

RESPECT

RESPONSIBILITY

**FROM DIGNITY
TO ENTERTAINING**



CHILDREN, VALUES & THE ENTERTAINMENT MEDIA

A CHILDREN NOW



SPECIAL REPORT



culture that becomes a stranger to its own inner human needs — which are, for better or worse, unquantifiable, intuitive and mysterious — is a culture that has lost touch with the best of its humanity... Why is it so hard to acknowledge this dimension?

— *Norman Lear*

June 1995

Dear Friends,

In early March, 1995, Children Now was privileged to join Stanford University and the UCLA Center for Communication Policy to host our second annual conference on children and the media. This year our topic was "Shaping Our Children's Values: The Role of the Entertainment Media."

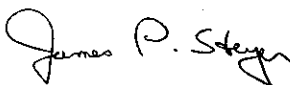
The signs of children in crisis are all around us: in the hundreds of guns brought into classrooms every day, the unacceptable rates of teenage pregnancy and high school dropouts, the rising tide of drug abuse and juvenile crime. Today, the choices a child makes have monumental consequences, and a strong sense of values is vital to help kids choose wisely. Like it or not, it is no longer enough to turn to families or schools alone for the solution. The media play a powerful role in children's lives, and every day the media are sending important messages to kids. Television shouldn't be a scapegoat for the problems we face, but it *should* be part of the solution.

For these reasons, we were pleased to gather many of the country's top entertainment industry producers and executives, along with leading academics, advocates and children's experts, to explore a number of important issues:

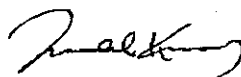
- What role can and do the media play in helping children develop a sound sense of values to prepare them for the many difficult choices they need to make in the years ahead?
- What can be done to ameliorate the negative messages many children may currently be receiving through the media?
- What steps can be taken to promote tolerance and respect by improving the quality of portrayals of women and minorities on programming watched by children?

President Clinton's message to the conference and the series of meetings Vice President Gore has convened on this subject have convinced us that this issue has captured the attention of our top national leaders, and that the time is right for action. But we need everyone's help.

This report is meant to help spur new ideas and inspire each of us to do what we can to help produce better results for kids. We hope you enjoy this report, and we look forward to hearing your thoughts.



James P. Steyer
Founder & President
Children Now



Donald Kennedy
Chairman of the Board
Children Now

Unsolved Mysteries: Should TV Teach Values?

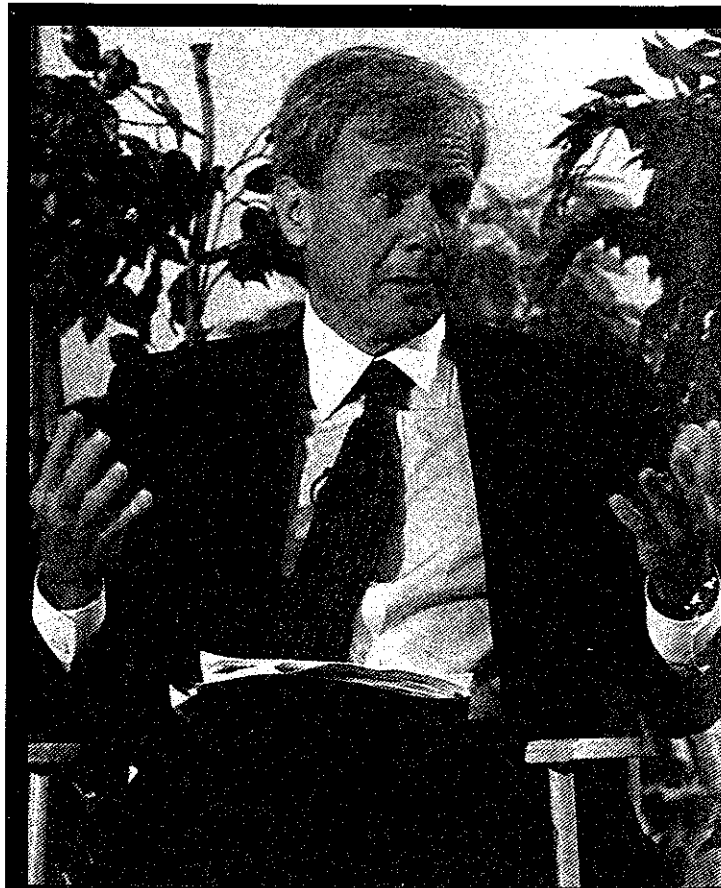
Children grow up learning some unusual lessons from TV: karate chops and trickery can get you what you want; most people stick with their own ethnic group; it's okay for super heroes to kill off their enemies; sex is far more common than abstinence; and it's funny, not bad, to disobey your parents.

