

The Effect of War Toys and Military Figure Toys on Children (An Evaluation on the Example of Nazi Germany and the Gaziantep Toy Museum)

Hüseyin KARABAŞ

Gaziantep Metropolitan Municipality

Leyla KALKAN

Gaziantep Metropolitan Municipality

Hatice ALINCAK

Ministry of National Education

To Cite This Chapter:

Karabas, H., Kalkan, L., & Alincak, H. (2025). The effect of war toys and military figure toys on children (An evaluation on the example of Nazi Germany and the Gaziantep Toy Museum). In F. Alincak (Ed.), *Current studies in sports science* (pp. 87–96). ISRES Publishing.

Introduction

Play helps children feel good about themselves. Play is an outlet for a child's happiness and excess energy in life (Nutku, 2006). Play is one of the fundamental building blocks of personality, encompassing various values such as sociability, talent, and intelligence. Play is a form of learning that involves the release of excess energy, relaxation, and enjoyment (Aksoy & Çiftçi, 2014). Play contributes to individuals socializing with both their own groups and other groups and to the formation of a common language (Alincak, 2017). It has been observed that preschool children imitate the adults around them (Akkoyunlu and Tuğrul, 2002). Gaming has been a part of our lives since the dawn of time, an activity in which people of all ages, young and old, spend a significant portion of their time. With technology making every aspect of our lives easier, it has also become increasingly widespread, particularly in the areas of entertainment and gaming (Özmen, Alincak and Çağdanlıoğlu, 2023). When research on play is examined, it is seen that there are many definitions of play, but it is difficult to make a common definition, and different meanings are attributed to each definition. The lack of a common definition leads to the conclusion that the subject of play is very broad and its boundaries are wide. The existence of so many definitions and theories highlights the importance and value of play and answers the question of why so much research is done on this subject (Aydınlı & Ramazanoğlu, 2016; Ayan et al., 2015). Children, driven by a desire and curiosity to explore their surroundings, complete this process most effectively through play. It is also an area where they learn through experience, expand their imaginations, and connect with their environment. Toys are effective tools used in play. Like games, toys have different meanings for each child. This is because every child is different, and their

imaginations, levels of development, feelings, and thoughts are unique to them. Children become aware of their own capacities, their movement control mechanisms develop, their emotions become clearer, and their talents and skills develop. Motor skills such as strength, power, endurance, balance, flexibility, and coordination develop through motor responses that are constantly tested during play. Fine motor skills also develop through activities using materials such as clay, dough, cutting, gluing, and toys. The development and maturation of the neuromuscular system lead to the development of skills and performance. Starting with movement in the womb, children open their eyes to the world with various responses and motor skills. Babies' first movements and reflex responses form the basis of learning, and as they learn through experience, their motor skill development accelerates. It is crucial that the environments in which children grow up are designed to support their development in terms of proper and healthy development, especially during this period of rapid development from birth to the end of preschool (Alıncak & Bozdağ, 2022; Bozkurt & Sözer, 2017; Kerkez, 2006). Childhood is the most crucial period in which an individual's values, social roles, and identity are shaped. During this period, play and toys play a fundamental role in how children perceive the world (Sezici and Yiğit, 2019; Girgin, 2024; Öztürk and Uğurlu, 2010). Toys are not merely objects of entertainment; they carry social, cultural, and ideological meanings. Especially in times of crisis and war, toys become a means of directing children towards specific ideological patterns (Ersoy, 2015).

Aim of the Study

This study examines how war toys affect children's mental world and psychologically prepare them for war. The ideological function of toys in Nazi Germany is the clearest example of this process. The same ideological reflections are evaluated through historical soldier-figured toys exhibited at the Gaziantep Toy and Toy Museum today.

The Cultural and Ideological Function of Toys

Toys play a mediating role in a child's understanding of social reality. According to Grossman (2000), the psychology of war is shaped by the values and symbols learned in childhood. Therefore, toys influence children's later perspectives on concepts such as violence, authority, and heroism.

