

## BOOK REVIEW

# Games Slim People Play: Winning the Fit and Slim Game

by L. Michael Hall, Ph.D.

Reviewed by Judith E. Pearson, Ph.D.

In many advanced nations, obesity is an epidemic and a burgeoning health problem. Weight reduction plans, pills, clinics and books comprise a huge industry. Yet many dieters are unsuccessful in the long run; statistics show that most gradually regain their excess weight. Walk down any busy city street in the U.S. and you will see ample numbers of people who are flabby and overweight. Therapists and physicians' offices are filled with depressed, frustrated, overweight folks who simply do not seem to have what it takes to consistently eat and exercise in a healthy way.

With so many people stuffing themselves with all those greasy cheeseburgers and fries, L. Michael Hall was not about to sit around and do nothing! *Games Slim People Play* is Hall's Frame Games concept applied to getting and keeping the weight you want.

If you've read Hall's *Frame Games* (Neuro-Semantics, 2000), or attended any of his Frame Games workshops, you know that the Frame Game concept is a cognitive strategy for human change. The concept is based on NLP, General Semantics

and the work of the late Eric Berne, M.D. (author of *Games People Play*, Random House, 1969; and father of Transactional Analysis). *Games Slim People Play* is one of Hall's many books on self-improvement through mental programming and self-reflective consciousness.

## Content

The Frame Games premise states that our mental frames determine how we approach life—what games we play and how we play them. Our games are behavior patterns that emerge from our attitudes, beliefs, truths and self-talk. Our thoughts create our behaviors and our frames create our games.

Every game carries consequences and rewards. The rules of our games set the parameters for what we think we must do in order to get the results we want. Some rules work well and some lead to self-sabotage. Ultimately, our games determine the quality of our lives. If we aren't satisfied with some aspects of our lives, and if the consequences of our games are too high, then it's time to change those games.

*Games Slim People Play* is not a quick-fix. It is a book that requires serious commitment. If you want to benefit from it, you must admit that your "fat" games have not served you. Then you must read and practice the applications in the book, set realistic expectations, give up some old games, and learn new ones. Hall takes his readers through a "transformational process" with a series of basic steps and understandings that lead to new "mind games" for improved health and fitness.

## The Structure of Games

Hall explains the structure of mental games. We play our games with specific rules (although we may not be consciously aware of it) and we get payoffs (some good and some not so good). Games have strategies; patterns of thinking, feeling, and acting. We engage in our games under specific circumstances or in response to specific cues. Often, we recruit others into playing our games with us—or we get recruited into theirs. Games can be empowering or toxic. Game-playing is so habitual that we run our games unconsciously.

Our mental “frames of reference” (meanings, beliefs, values, opinions, and associations) prepare us to play specific games. We cannot avoid having frames and playing games. Hall advises us to become conscious of the games we play and decide which ones are worthwhile, which ones we want to stop, and what new games would better serve us.

If you have weight problems, Hall invites you to see your relationship with food and activity “through the eyes of the game.” Some people play some pretty destructive games with food and weight. Here are some examples:

- The Helplessness Game: I am powerless to change my weight.

- The Stress Game: I can't feel comfort without food.

Frames are the driving forces in our lives. Everyone approaches food/eating with some frame of mind, which structures the game. Frames create thoughts and feelings. To add complexity, consider that we can also have thoughts and feelings about thoughts and feelings—endless meta-frames, with each successive frame—about—a-frame taking precedence in governing our actions and states. This self-reflective consciousness allows us to examine, evaluate, and “quality control” our frames and games. We can refuse to play games that do not serve us and we can design new games for health and fitness. Hall not only tells his readers how to do it; he

even provides worksheets to guide the process.

## Modeling Slim People

NLP is, in part, about modeling excellence. So we can focus on healthy outcomes for fitness and weight management by learning the games the slim “experts” play. It takes energy to play the games slim people play. The energy comes from four sources of personal power: the ability to think and feel (private powers) and to speak and act (public powers). These are the “core powers” that support all other powers—primarily our abilities to respond to our environment and circumstances. The key to effectively using these powers is to recognize, cultivate, and develop them. Personal empowerment is the ability to take effective action to obtain the outcomes we desire. Personal empowerment rests in using our powers responsibly.

I, and only I, ultimately determine what I think and feel. Nobody can make me think or feel anything...I always play a determinative role about what I let into my mind and what I give attention to. I always have the power of mind and heart over this ultimate human freedom of what to think and how to think. (pp. 69 – 70)

Hall takes his readers through the process of owning one's powers and activating the “Power Zone.” Just as we can own our power to be responsible for how we think and feel, we can also realize that each of us is totally responsible for our habits of

eating and exercise. By assuming this responsibility, we can say “NO” to the blame game, the victim game, or the excuse game, and say “YES” to games that promote health and vitality. The ability to develop an emphatic and effective “YES” and “NO” allows us to apply our core powers effectively and adapt new beliefs.

To transform eating and exercise habits requires motivation—a “big enough why.” People who feel stuck and unable to make effective changes think they lack will power. Hall points out that the “power of will” is the result of attention and intention. We pay attention to whatever is going on at the moment. Intention is based on enduring values, goals, and commitments. A problem occurs when one has not consciously chosen intentions but allowed them to occur by default. By consciously and conscientiously choosing worthwhile intentions, we direct our attention in purposeful ways. This sense of direction, a guiding force, equals “will power.” When we experience will power, we are “at choice.” Personal mastery emerges as we mindfully align our attentions to our highest intentions.

