

Playing by the Rules: How Our Obsession with Safety Is Putting Us at Risk

Tracey Brown

Michael Hanlon

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Better read this book; your safety may depend on it.

In an age of widespread security theater and cult-like adherence to safety rules, how does the average person know when regulations can be (reasonably) relied upon for protection, and when restrictions should be questioned? Who is assumed to hold responsibility when bad things happen, or when new threats are perceived, and to whose benefit? Tracey Brown and Michael Hanlon have compiled a straightforward examination of the factors that contribute to some of the most over-the-top, unnecessary, and in some cases downright harmful, measures enforced in the name of keeping people (and nations) “safe and sound.”

In *Playing by the Rules: How Our Obsession with Safety is Putting Us All at Risk*, Brown and Hanlon provide numerous examples of safety concerns run amok. From liability-dodging over-corrections, to “nonlethal” weaponry becoming integrated into compliance and interrogation applications, one thing is certain—an unquestioning citizenry is a vulnerable one. Without participating in the kinds of media hyperbole they critique, the authors allow ludicrous examples to illustrate how everyday people will enforce their perception of rules, even when they don’t understand or agree with them. With disturbing frequency, these seemingly well-intended restrictions are exposed to have no practical effect on the desired outcome, or are extrapolated from advice ostensibly given in the interest of public order, and have no grounds in reality.

Yet Hanlon and Brown aren’t simply writing to point out professional stupidity, or to disturb their readers. From the outset, their stated aim is to equip regular folks with the confidence and tactics to analyze and challenge harmful or unnecessary “protections.” Political and economic motivations can be exposed, and a culture of fear can be combated, they assert, by insisting that authorities provide evidence of a need for these rules and proof of their efficacy.

Despite the seriousness of the subject, *Playing by the Rules* is an entertaining read. Brown and Hanlon write in a lighthearted tone, allowing experience and research, rather than fear and mistrust, to back up the call to skepticism and action. Here, grassroots advocates find an encouraging primer for insisting on better, not simply more, safety measures.

PATTY COMEAU (Spring 2016)

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