

The unreadable first few lines of this article from The Christian Science Monitor, May 7, 1996, are as follows:

TV and Toy Trend
Affects Young Children

By Alexandra Marks

New York

Across the country, child psychologists, teachers, and many parents report that children at younger and younger ages are increasingly talking about sex and bringing sexual images into their play. So far, the evidence is mostly anecdotal, but the growing number of reports has raised alarms and prompted calls for academic studies.

"Kids normally are not that interested in sex in the 3-10 age group, but we're kind of forcing it onto them," says Mary Sinker, a child-development expert at the Kohl Children's Museum in Wilmette, Ill.

Ms. Sinker says childhood is undergoing rapid

Dear George,

You can add this one to the list of TV horrors.

Ted Herman

TV, Toy Images Affect Young Children

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change, and no one is ready to predict the impact on this generation. But some experts are increasingly concerned that the pervasiveness of sexual images and innuendoes - in everything from TV to toys - may damage children's development. That is prompting calls for restraint on the part of the entertainment and toy-manufacturing industries.

"We've crossed the line from sexism to sexuality, and it's all mixed in together and really confusing for children," says Diane Levin, a professor of child development at Wheelock College in Boston.

Ms. Levin says that children have always had a natural curiosity about their bodies. Questions about the functions of different parts, or where babies come from, or why a little boy is different from a little girl are not unusual. But Levin and other child-development specialists say the questions and language increasingly used by many children indicate that more than natural curiosity is at work.

"The curiosity is definitely there," says Martha Edwards, a psychologist at the Ackerman Institute for Family Therapy in New York. "But because of the images that [children are] seeing, they're definitely getting into a level of detail and specificity that is beyond their ability to comprehend, or the appropriateness of their acting them out."

Several preschool teachers also say there is a "driven" quality to many of the questions and the play they are seeing, a quality that didn't exist even five years ago.

"Kids are getting these ideas and they seem driven to work them out, like they're grappling with things they can't possibly understand, and it disturbs them," says Honey Schnapp, the education director at The Open Center for Children, in Somerville, Mass.

Ms. Schnapp and others say that when a child acts out sexually with great specificity, it is usually seen as an indicator of possible sexual abuse. But the increasing number of incidents of the innocent use of explicit language or images out of context has caused them to reassess.

In Cambridge, Mass., a preschool teacher walked onto the playground and saw a four-year-old boy lying on top of a four-year-old girl.

"What are you doing?" asked the teacher.

"We're having sex," the little boy said, looking up innocently. One Manhattan parent found

that her son had written a "How to Have Sex Guide," complete with the kind of simple, inaccurate directions one would expect from a seven-year-old. Another heard a young boy express his affection for a little girl, by saying, "I really want to rape that Jennifer."

"The way that kids develop scripts for things they don't know how to do yet," Ms. Edwards says, "is usually by having some kind of model, if they're not explicitly trained by their parents." Many children all too often find images and models on television.

Twenty years ago, sex on TV was usually handled by a gentle fade-out. Today, sexual innuendoes and some more explicit scenes are common, even in the 7-to-8 p.m. so-called "family hour."

Many parents, politicians, and child-development experts have raised concerns about that for the last several years. But now, some say the toy-manufacturing industry has gone even further and is marketing toys with sexually inappropriate images to children.

"Baywatch Barbie is an example, they say. Barbie, with her exaggerated features, is dolled up in clothes just like the skimpy clad women for which the syndicated TV show is famous worldwide.

"Wow!" exclaims the promotion on the back of the box. "Play real lifeguard adventures with Barbie like you see on the hot TV show, Baywatch! The toy is suggested 'for ages over 3 years.'"

"It is absolutely not appropriate for young children," Edwards says. "It's those very sex-typed, almost cartoonlike images that give kids a very skewed sense of what it means to be a woman, what it means to be a man."

The television show, about a group of lifeguards' beach adventures, contains sexual innuendoes that can be fairly explicit.

"Kids are seeing more sexual images, and they're trying to figure them out," Levin says. "Then toys like Baywatch Barbie say it's OK to bring them into their play because the toys are there for them, for children to have fun with."

A spokeswoman for Mattel Inc. makes of Baywatch Bar-

bie," disagrees, saying the toy is intended to show little girls that they can be lifeguards.

"If you watch Baywatch, you'll see it's pretty wholesome in that there's always a moral in the story line, and it's about rescuing and saving people's lives," says Lisa McKendall, Mattel's director of marketing communications. Ms. McKendall says adults

children who are trying to come to terms with their own sense of gender identity."