At a time when most Americans believe we are facing a "crisis in values" in this country, are these really the messages we want TV to send our children? Even most kids say no. In a recent Children Now poll, two-thirds of young people ages 10 to 16 said that sex on TV encourages kids their age to have sex before they are ready, and that some shows encourage kids to disrespect their parents. Some shows send the message that "being bad is cool," says 14 year-old Rayelyn Rodriguez. And when it comes to sex, "They tell kids 'Everybody's doing it.' Then some kids think, 'Well, if everyone's doing it, why don't I?'"

Television has become today's storyteller. The problem is, there are too few morals to its tales. Even kids sorely miss them — eight out of ten kids polled said television should teach them right from wrong. And they should know. By age 18, the average child will have watched 22,000 hours of TV — more time in front of the tube than in the classroom. Children Now's survey showed that two-thirds of kids live in

households with three or more sets; over half have a TV in their bedroom and usually watch TV without their parents.

When it tries, TV can teach values such as tolerance and kindness and still remain entertaining. Several studies of preschoolers, for example, have found that children who watch *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* and *Sesame Street* got along better with other children than those who didn't. TV's huge unfulfilled promise, notes Norman Lear, pioneering producer of such shows as *All in*



NBC Nightly News Anchor Tom Brokaw

the Family and *The Jeffersons*, is "to educate, to heal...and to satisfy the hunger for connectedness."

The need for TV to fill this role has never been greater. The splintering of families, the decline in organized religion, and the disarray of public schools have left many young people feeling less connected than ever. The anchor they really need, many argue, is a shared code of universal values. Words like "virtue," "morality" and "shame" are back in vogue. A 1994 *Newsweek* poll found that 67 percent of those polled blamed TV and other popular entertainment for the country's moral crisis. NBC News Anchor Tom Brokaw echoes this concern. "I see what's happening with kids in the inner city," he says, "and I see the influence of the box on their lives." As the Chairman of the Federal Communications Commission recently said, TV is like a third parent.

While some in the industry deny responsibility, others are beginning to embrace it. "Just as television was once an enabler of the nation's drug problem, I believe, to some extent it may today be an enabler of some of the problems afflicting our nation's youth," says Richard H. Frank, president of the Academy of Television Arts & Sciences. "Though TV may not be the cause...those of us who work in television should not feel we can walk away and wash our hands of the problem."

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President Clinton



As President and as a parent, I'm concerned about the values portrayed in our media today.... Every day, TV and movies send children important messages — about what's important and what's not; about what attitudes and behaviors are acceptable and may be adopted by children and what aren't. Like it or not, the media is an important influence on our young people. With that power comes a measure of responsibility.

It is the creative decisions of those of you in the entertainment industry that determine which movies will be made, what shows will air, which characters a new generation of children will come to love and emulate. No one will take away that freedom of expression from you. But we do ask you — and we should ask you — to exercise responsibility and good judgment, to weigh your powers of influence carefully as you make important decisions, to weigh what may be commercially successful in the short run with what may be important to our public life and our private successes over the long run.