From the late 19th century onward, the toy industry developed rapidly in Europe, and toy production, particularly in Germany, France, and England, became a tool for cultural identity. Hoffmann (2000) states that during this period, toy manufacturers consciously incorporated themes of national identity and patriotism into their products. Thus, toys became the carriers of state ideologies. Play and toys influence and enhance all areas of a child's development. Therefore, care must be taken regarding the games played and the toys they serve as tools. Care must be taken to ensure that play and toys are

not only entertaining but also educational. For play, children can be provided with spaces appropriate to their age and development, supporting their developmental areas, where they can have fun and engage in independent or group play. Care should be taken regarding the purpose and duration of technological games. Spending too much time in front of screens and using technological games reduces physical activity in children and increases their risk of obesity. Furthermore, it can hinder their ability to form social relationships and slow down language and communication skills (AAP, 2016). Screen time can also negatively impact sleep patterns, particularly when digital devices are used before bed, reducing sleep quality and negatively impacting children's health (Berk, 2013). This ideological transmission becomes clearly visible during times of war. When figures of soldiers, weapons, tanks, and warplanes enter a child's world, war becomes internalized as a "game." Jenkins (2006) emphasizes that children in modern culture are desensitized to violence through media and play tools, describing war toys as "visual propaganda objects."

Child Psychology and War Toys

Play is an area where children organize their inner world, learn social rules, and develop a sense of identity. However, war-themed toys can make this process violence- and authority-centered (Ersoy, 2015; Hürtürk, 2017). It has been found that war toys weaken children's empathy skills and increase their tendency toward aggressive behavior (Aydın, 2022). According to Piaget's (1962) cognitive development theory, children make sense of their environment through play (Bardak and Topaç, 2022). Therefore, war-themed toys cause children to perceive the world in terms of a "winner" and "loser" dichotomy. Grossman (2000) argues that military toys are psychological tools that condition children to "learn to kill" (Girgin, 2024; Aksu, 2013; Yazıcıoğlu, 2024). These toys give children a sense of heroism, but also portray violence as a normal phenomenon and armed conflict as part of everyday life, teaching them that violence is a legitimate tool. Thus, through play, children become individuals who conform to the future authority structure.

The Toy Industry and Propaganda in Nazi Germany

During the Nazi era, the toy industry was made part of the state ideology. (Hoffmann, 2000; Sormaz and Yüksel, 2012) During Hitler's reign, children's education was seen as the most important factor in shaping the future of the nation, and in line with this, the toy industry, like every other cultural field, served propaganda purposes (Yurdakul and Alperen, 2019). The "Elastolin" toy series by the O. & M. Hausser company was produced based on models of Nazi soldiers. Wehrmacht officers, SS soldiers, swastika tanks, and Hitler figures were used to teach children heroism and obedience. Even the catalogs for these toys were prepared in propaganda language: the goal was to present "fighting for the homeland" to children as if it were a game. During this process, children underwent ideological education without realizing it. According to Grossman (2000),

toys during the Nazi period became tools that eliminated the emotional cost of violence. Children learned to “obey through play” and equated violence with heroism.

War-Themed Toys at the Gaziantep Game and Toy Museum

The old stone building in Bey Mahallesi, Gaziantep, which was expropriated by the Gaziantep Metropolitan Municipality in the years and restored in 2010-2011, opened as the Gaziantep Toy and Game Museum on April 6, 2013, under the coordination of Sunay Akın. The Gaziantep Toy and Game Museum, which holds an important place in Turkey’s cultural memory, houses thousands of toys from different periods, each reflecting the socio-cultural characteristics of their time. The most striking part of the collection is the section on the first floor of the museum, where toy soldiers are displayed.

The toys on display here offer important clues for understanding how children were subjected to an ideological education process in the past. According to the work of Sürme, Yiğit, and Güler (2021), the soldier figures displayed in the museum create both a nostalgic and questioning effect on visitors. While these toys appear to be memories of “innocent” childhood on the one hand, on the other hand, they reveal how war was romanticized.

The information panels next to the toys on the museum’s first floor present this historical reality within a critical framework. Thus, military toys are transformed from propaganda tools of the past into educational materials that foster a consciousness of peace.