Attempting to deal with attention, without working with our intentions at the same time, binds us from ever finding the leverage points by which we can change things. It . . . misfocuses our energies. We end up fighting with our attentions—trying to get them to go away. It’s a battle we will not win. (p. 95)

A “big enough why” sets our intentions to an overriding purpose. The “big enough why” lies at the end of the values hierarchy; what

Connirae Andreas calls “The Outcome Chain.” When we find our highest intention, we can then play the Living Life on Purpose game.

If you don’t have the body you want (given what is physically possible for you), then the games you play are not working. If you want improved health and vitality, a slender shape, inner control, and more pleasure and fun out of living, then it’s time to change the games you play with food.

## Playing Games with Food

Food is fuel for energy. When people eat to assuage emotions, they eat for the wrong reasons. Emotional eating leads to weight gain. Still, let’s admit it. Food is pleasurable. When we attach meanings to the pleasure of eating (i.e., food equals comfort, happiness, love, etc.), then the act of eating carries a heavy “semantic loading.” In this way, a simple experience, such as eating, turns into a compulsion or addiction. The addiction says, in effect, “If a little is pleasant, then more is better.” When we exceed the threshold of primary pleasure (i.e., overeat) we lose the pleasure. Instead, we experience physical discomfort, and often, disgust or regret.

When we give too much meaning to food, and when food is more than a pleasant way to obtain nourishment, overeating is the inevitable result. Some people play additional games about overeating, such as the Self-Contempt Game or the I Need To Diet Game. Hall teaches how to detect the meanings we attach to food,

dismantle those meanings, and eventually conclude “It’s just food . . .” after all.

Hall shows us how to eliminate toxic food games; do away with excuses, overcome fears, release guilt and resentment, and find self-love and self-acceptance. When we finally decide the old food games no longer make sense, Hall treats us to a menu of new games such as the Personal Dignity Game, the Eating Awareness Game, the Solution Orientation Game, and the Eating as “Flow” Game, to name just a few. All lead to a healthy approach to eating. In the Personal Dignity Game, for instance, you think of yourself as so awesome, feeling so much dignity that you couldn’t even begin to mistreat yourself with poor eating habits.

The section on “flow” (Chapter 10) is worthwhile reading. Drawing upon Csikszentmihalyi’s work in peak performance and creativity (see *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*, Harper and Row, 1990), Hall explains that when we turn any goal-oriented activity (such as sensible eating) into a “flow” experience, we find a perfect, effortless synchrony in mind and body, resulting from an ideal balance between skill and challenge. We create enough ease to prevent anxiety, and enough concentration and effort to prevent boredom.

The final chapters of *Games Slim People Play* offer a banquet of games for:

- Thinking differently about food.
- Living with energy and vitality and enjoying exercise.
- Maintaining good health as a lifelong passion.

To fine-tune one's thinking, the final chapter is a smorgasbord of healthy thoughts and self-talk to foster sensible attitudes about food, emotions, eating, weight, exercise, metabolism, values, choice, pleasure, persistence, patience, impulse control, etc.

## The Author

L. Michael Hall, Ph.D. hardly needs an introduction to NLP practitioners. He is an entrepreneur, a masterful trainer of international fame, and a prolific writer, living in Western Colorado. He is co-founder of Neuro-Semantics, along with Bobby Bodenhamer, M. Div. He holds a doctorate in Cognitive Behavioral Psychology. His books and workshops are based on the principles of NLP and cover a wide range of topics such as communication, reframing, hypnotic language, wealth-building, and personal development.

## Conclusion

In *Games Slim People Play*, L. Michael Hall addresses a prevalent health issue affecting a major portion of the population. He ably charges into the age-old "nature versus nurture" controversy, as applied to weight: Which view is yours?

- 1) Obesity is a physical condition that must be consistently treated with diets, pills, and clinics, and a lifelong commitment to counting calories and measuring portions;

Or

- 2) Obesity is the result of deeply engrained, faulty, mental

strategies, and can be remedied when one learns to think, "as a thin person thinks."

As any good cognitive psychologist would, Hall insists that overeating and excessive weight gain are the products of faulty thinking and reasoning. There is ample anecdotal and empirical evidence to suggest he may be right. People who effortlessly control their weight demonstrate a very different mindset (and feelings) about food, eating, exercise, weight, and their bodies, as compared to those who have constant weight problems.

According to Hall, the solution to getting control over weight is to get control over meanings, beliefs, values, and how we talk to ourselves—especially about food, exercise, and the body. The quality of one's thinking has a significant impact on fitness. *Games Slim People Play* may be the ticket to put you in charge of how you look and feel!

The principles in this book, applied conscientiously and consistently, will work. Hall has been teaching "Games Slim and Fit People Play" workshops for the past year and his trainees are getting positive results. He is an engaging, sensitive trainer with a winning personality who can "walk the talk." In print and in person, he makes learning and personal improvement fun, logical, and doable.

Some authors may find it difficult to write to readers about what many consider a self-induced problem, such as obesity, without resorting to blame and guilt, or reminders of the dire consequences of continued maladaptive behaviors. Hall, however,

manages to keep *Games Slim People Play* upbeat, inspiring, positive, and playful. His intelligence, warmth, and sincerity are evident in every page of this well-written book.

To purchase *Games Slim People Play*, and other books by Dr. Hall, and to see a schedule of his workshops, visit [www.neurosemantics.com](http://www.neurosemantics.com), or contact:

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(Ed. note: *Games Slim People Play* is also available at the Anchor Point Book Store.)



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