Newton Minow



My own interest in television's effect on children began in 1956, when Robert Kennedy and I traveled together, often as roommates, as members of Adlai Stevenson's presidential campaign staff.... One day Bob said something I've never forgotten: he said that when he grew up, the three great influences on children were home, school and church, but in observing his own children, he believed that there was now a fourth major influence, television.

Our choice is not between free speech and the marketplace on the one hand, and governmental censorship and bureaucracy on the other. The choice is how best to serve the needs of children and use the opportunities presented by the digital age to enrich their lives. If we turn away from that choice, the consequences will be a wasteland vaster than anyone can imagine, or would care to.

Producers and children's advocates often have a different idea of how best to meet the industry's responsibility. Take the *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers*, the TV show that has boys joyfully karate-chopping each other on playgrounds. Producers defend their Saturday morning show by pointing to the kicker — a two minute admonishment at the end of the program that hitting is, in fact, wrong. That defense doesn't do much to impress 12 year-old Sarah Mirabelli, an eighth grader at Oakland's Cole School for the Performing Arts. "TV really does have an effect on younger kids. My sister and brother run around the house as Power Rangers. Please try to find out what's wrong and fix it."

Luckily, many shows have made progress. Lots of people in the industry are trying hard to send out positive values messages. "We are acutely aware that we help define or shape the values of children," says Matt Williams, creator of the show *Home Improvement*, ranked number one among teens 12 to 17 and number three among children two to 11. All of the broadcast networks have special standards for children's programs, but the problem is that most kids watch adult TV, including nighttime soaps heavy on sex and violence. In the 94-95 season, nine out of the top 10 shows watched by kids two to 11 ran in prime time. So while executives acknowledge that

By the age of 18, the average child will have watched 22,000 hours of TV — more time in front of the tube than in the classroom.



**ABC News Anchor
Carole Simpson**

kids need special standards, most shows kids watch don't meet them. This disconnect has yet to be addressed.

But is it fair to make TV the bad guy? "To make TV the whipping boy for society's ills is ludicrous," says Dick Wolf, the man behind such shows as *Law & Order* and *New*

York Undercover. Network executives argue that if parents don't like what their kids are watching, all they have to do is turn off the television. "It's an issue of parental responsibility, it's not the role of the government or of some pencil neck geek to be making these decisions," Wolf says. "I'm old fashioned. I have three kids under age 10. None of them has ever seen any of my shows." But the reality is that many parents are so busy working to meet their financial pressures that they can't monitor what's on the tube themselves. Like it or not, TV is often used as an electronic baby-sitter, and that means new responsibility for those who create and distribute its shows.

So what kids end up watching is what everyone else is watching. What drives those TV shows is not good taste, or what's good for

kids, it's popularity. "It's too tempting to say let's do the show that draws the biggest audience," says Nicholas Boxer, executive producer of *Captain Planet*. "The good shows tend to be the exception." Perfect example: *My So-Called Life*, which despite unanimous critical acclaim, was recently canceled because not enough people watched it. In fact, it was ranked 114th among prime time shows. "What you can't ignore is that we did something interesting. There's gotta be something other than popularity or we're all really in trouble," said the show's creator and co-executive producer Winnie Holzman.

But if a show — even a good show — is coming in at the bottom of the ratings heap, how can we expect executives to keep it on the air and keep their jobs too? Many children's advocates argue that programs like *The Cosby Show* and *Grace Under Fire* prove that shows about families and their real life problems can be compelling and popular, if written and produced well, and if promoted aggressively by the network. And therein lies the problem and the solution. It takes imagination, money and real creative talent to launch a successful and original quality show. Luckily, there's plenty of that in Hollywood.





Justin Van Den Berg

My real life: Badminton, studying for the SAT's, studying for an exam on the Bible, maintaining a 3.5 GPA.

TV life: Dating, going to endless parties every night.

