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ANOTHER REASON TO JUST SAY NO TO VIDEO GAMES

Maybe we don't need one more reason to just say no to violent video games. Maybe we have passed that bridge with our children and can go on to other, less worrisome, issues – morning hassles, messy rooms, uneaten vegetables, homework....

But for those of us who are still confused about the issue of violent video games in our homes, or who have decided “not to decide” about whether or not they should be allowed there, or who have just given up the fight, here is some sobering news: The very thing that makes violent video games so enticing for so many - the “shooting” of “human” targets - is the same principal that turns young men from reluctant gunmen into soldiers trained to kill the enemy. And although that may be beneficial from the point of view of military preparedness, I don't think we want that happening in our homes or in our schools or churches.

All of this is very thoroughly explained by Dr. James Garbarino in his superb book, *Lost Boys: Why Our Sons Turn Violent and How We Can Save Them*. Dr. Garbarino, a professor of Human Development at Cornell, writes that even as late as World War II only about 20% of American soldiers were actually able to point their weapons at the enemy and shoot them, even though they had been through basic training. The reason, it turned out, was that these young soldiers were trained to shoot using bulls-eye targets. Their practice during basic training consisted of improving their marksmanship on the traditional bulls-eye but, instead, a live human being, 80% of them could not pull the trigger. They simply couldn't make the transference.

From a strictly military perspective, this would have to change. And so, the bulls-eyes were replaced with human figures, and by the time we were engaged in the Vietnam War, some 90% of our young had no difficulty pulling the trigger on another human being.

So what does this have to do with violent video games? Very much, unfortunately, because it is that same principle, which is called desensitization, that is at work in many video games, particularly those that use a point and click approach to “shooting” a figure on the screen. In pointing and clicking to “shoot” a figure on the TV screen, our children are exactly mimicking the training that our military uses to desensitize young men and change them from reluctant shooters into willing killers. Military trainers have found that the vast majority of young men are reluctant to shoot at another human being: They need to be desensitized through training that involves the shooting of a human figure, a “training” that many of our children are engaged in daily on their video sets in our homes.

Is this to say that the reason for violence in our homes and communities and churches and schools is “point and click” video games? Well, yes and no. ‘No’,

because there are many factors that probably need to combine to create another Columbine, to mention just one infamous example. Psychologists refer to this, as over determination – there is never just one factor that results in the kind of violence we have witnessed far too often; the cause is over determined.

But, 'yes' because the desensitization that occurs through violent video games is at least one major factor, a factor so important that our military uses the same principle to change young men reluctant to point guns at other human beings into trained killers. Violent video games alone might not do it. But add anger, rejection, isolation, unhealthy self-esteem, involvement with the "wrong crowd" – and, of course, the availability of guns – and that desensitized youth becomes a potential killer.

There are many factors with the potential of leading children to violence that we cannot control. Although we would all love to live in a world in which there were no angry, rejected, isolated young people, we know that is not possible. We are all called upon to do our best to reduce the potential for the alienation of our youth, but we know we can't control all the factors that lead young people to anger and despair.

But we can control their access to violent video games that desensitize them to their natural reluctance to kill. We can keep those games out of our homes, and – let's go a step further with this – we can use our Constitutional rights to free expression to protest their availability where young people congregate. We CAN say no to violent video games.

Michael L. Brock