Figure 1

Information note regarding the soldier figures exhibited at the Gaziantep Game and Toy Museum

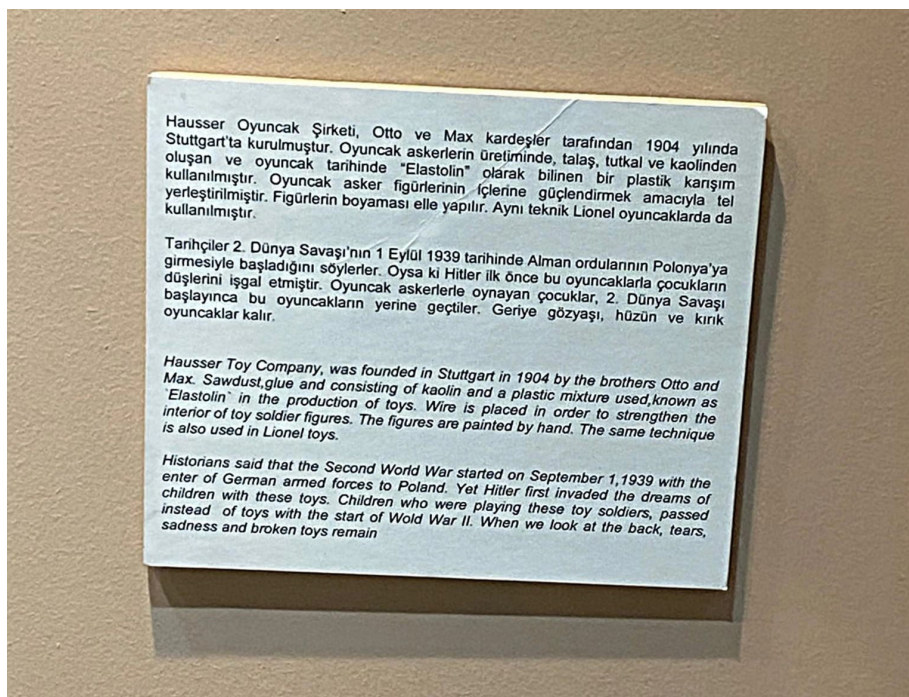


Figure 2

Soldier figures on display at the Gaziantep Game and Toy Museum (Toy history: 1920-1930 Germany)



Figure 3

Soldier figures on display at the Gaziantep Game and Toy Museum (Toy history: 1920-1930 Germany)



Figure 4

Soldier figures on display at the Gaziantep Game and Toy Museum (Toy history: 1920-1930 Germany)



Figure 5

Soldier figures on display at the Gaziantep Game and Toy Museum (Toy history: 1920-1930 Germany)



Figure 6

Soldier figures on display at the Gaziantep Game and Toy Museum (Toy history: 1920-1930 Germany)



The Process of Preparing Children for War Through Toys

The purpose of war toys is not to physically prepare children for war, but to initiate a mental preparation process by normalizing it. (Jenkins 2006; Yamlı, 2019) states that in modern societies, games serve the function of “training children to adult roles.” War toys also teach children discipline, command, and enemy perception (Ataç, 2017). Through these toys, children are led to believe that war is inevitable and necessary in the future. This process contributes to the reproduction of militarism at the societal level. Cowan, Van Leeuwen, and Selander (2022) state that masked toys produced during the pandemic similarly serve the function of normalizing crises. This example demonstrates that toys can be used as a tool for social guidance in any era. In this part of the research, findings based on the analysis results of qualitative data are included.

Conclusion

War toys intertwine the concepts of heroism and violence in children’s worlds. The example of Nazi Germany is the most striking example of how toys can become a propaganda tool. During this period, children were raised with the ideal of “being a good soldier,” and playgrounds became mini-war training camps. The war-themed toys at the Gaziantep Play and Toy Museum make visible these ideological manipulations of the past and enable society to confront this past. Consequently, ethical responsibility is paramount in toy production. Toys presented to children should teach love, not violence, freedom, not authority, through peaceful means instead of war. Play is not just entertainment; it is a cultural language through which children begin to think, feel, share, and ultimately learn who they will become.