My summer plans: Attend Harvard Summer School so I can get into Stanford.

TV boys' summer plans: Work as lifeguards to get great tans and beautiful girls.

Girls in real life: It's sad. They all want to be like the girls on 90210.

TV girls: Complete romantic B.S.

Divorce in real life: Alone with Mom. Home Alone.

TV divorce: Lots of kids, pets and noise.

My TV show: A kid grows up in a rich family, an intelligent golden boy. His parents send him away to boarding school, where there are lots of snot-nosed kids. His parents want him to go to Harvard, but he wants to be an artist. He wants to escape the corporate life everyone has laid out for him. One summer, he runs away. For two months, he's way the hell out there, unattached to his parents. By the end, he and his parents negotiate a home-coming. I see this as half-way between *Grace Under Fire* and *My So-Called Life*. Not many one-liners, but some Seinfeldian humor.

My real life: Kinda boring to me. Band, basketball, watching television.

TV life: Dates and skiing trips.

My real Mom: Works hard. Strict.

TV Moms: Don't deal with real problems. Don't have messed up jobs, but still live in nice homes.

My real Dad: My Daddy's not around. Don't even live that close.

TV Dads: Real different. They're THERE. Still married to the mothers and in the house.

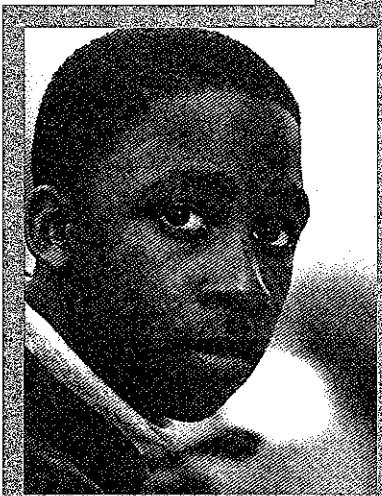
My real Grandma: We lived with her when my mother had a traveling job. I love her a whole lot. She has bad memories. She got shot in both her legs once.

TV Grandmas: Have lots of money. They have glorious memories, like when they used to be famous dancers.

Real life crisis: My Godbrother BoBo got shot. He was going to see a girl in Richmond, and when he drove up in his beatup car some boys thought he was someone else looking for revenge. Shot him in the thigh, the chest, and two times in the shoulder.

TV teen crisis: Girl problems. Like on 90210: Brenda and Dillon break up. Then Kelly starts dating Dillon. And then Brenda gets mad at Kelly.

My TV show: There's a boy, Omar, in the eighth grade. He's got a smart mouth and be fighting in school, plus he's got friends selling drugs. His mother left him with his grandmother and moved out of state. He don't know his father. Omar gets picked up by the police for possession of dope. His grandma bailed him out and took him to a counselor. He tried not to see his friends, but they called him a punk and had a fight. He went home and got a gun. His grandma calmed him down.



John Greer

From Sidekick To Superwoman: TV's Feminine Mystique



ou've come a long way, baby — from June Cleaver mopping floors to Murphy Brown topping Dan Quayle's agenda. Since the 1960's, TV women have moved out of the kitchen and into the boardroom, the courtroom, and the newsroom. Kids realize it, too. Children Now's recent national poll found that most girls feel there are enough role models for them on prime time TV. And when it comes to young girls on TV, they're right. There are roughly the same number of boy and girl characters on TV — and for the most part, no significant differences in the way they are portrayed in terms of their motivations and behaviors, although girls are more likely to show affection and boys are more likely to be aggressive.

And nowadays, women on TV are better role models, too. They've landed the best pay, the best promotion, and the best punchline. But something crucial is missing: reality. For the most part, female characters hardly ever tackle the real-life situations that cause working women the most grief: child care problems, job discrimination, sexual harassment or...just plain being broke. "They are far removed from the world of reality," says professor Aletha Huston, director of the Center for Research on the Influence of Television on Children.

