**Excerpt from "Why We Love Dogs, Eat Pigs, and Wear Cows", Melanie Joy**

**Unnatural Born Killers**

There is a substantial body of evidence demonstrating humans' seemingly natural aversion to killing. Much of the research in this area has been conducted by the military; analysts have found that soldiers tend to intentionally fire over the enemy's head, or not to fire at all.  
  
Studies of combat activity during the Napoleonic and Civil Wars revealed striking statistics. Given the ability of the men, their proximity to the enemy, and the capacity of their weapons, the number of enemy soldiers hit should have been well over 50 percent, resulting in a killing rate of hundreds per minute. Instead, however, the hit rate was only one to two per minute. And a similar phenomenon occurred during World War I. According to British Lieutenant George Roupell, the only way he could get his men to stop firing into the air was by drawing his sword, walking down the trench, "beating [them] on the backside and ... telling them to fire low".1 World War II fire rates were also remarkably low: historian and US Army Brigadier General S.L.A. Marshall reported that, during battle, the firing rate was a mere 15 to 20 percent; in other words, out of every hundred men engaged in a firefight, only fifteen to twenty actually used their weapons. And in Vietnam, for every enemy a soldier killed, more than fifty thousand bullets were fired.2  
  
What these studies have taught the military is that in order to get soldiers to shoot to kill, to actively participate in violence, the soldiers must be sufficiently desensitized to the act of killing. In other words, they have to learn *not to feel*, and learn *not to feel responsible for their actions*. They must be taught to override their own conscience. Yet these studies also demonstrate that even in the face of immediate danger, in situations of extreme violence, most people are averse to killing. In other words, as Marshall concludes, "the vast majority of combatants throughout history, at the moment of truth when they could and should kill the enemy, have found themselves to be 'conscientious objectors'".3  
  
1: Dave Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in war and Society*. New York: Back Bay Books, 1996, 12.  
2: Grossman, Martha Stout, *The Sociopath Next Door*. New York: Broadway Books, 2005.  
3: Grossman, 15.