References

- Abakay, U., Alıncak, F. (2016). The Evaluation of the Opinions of Physical Education and Sports Teachers about Using Lesson Equipments. *Journal of Sport and Exercise Physiology*, 2(2):25-30.
- Akkoyunlu, B., Tuğrul, B. (2002). The effects of technological interactions in preschool children's home life on computer literacy skills. *Hacettepe University Journal of Education*, 23(23).12-21.
- Aksoy, A., Çiftçi, H.D. (2014). *Play in Early Childhood: From Sensory-Motor Play to Ruled Play (First Edition)*. Ankara: Pegem Academy.
- Aksu, S.G. (2013). *The Effect of a Sensory-Based Education Program on the Acquisition of Living and Nonliving Concepts by 5-6 Year-Old Children (Master's Thesis)*. Akdeniz University, Institute of Educational Sciences, Antalya.
- Alıncak, F. (2017). Attitudes Of Primary School Teachers Towards Playing Games That Involve Physical Activity. *European Journal of Education Studies*. 3(1): 202-216.
- Alıncak, F., Bozdağ, Ö. (2022). Physical activity and sports in education science. *Current Studies in Sports Science*.
- Alıncak, F., Tuzcuoğulları, Ö.T. (2016). The Evaluation Of Violent Content Games For Children's Development. *European Journal of Physical Education and Sport Science*, 2(5), 61-66.
- American Academy of Pediatrics. (2016). Media and young minds. *Pediatrics*, 138(5), e20162591.
- Ataç, O. (2017). *Cinema as a Mass Media Tool and Post-Cold War Imperialism: The James Bond Example (Master's Thesis)*. Sakarya University, Institute of Social Sciences, Sakarya.
- Ayan S, Alıncak F, Tuzcuoğulları, Ö.T. (2015). Evaluation of Some Local Games Played in Gaziantep as Educational Games for Technical Training in Handball. *International Journal of Turkish Educational Sciences*, 4, 252-257.
- Aydın, A. (2022). *Aggressiveness Tendencies and Toy Preferences of Preschool Children (Master's Thesis)*. Anadolu University, Institute of Educational Sciences, Eskişehir.
- Aydınlı, İ., Ramazanoğlu, F. (2016). Application of Traditional Children's Games in Physical Education Class: The Example of the Handkerchief Grab Game. *Journal of Academic Social Research*, 4(27), 443-454.
- Bardak, M., Topaç, N. (2022). *Games and game materials*. Efe Academy Publications.
- Berk, L.E. (2013). *Child Development* (9th ed.). Pearson Education
- Bozkurt, E., Sözer, M.A. (2017). "Values Education Through Children's Games." *The Journal of Academic Social Sciences*, 5, 55:295-323.
- Budak, M. (2016). *The Effect of Traditional Children's Games on Orientation and Rhythm Ability*. Selçuk University, Institute of Health Sciences, Master's Thesis, Konya.
- Cowan, P., van Leeuwen, T., & Selander, S. (2022). Pandemic toys: Multimodal design and the meaning of play in crisis. *Journal of Visual Communication*, 14(1).
- Ellialtıoğlu, F.M. (2005). *Games and game examples in the preschool period*. Ya-pa Publications, Istanbul, 23.
- Ersoy, M. (2015). *The seeds of war in toys*. Havadis Publications.
- Girgin, F. (2024). *Examining the relationship between primary school children's gender perceptions and their game and toy choices (Master's thesis)*. Uludağ University, Institute of Social Sciences, Bursa.
- Grossman, D. (2000). *On killing: The psychological cost of learning to kill in war and*