And when it comes to adult women on TV, they remain far too few. On prime time shows, men still outnumber women three to one. Male characters almost always drive the plot. Most

of the rest of the women on TV are younger than the men, more attractive, blond or red-headed, nurturing, and often victimized, according to content analysis studies. On Saturday mornings, females fare far worse. In TV shows designed specifically for kids, only 23 percent of the characters — and even fewer of the major characters — are female. "In cartoonland, all the girls are sidekicks and there's no doubt who's in charge," says ABC news anchor Carole Simpson. And they're stereotyped, too: the lone Smurfette is blond and all too caring and a female Power Ranger is, of course, dressed in pink. "The girls on these shows are a quick fix, almost an afterthought," says Katharine Heintz-Knowles, assistant professor of communications at the University of Washington and author of a pioneering study on the subject.

Some Hollywood execs recognize that female cartoon characters are an endangered species. "The issue of a girl being empowered is a wonderful theme you just don't see in American animation," ventures Andy Heyward, president of DIC entertainment, who is bringing a Japanese cartoon series called *Sailor Moon* to American TV this fall. The show's main character is a clumsy, long legged, blond junior high school student who transforms into a heroine with super powers. Why aren't there more *Sailor Moons*? Most execs argue that girls will watch shows designed for boys, but that the reverse isn't true.

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**"TV is a real turn-off,
when all you see are
blond bimbettes"**

Girls may watch. But as they grow older and more savvy, they're less satisfied with the experience. In the recent Children Now poll, teen girls were much less satisfied than most kids with the role models they see on TV. "TV is a real turn-off, when all you see are blond bimbettes," says 15 year-old Julie Sohn. The result? They tune out — with teen girls watching half as much TV as other kids. Partly it's the heavy barrage of sex — 14,000 sexual references versus 150 of abstinence — on soap operas, prime time shows, commercials, and even MTV videos — that turns them off. Those who keep watching are strongly influenced — often by stereotypical images of uniformly beautiful, obsessively thin, and scantily dressed objects of male desire. And studies show that girls who are frequent viewers have the most negative opinion of their gender.

Even preschool girls suffer from TV's sex stereotyping. Action-packed shows geared to younger kids have the fewest girl characters — one out of four — with girls less aggressive and combative than boys, unless they're evil witches. And these shows can erode girls' self-confidence. One study of three to 10 year olds found that those who watched the most TV were most likely to want to be housewives and nurses. In another study, three to six year olds agreed that men have more ambition and that women are happier raising kids.



***Real life superhero:
Nickelodeon's Linda Ellerbee***

Yet, on the rare occasion when TV has been used to break down sex stereotypes, it's been successful. After watching a PBS series called *Freestyle* which showed girls and boys in non-traditional roles, kids showed more acceptance of boys as helpers, girls as leaders, and girls doing mechanical tasks. But such shows remain rare experiments. The new and few female characters on Saturday morning have had little impact, so far. In a recent survey, school age girls had a hard time coming up with more than three female heroines: Marilyn Monroe, who's been dead for 30 years; Wonder Woman "because of the sparkles on her dress"; and Julia "but-I-could-never-look-like-her" Roberts. So while progress is being made, too often, as Professor Heintz-Knowles points out, "the message coming from the screen is that girls are not valued in our culture."



My real life: Homework and taking care of six brothers and sisters.

TV life: *Wasting your allowance, blasting the stereo.*

■

My after-school life: Very busy with homework and studying.

TV after-school life: *Joking around, going out, playing games.*

■

My friends: All different races, Asians and Latinas.

TV friends: *All white or all black.*

■

Girls in real life: Hang out together, play basketball and fight.