Paul Burke, chief of Todd Toys, which makes the Spawn series, says the company is not trying to make "sexist" toys, but high-quality, intricate toys that can compete with fast-moving computer games that many children now play for hours at a time.

R. NORMAN HATHORN - STAFF



BAYWATCH BARBIE: It's those very sex-typed, cartoonlike images that give kids a very skewed sense of what it means to be a woman, one psychologist says.

"giving a whole different set of values and expectations to toys that children don't. I think children play in a very pure and innocent way, they don't see toys in terms of sexuality," she says.

"Baywatch" is appropriate for children, McKendall says, but if some parents disagree, it's their responsibility to keep children from seeing it. As for the notice on the box that says the toy is "for ages 3 and up," she says that's from a safety perspective and has nothing to do with the developmental appropriateness of the toy.

"It's a parent's responsibility to determine what products are appropriate for their children based on their age," McKendall says.

Another toy line that has raised concerns is called "Spawn." Based on the best-selling comic-book series, female Spawn characters have exaggerated gender characteristics, carry weapons, and are scantily clad in bizarre outfits. For instance, "She-Spawn" has skulls for a brassiere. The box says "ages 4 and up."

"They're scary, grotesque images which seem to be totally defined by sex, and sex gets equated with violence," Levin says. "They send distorted messages to chil-

"We've got to sell them a toy that will keep their interest for more than two days," Mr. Burke says. "That's what we're up against, competitively, in the electronic age."

Like the Mattel spokeswoman, Burke says the age notice on the box is solely for safety reasons and has nothing to do with the age appropriateness of the toy. In fact, he says, more than half of "Spawn" toy sales are to people over 18. "A lot of collectors buy it," Burke says.

But the Spawn characters have also become the "cool" toy to have for many elementary schoolboys, says seven-year-old Sean Dalao, who was examining a Spawn doll at an FAO Schwarz toy store in New York.

"She's cool because of the spikes, and she has wings so she can fly," says Sean of "Cosmic Angela." And those wings are metal, so when she flies she can also cut off your head."

Some experts think it's important for parents and teachers to start registering their concerns and even boycott such toys. Not all agree: Banning a toy or a TV show can also have the opposite effect, they say. Giving something "forbidden fruit" status may make it more attractive, and thus more profitable.

"I don't think we're going to get it stopped," says Peggy Brick, chairman of the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States, a nonprofit research center in New York. "We have to prepare our children for the world they're going to be exposed to. That means establishing our own values in our children at the same time they're being exposed to all of this incredibly exploitative stuff."

Others, like Levin, are more optimistic. She and a group of teachers have started Teachers Resisting Unhealthy Children's Entertainment (TRUCE). They say that the more adults' awareness is raised about the issue, the more effective they will be as lobbyists for change, and as parents.

An international group forms to cut through governmental hurdles at world pressure points

Jan. 3, 1996

Alternative Path to Settling Conflicts

By Eric Moskowitz

Special to The Christian Science Monitor

NEW YORK

WHEN the world's attention suddenly focuses on a bloody ethnic conflict in a remote land, political leaders often confront a quandary: They don't know how best to intervene in a situation they know little about, but they cannot turn away from suffering.

Open-ended conflicts that turn whole countries into war zones are on the rise, says the newly formed International Crisis Group, an autonomous, multinational collection of business and political leaders. And not enough is being done to stop such battles before they start, the ICG says.

"We want to head off crises before they develop, rather than reacting to crises after they happen," said ICG chairman George Mitchell to reporters at the start of the group's first board meeting high above Manhattan's Madison Avenue. Mr. Mitchell retired as a Democratic senator from Maine in 1994.

The private, nongovernmental organization (NGO) hopes that, by remaining nonpartisan, it can avoid the political and financial pitfalls that can limit the UN's effectiveness. "At the recent 50th anniversary of the United Nations, much was said about political and financial constraints on the UN system," Mitchell says. "ICG's independent status, combined with its multinational leadership and collective experience, will enable it to speak with candor and authority."

