

# Are War Toys Harmless?

23.11.2009



2009  
23  
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**Ist Kriegsspielzeug harmlos?**  
Günther Gugel, Pädagoge

Gehören Panzer ins Kinderzimmern? In den letzten Jahren steht Kriegsspielzeug in den Eltern wieder hoch im Kurs. Eine weiblichen Übermacht, die Jungen oft erleben, eine Ursache für Kriegsspielzeug, berichtet die Killerspiele, Kampf-Hubschrauber der Fantasie der Kinder. Freiraum

Do tanks belong in a child's bedroom? In the past few years, war toys have again become popular items among children. According to a reported on 3SAT.de, experts say that the domination of feminine influence most boys experience in their upbringing is the most likely cause of this „return of the war toys.“ According to the supporters of the war toy phenomenon, virtual killing games, war helicopters or tanks allow children to regulate their every day experiences through their imagination and find acceptable ways of coping.

Gunther Gugel, an educator, has his say on the issue in today's journal. He warns against the trivialization of violent toys, which, according to him, represent an outdated concept of masculinity, power, and a false understanding of history.

## Gunther Gugel's editorial in „die Gesellschafter“:

In recent years, the sale of war toys has experienced a new boom. Playing with such toys is often presented as being innocent or even positive by most media reports, despite the concerns of most parents. Before entering this debate it is important to mention a few things. Firstly, it cannot be said that those who play with such toys are bound to become militarized or violent. Secondly, as long as weapons exist in the adult world, they will also exist in the world of toys. Similarly, prohibiting war toys is not a solution.

When we talk about „war toys“ we aren't referring to water guns, firecrackers or toy revolvers at festival time. What is being referred to is the reproduction of weapons and machines used in war, such as tanks, fighter jets, rockets, and warships, as well as of entire contexts such as ruins, bomb shelters, and battlefields based on real (current or historical) or fictive wars. War toys are fashioned and intended for the playing out of acts of war. Such toys are enhanced and reinforced by the existence of media-facilitated war games, whether video, computer, or internet based. The fascination with weapons is wide spread and is not limited to children. Weapons were and are a

status symbol and connected to feelings of power, control, and the ability to dominate others. It is connected to the fantasy of omnipotence through the ability to decide over the life and death of others. This power is also attractive for children:

- \* Toy weapons give children a sense of power and control (if only in their imaginations) in a world that often seems threatening to them. It can help them compensate for the experience of powerlessness.

- \* Playing with violence and war toys can help them process and cope with psychologically damaging experiences (such as domestic violence.)

- \* Weapons are a part of the realities of the adult world. Not only do they pervade all forms of media, they are also connected to particular concept of masculinity.

- \* War and violent toys is a gendered phenomenon. It is primarily boys who play with such toys and are influenced by the masculine values that are communicated through them. The toys promote a type of masculinity that can be summarized with terms such as: militant, stoic, inconsiderate, or „fighting for the good.“ The gender roles propagated by these values is no longer fitting for today's society.

Being that war toys are often embedded in current or historical war scenarios, knowledge about these events is being subtly transferred through the images of the game. This information provides the foundation for particular world views long before a child forms an actual understanding of history and the world, or can differentiate between the types of information it receives.

Today, discussions surround the educational and psychological dimensions of play with war toys. Earlier, however, (for example in the debates of the German parliament in the 1950's) the political functions thereof were also considered. In these debates it was clear that such toys trivialize war and contribute to its glorification.

We ought not to forget that it is not children, but rather adults who produce and sell both real and toy weapons. It is not that playing with war and violent toys violates a societal taboo. The true taboo subject is the duplicity of the Federal Republic of Germany. It is not only a „civilized“ society. German soldiers are participating in wars. The nation has the 6th highest military expenditure in the world and is the third largest exporter of weapons—just behind USA and Russia.

The discussion surrounding disarmament in childrens bedrooms does not only have to do with education. It is connected to the political. It is hypocritical to discuss it as long as it is not being accompanied by the promotion of disarmament in the real world. Perhaps people should think about what children need in order not to need war toys.