TV girls: *Fake, their clothes are too new, and their biggest problem is not telling their mom they pierced their ears.*

■

My TV show: The narrator would be a 13 year-old girl of mixed race, whose best friend is a boy. Like in *The Wonder Years* you would hear her inner voice, her conscience talking. She would hang out with lots of different kids, from different races and backgrounds. She deals with peer pressure, conflicts with friends and jealousy because she gets good grades at school. At home, her mother is strict, she has a lot of brothers and sisters and lots of chores. Her best friend is a boy and they talk about their dreams, their goals and their problems. They also learn a lot about other ethnic groups from the other kids in the neighborhood.



Sarah Mirabelli

My real life: Too busy for TV.

TV life: *Juggling boyfriends, being sassy.*

■

Real Asians: Americanized, wear suits or jeans; have real jobs.

TV Asians: *Margaret Cho's clothes are the sluttiest, tight little mini-skirts with a crop top, ugh.... Acts like a ditz. Can't understand her Korean.*

■

Girls in real life: A lot of them are virgins, not all eager to have sex. Concerned about STDs, pregnancy, birth control.

TV girls: *Gorgeous models, jumping in and out of bed with guys.*

■

Parties in real life: Nothing happens.

TV parties: *Guys get drunk, crash cars; girls almost get raped, and the cops always come.*

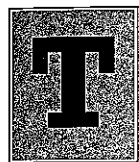
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My TV show: It's about a 15 year-old Latina sophomore in high school, whose parents are both lawyers and workaholics. There's no one to help her day by day, because they're so busy working they have no time. Her anger toward her parents is building and she's becoming more hostile. On weekends, they're working on cases and they brush off her problems. She fixes her own dinner at night and eats by herself. One of her friends or a close family friend is diagnosed with cancer and it changes the family's life. Slowly, not in one episode, it's a continuing story line.



Julie Sohn

Behind The Times: Minorities On TV



V is still black and white when it comes to portraying minorities. A recent study found that the number of Latinos in prime time television has dropped from three percent in 1955 to one percent in 1992, even though the population has grown to about ten percent. The few roles there are haven't evolved much



since the days of Frito Bandito. "I'm tired of reading for drug dealer parts," says actor Tony Plana, who also plays lots of Latin American dictators. The picture's even worse on Saturday mornings, when a child will watch an average of 123 characters — but see a Hispanic maybe once every other weekend. And Children Now's survey found that only three percent of the child characters seen on TV are Latino. "When it comes to minorities on TV, the record is appalling," observes ABC News anchor Carole Simpson.

The number of African Americans on TV has increased substantially, but prime time may be one of the most segregated places in America,

with most shows cast in all black or all white. "I have a better chance of living near Peter Tortorici (president of CBS Entertainment) in real life than I do on TV," says noted writer and producer Ralph Farquhar, an African-American. Many black actors are still confined to comedies. "There's a singularity of images of blacks being happy-go-lucky buffoons," Farquhar says. Since ethnic comedies like *Amos 'n Andy* first aired in the 1950's, Hollywood has tended to turn the real issues and concerns of minorities into humorous plot lines and ethnic characters into caricatures, raising the question of whether these shows ultimately attack or reinforce stereotypes and prejudices. "It's time to change the formula...with a dose of reality," Farquhar says. And yet when Farquhar tried to do just that last year with a black drama called *South Central*, he was told the show "wasn't funny enough."

But life isn't always funny. And TV's picture of the world may be affecting kids in ways Nielsen ratings can't measure. Minority kids tend to be the heaviest viewers of TV — Children Now's survey found that 80 percent of black youngsters had their own TV in their bedroom, compared to 51 percent of whites. TV often fails to provide it's most loyal fans with role models. Actor Plana notes that in some communities the dropout rate among Latinos is up 50 percent, and blames television in part for not offering them other roles to aspire to. "TV gives our kids no role models and a very narrow sense of possibility for themselves in

mainstream society," he says. TV is failing white kids, too. Little on screen will prepare them for the diverse world into which they are growing. Study after study shows that TV can be a powerful tool in teaching tolerance and understanding, but, all too often, it doesn't take advantage of that opportunity.