- society. Back Bay Books.
- Hoffmann, H. (2000). *Schwarzer Peter im Weltkrieg: Spielzeugindustrie und Propaganda im Dritten Reich*. Deutscher Verlag.
- Hürtürk, Ç. (2017). Investigation of the Content of Preschool Children's Play and Play Behaviors (Master's Thesis). Eastern Mediterranean University, Institute of Graduate Education, Training and Research.
- Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence culture: Where old and new media collide*. NYU Press.
- Kerkez, F.İ. (2006). Investigation of the Effects of Play and Exercise on Physical and Motor Development of 5-6 Year Old Children Going to Kindergarten and Preschool. Karadeniz Technical University. Institute of Social Sciences. PhD Thesis, Trabzon.
- Locke, J. (2000). *Some thoughts concerning education* (J. W. Yolton & J. S. Yolton, Eds.). Oxford University Press. (Original work published 1693)
- Nutku, Ö. (2006). *Game, Child, Theatre* (Second Edition). Gaziantep: Özgür Publications.
- Özmen, O., Alıncak, F., Çağdanlıoğlu, M.B. (2023). An Examination of Physical Education and Sports Teachers' Motivation for Playing Digital Games in Terms of Different Variables, *Journal of Academic Social Research*, 11(139), 97-114.
- Öztürk, K., & Uğurlu, Ö. (2010). The role of toys in cultural acquisition as a communication tool specific to the child's world. *Erciyes Communication Journal*, 1(3), 133-142.
- Piaget, J. (1962). *Play, dreams and imitation in childhood*. New York: Norton.
- Sezici, E., Yiğit, E. (2019). The relationship between children's play and toy preferences and their social-emotional adjustment levels in the preschool period. *JAREN*, 5(3), 178-187.
- Sormaz, F., & Yüksel, H. (2012). Changing childhood, the industrialization of play and toys, and consumer culture. *Gaziantep University Journal of Social Sciences*, 11(3), 985-1008.
- Sürme, M., Atilgan, G., Atilgan, E., & Akmaz, A. (2025). Evaluation of visitor comments on Tripadvisor regarding the Gaziantep Toy and Game Museum through content analysis. *Journal of Tourism Economics and Business Research*, 7(1), 17-31.
- Uskan, S.B., & Bozkuş, T. (2019). The place of play in education. *International Journal of Current Education Research*, 5(2), 123-131.
- Yamlı, Z. (2019). A social evaluation of the reflection of war and children in works (Master's thesis). Balıkesir University, Balıkesir.
- Yazıcıoğlu, Ş. (2024). A comparison between Rousseau's Emile and contemporary child education (Master's thesis). Marmara University, Istanbul.
- Yeltekin, E., Alıncak, F. (2021). An Examination of Secondary School Students' Attitudes Towards the Concept of Play and Playing Games Involving Physical Activity in Terms of Certain Variables. *Journal of Education and New Approaches*, 4(1), 83-100.
- Yurdakul, A., & Alperen, A. (2019). An example of the use of children's books as a propaganda tool in Nazi Germany: Der Giftpilz (The Poisonous Mushroom). *Journal of German Language and Culture Studies*, 1(2), 15-34.

About the Authors

Hüseyin KARABAŞ graduated from Gaziantep University's Department of Physical Education and Sports Teaching. He completed his non-thesis master's degree in Curriculum and Instruction and is currently pursuing a thesis master's degree in the Department of Traditional Sports and Games at Gaziantep University. He served as

the Accessible Sports Branch Manager for the Gaziantep Metropolitan Municipality and currently serves as the Sports Facilities Coordinator. He is interested in athletics, aviation, and traditional sports.

E-mail: huseyinkarabas90@gmail.com , **ORCID:** 0009-0001-5680-1451

Leyla KALKAN completed her undergraduate studies in the Department of Physical Education and Sports Teaching at Mersin University. She completed her non-thesis master's degree in Sports Management at the Gaziantep University Institute of Social Sciences and is currently pursuing a thesis master's degree in the same field. She currently works as a Pilates instructor at the Gaziantep Metropolitan Municipality. Her research interests include Pilates, fitness, and traditional games.

E-mail: leylaaytekinkalkan@gmail.com , **ORCID:** 0009-0001-3688-7606

Hatice ALINCAK graduated from Gaziantep University School of Physical Education and Sports, Department of Physical Education and Sports Teaching in 2012. She completed her master's degree at Gaziantep University Institute of Health Sciences, Department of Physical Education and Sports. She is currently working as a Physical Education Teacher. Her research interests include physical education and sports, educational sciences.

E-mail: alincakhatice2700@gmail.com , **ORCID:** 0009-0003-8976-5578

Similarity Index:

The similarity index obtained from the plagiarism software for this book chapter is 3%.