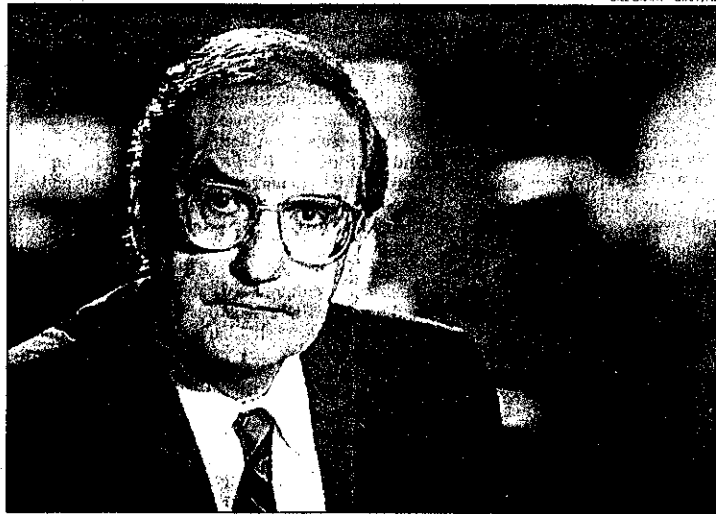
Lack of political will

Mitchell says the group has already sent its first fact-finding team to Sierra Leone and plans to send another to Nigeria. The teams will report back to the ICG, which will, if the situation warrants it, try to persuade the world to intervene. Such intervention might range from mediation teams to peacekeeping troops, says Nicholas Hinton, ICG president and former head of the Save the Children Fund, UK.

"We believe that, more than anything, it is a lack of collective political will that prevented more timely action from being taken in Somalia, Bosnia, Rwanda, and elsewhere," says Mitchell, who is currently assisting in the peace process between Britain and Northern Ireland.

Edward Joseph, director of communications of the Council on Foreign Relations, a New York-based private organization that studies international affairs, has met with some of ICG's board and feels that they are on the right track. "I think they have a realistic grasp on the problems and their purpose, which is to galvanize states to action," Mr. Joseph says. "Because they are an independent NGO, they could have been extremely useful in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and I think they can be a real asset in Africa."

The failure of the international community to intervene early on in the Balkan conflict prompted Morton Abramowitz, president of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, to visit the region in



GEORGE MITCHELL: The former senator chairs the newly formed International Crisis Group.

early 1993. "After seeing the devastation there, he asked I wondered whether there was anything I could do to change the world's slow response to future situations."

After bouncing the idea off a number of social and political officials, Mr. Abramowitz formed a steering committee of 50 international statesmen. "We realized," he says, "that the best way we could persuade countries to take action was to form a single-issue organization made up of senior officials who still had influence in their respective countries."

ICG members include the former prime ministers of France (Michel Rocard) and Australia (Malcolm Fraser); former Con-

gressman Steve Solarz; financier George Soros; Graca Michel, chair of a UN study on armed conflict and the former minister of education in Mozambique; and leaders from Norway, Canada, and the European Parliament.

Nations give monetary support

Solarz says ICG needs to act swiftly to gain the international community's respect. "We have to rack up some successes fairly early to show that we can make a difference," he says. "Through a combination of quality assessments and recommendations, ICG will hopefully come to be seen as a serious, significant organization to which governments and other NGOs look to for guidance."

Abramowitz says they already have been promised \$2 million over the next three years from a collection of governments and business entities. The Republic of China, Australia, Finland, Norway, the United States, and New Zealand, as well as corporate donors the Daiwa Bank, the Soros Foundation, and the Rockefeller brothers have all given their financial support. Abramowitz says it is likely that ICG will open its main office in New York.

Eighty countries are currently on ICG's "crisis list," says Mr. Hinton, who adds that none of the donor countries is currently on it. He notes the board resolved not to take 15 percent in funding from any one source so as not to have its "hands tied behind one person or government."

Hinton also says it is essential for ICG to build up close relations with regional entities such as the Organization for African Unity, the European Union, and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation. "By starting these relationships we will be able to identify crisis-prone situations early," Hinton says. "And after we identify the situation, we will send in teams. It is at this point - before the situation becomes a conflict - that we want to pitch our tent."

'We want to head off crises before they develop, rather than reacting to crises after they happen.'

- George Mitchell, chairman International Crisis Group

UN welcomes effort

Mr. Solarz, a vice chairman of the group, says the crisis in Rwanda, for instance, might have been contained had the UN agreed to an early proposal by UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali to send a multinational force. "If [the force] had been dispatched at that point, the UN could have saved thousands of lives," Solarz says. "We intend to be there to legitimize and give international respectability to future UN proposals."

The United Nations, says spokesman Fred Eckhard, welcomes ICG to the field of