara Estroff Marano's *A Nation of Wimps* also takes up the theme of micromanaging by parents who are far too intrusive. However, her work

is more psychological, focusing on the problems that can result from children who are pressured to succeed academically. Generally, the book seeks to prevent the kinds of mental-health problems common today on college campuses—depression, anxiety disorders, substance abuse, and the inability of many young adults to function on their own.

Marano characterizes this generation of college students as less capable of dealing with stress than previous generations. Her explanation is that today's college students have been raised in a hothouse by well-off but overly anxious parents who throw time and money into raising perfect children. Like Honoré, Marano sees in such micromanaging parents—and in their addiction to the idea of the perfect child—a recipe for failure. But unlike Honoré, Marano believes something far more pernicious is at work than the word micromanaging might imply.

There is something pathetic about today's college students as Marano depicts them. The word *wimp* in the title catches the sense of what I mean. She paints college students as passive, helpless, and dysfunctional, certainly not the independent young adults we might wish for. To the word *wimp*, Marano adds other, more somber and more clinical terms, words such as depression and disorder, to make

her case that the mental-health situation on today's college campuses does indeed constitute a crisis and that the crisis has its roots in what she calls hothouse parenting.

Tom Farrey's *Game On: The All-American Race to Make Champions of Our Children* narrows the focus to organized youth sports, but the book continues the theme of overbearing parents, parents who can even become maniacal in their efforts to raise sports stars. Among all of today's star athletes, one star shines brighter than all the others—namely, Tiger Woods. Tiger Woods was a child prodigy, and his unparalleled success as a professional athlete has parents today adopting Woods as their model as they “race to the bottom” to give their infants, toddlers, and preschoolers an early jump on becoming stellar performers.

Farrey documents just how wrong-headed the Tiger Woods model is for raising children. Describing the way parents have overorganized youth sports, pushed children into playing one sport year round, and steered children toward joining elite teams, Farrey unmasks many of the assumptions behind parents' behavior as plainly wrong. According to Farrey, parents have overestimated the role of effort and underestimated the role of biological endowment in determining who eventually becomes a star athlete. He

argues that for most sports, contrary to popular belief, early focused training does not make a child a star athlete.

But Farrey's most important accomplishment may be something different from exposing the folly in the race to the bottom to raise children to become star athletes. His most important accomplishment may be his revelation that in overorganizing youth sports, in turning them into dress rehearsals for stardom, adults have ironically contributed to the nationwide epidemic of obesity and created unequal opportunities for children to participate in sports. Farrey points out that by structuring youth sports to weed out the unfit (or, more precisely, the children who seem unfit), we are left with a pool of older athletes who, on average, are much less talented than athletes from much less-developed countries than ours. More importantly, our system of giving preference only to elite teams has led many adolescents to drop sports altogether, especially in large urban public high schools. The dropouts then adopt lifestyles that are far less healthy than those of previous generations. When it comes to youth sports, then, the stakes are higher than whether or not an individual child becomes a star athlete.

All three books make for enjoyable, informative reading, and all three provide a special perspective on

the role of children's play. By showing us what happens when children are denied opportunities to play, the books allow us to see that the alternatives to play are not good alternatives. In the final analysis, then, we may not have good measures to establish that play is essential for children's overall development, but we do have measures to establish that the alternatives to supporting children's playing are not so good for children. From these three books, we gather that when children do not enjoy play, when they do not control how they spend their free time, they will never—to use Honoré's reference to the poet William Blake—"see a world in a grain of sand."

As sensible and wise as these three books are, however, they do not make an ironclad case that this generation of children is in any more trouble than previous generations. While today's problems are real problems, without good data on previous generations, we have no way of knowing for sure whether children today are in fact headed downhill or whether they will eventually do as well as previous generations. If, then, parenting today really puts children more at risk, one can still hope that, with respect to children's long-term development, parenting is not destiny.

—W. George Scarlett, *Tufts University, Medford, MA*

The Hidden Life of Girls: Games of Stance, Status, and Exclusion

Marjorie Harness Goodwin

Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006. Appendices, notes, illustrations, references. xi, 329 pp. \$31.95 paper. ISBN: 9780631234241.

Sugar and spice and everything nice—far from it. Marjorie Harness Goodwin's ethnographic account of the interpersonal behavior of preadolescent girls shatters the antiquated stereotype. In this well-researched book, we witness firsthand the Machiavellian politics of the playground, where scheming behavior is the rule rather than the exception. What clearly emerges from this important research is that the negotiation of power among middle-school girls is complicated and clumsy. For example, Goodwin's systematic account of a seemingly benign childhood activity such as hopscotch reveals intricate details about rules, status, and competition. Clearly the play of girls is highly circumscribed, and what looks like play to an adult outsider is in effect a convoluted series of interactions. In these interactions, games act as a pretext for trying out, albeit awkwardly, different social roles.

This book makes it obvious that when girls play, they compete for hegemony, and their bids for status often result in hurt feelings. Indeed,