The networks and other programmers have made some significant changes. The number of African American roles — as doctors, lawyers, judges, and police lieutenants — has risen dramatically. Many of the negative stereotypes, including roles that Tony Plana is sick of having, have been eradicated. But for the most part, nothing has replaced them — leaving Latinos with virtually no presence on TV and minority kids with almost nobody to identify with on Saturday mornings. And, interestingly enough, when the networks do launch ethnic shows, they often receive criticism instead of acclaim. ABC Entertainment President Ted Harbert championed *All American Girl*, the first Asian comedy, last summer — and was stunned when it was promptly attacked for everything from the actors not being Korean to the Grandma's stereotypical behavior carrying around a pot-of-squid. "At least we tried," Harbert said. More progress is needed, however. And that clearly requires getting even more minorities *behind* the screen — writing, producing, and directing — as well as *on* the screen.



Norman Lear



In 1950, a network order was for 39 shows and there were no repeats... Soon there were orders for 26 new shows and as many repeats. When *All In The Family* went on in January 1971, our order was for 13. Last year when *704 Hauser* was picked up by CBS, our order was for six. They only aired four. What has been driving this trend is a need for instant success as measured by the ratings. "Give me a hit, Tuesday night at 8:30, and everything else, every other value be damned!"

Wouldn't it be extraordinary if we in television, films and other media, with our enormous influence on the culture, could take the lead in breaking down the wall that separates our higher personal ideals from the conduct of our professions and daily lives?

I am convinced that America's children will be far better served the day the entertainment media decides to drop the numbers-driven mental maps that lay claim to us now in favor of developing an industry in which the values that inform our television programs and our films flow primarily from our tastes and sensibilities, from our capacities for awe and wonder and mystery, from our humanity and compassion, and from that voice within us that may be saying even now — "This seems right. This seems right."

Moving Forward: Where We Go From Here

The most important part of any conference is what happens after the sessions are over, the keynote speeches have ended, and attendees have packed their bags and returned home. What is the next step?

Throughout our conference, a "working group" of participants met to discuss what practical suggestions could be distilled from the wide-ranging panel sessions, speeches and conversations we had. With so many different perspectives represented at our gathering, none of these suggestions has unanimous support. We here at Children Now will use

these recommendations to guide us as we develop our own follow-up efforts to the conference. And we hope that you too will use them to generate your own ideas of what you can do to improve the quality of media messages reaching our kids.

Suggestions for Advocacy Groups

- Don't just focus on the negative; reward the positive. Consider creating an award to writers for excellent programs dealing with issues children face.
- Work with television writers directly, perhaps organizing briefings on important issues affecting kids that might make good storylines.
- Serve as a bridge between academia and the media, helping to pass on important media-related research projects to those on the front lines of the industry.
- Do more to educate kids about how to use the media wisely; work to get "media literacy" programs, which give kids the tools to be more critical viewers, into schools and community groups.
- Provide parents the information and strategies they need to monitor their kids' viewing and talk to them about what they're watching; reach out to parents' organizations and community groups.



ABC Entertainment President Ted Harbert

**Suggestions for Media Executives,
Writers and Producers**

- Don't reward anti-social behavior. Watch out for the more subtle messages your programs may be sending; for example, don't portray physical aggression or deceitful behavior as acceptable means to an end.
- Listen to the kids who have told us they see too much premarital sex on TV.
- Improve the ethnic diversity in children's programs, which have the lowest diversity of any type of programming on TV.
- Address the near-total absence of Latino characters on the screen; cast more Latinos in positive roles to reflect the diversity in our society.
- Develop more storylines that show kids grappling realistically with the kinds of issues young people really face today.
- Show more children in your programs who are actively involved in school, community service, or religious institutions.
- Keep the 8:00 to 9:00 p.m. family hour in place, when the "softer" prime time shows have traditionally been scheduled.

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Richard H. Frank



On one issue there can be no argument: television is a major force in the lives of our children. When television underachieves, it can contribute to the underachievement of an entire generation.

I believe the TV Academy's Anti-Substance Abuse Campaign can serve as a model for dealing with the issues that Children Now is so rightly concerned about. As president of the Academy, I intend in the coming weeks to meet with the TV Academy's Board of Governors about mounting a similar initiative in an effort to more responsibly deal with such children-sensitive issues as violence, sex and education.

Working together — those of us who labor in the television industry, thoughtful organizations like Children Now, the leaders of our government and the children whose best interests we so sincerely wish to serve — we can find common ground. And, step by step, we can push and prod this frustrating but fascinating medium of television closer to realizing its extraordinary potential.

"How can we get advertisers to care more about which shows they invest in, without making them too afraid to support original or provocative programming?"

Hard Questions That Won't Go Away

At the end of our gathering, we were left pondering some tough questions; questions without easy answers, but ones we sensed we would have to grapple with if we are to continue to move ahead.

Why should advertisers invest in educational shows for kids, instead of action shows that bring lucrative product tie-ins?

What can be done about the fact that more children watch prime-time shows without special standards than watch shows that are designed for kids and do have special standards?

How can we get advertisers to care more about which shows they invest in, without making them too afraid to support original or provocative programming?

If quality prime-time shows fare badly, why should executives feel obligated to continue airing them?

Where We Stand

We were especially gratified to hear Richard H. Frank, President of the Academy of Television Arts & Sciences (ATAS), announce plans to launch a major industry-wide initiative on the issues of sex, education and violence on television, akin to ATAS's recent anti-substance abuse campaign.

We weren't able to achieve a common ground on the issue of the Children's Television Act, but those of us in the advocacy community will continue to work for implementation of strong guidelines to enforce the Act.

On one subject, all the conferees were in agreement: public broadcasting must be protected. We will all work to see that this safe harbor for children's TV remains afloat.



The Short and Unhappy Lives of Three TV Shows

South Central

Description: Created by Ralph R. Farquhar and Michael J. Weithorn, Fox aired ten episodes Spring 94. A realistic and dramatic portrayal of a single black Mom and her three children trying to survive amid poverty, drugs and violence.

Reception: "The sitcom that dares to link humor and despair... works"; "An engaging and impressive show with strong characters, quick humor, an exhilarating rhythm, and the courage to be real. Best of all, it's different." Network execs, however, said it wasn't funny or popular enough.

..fate.
CANCELLED
..fate.

My So-Called Life

Description: Brainchild of Winnie Holzman, ABC's picaresque drama about a normal high-school girl's growing pains. Realistic dialogues and internal struggles of teens without cliché. Debuted in fall of 94.

Reception: "Capable of greatness"; "Better than first-rate"; "Overall a marvelous ensemble both in concept and in performance." Ranked, however, only 114th out of 145.

..fate.
CANCELLED
..fate.

Our Family

Description: A Latino *Cosby Show* pitched by actor Tony Plana and his wife, *Nurses* star Ada Maris. Depicts Ray, a lawyer, and his wife, Connie, a college professor, and their family's struggle to adapt to their new affluence and status. One episode, for example, examined Connie's difficulty sleeping in a beautiful new home.

Reception: Network executives said it "wasn't Latino enough" and suggested something instead about Jose, a chef, and Maria, a waitress.

..fate.
REJECTED
..fate.

Acknowledgments

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Children Now is one of the nation's leading nonpartisan policy and media organizations for children.

Children Now acts as a strong and independent voice for children in the public policy arena, in the mass media and in the community. We focus particular attention on children who are poor or at-risk.

Children Now:

- Educates the public and decision makers about the needs of children;
- Develops and promotes effective strategies to improve their lives;
- Reaches out to parents and children to inform them of opportunities to help themselves.

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