



DAN DEAN/Staff photographer

This toy serves as an example of the types of toys that psychologists say may cause children to become more violent and "cooly aloof" to human suffering. Groups of parents opposed protested the sale of war toys prior to Christmas.

Toy store shelves throughout Oakland County are lined with so-called war toys that some parents oppose and many psychologists say may be harmful to children.

Experts say war toys incite kids' hostility

By Darrell Clem
staff writer

"Twas the day after Christmas, and all through the house came the loud noises of Rambo guns, Nintendo games, Batman videos, Chuck Norris weapons, G.I. Joe tanks and other war toys.
So much for peace on Earth.
It's time to bomb Libya, invade Grenada, capture General Noriega, kill some Sandinistas and rid the world of communism forever.
No time for pacifists on this post-Christmas battlefield that is America's living room.
Go for the enemy. Win one for the Gipper.
Miami! Destroy! Kill!
But, wait. Cease fire.
What's all this talk about war toys inciting violence, glorifying brutality and promoting conflict?
Is there any truth to what these protesters say when they march on toy stores, waving placards, chanting peace slogans and warning parents not to buy these so-called war toys?

Did parents make a mistake when they bought all those militaristic toys for Christmas?
WAR TOYS tend to increase hostilities and violent tendencies in children, said Oakland County psychologists surveyed.
"Personally, I think war game toys should be banned," said Farmington Hills psychologist Ron Rice. Rice cited toy guns as an example of war toys that he considers inappropriate for children. Some children playing with toy guns have been killed by police who mistook the toys for real guns, he said.
"There are wonderful, more creative, fulfilling toys besides the use of toy guns and the symbols they represent," Rice said.
THERE IS "very solid evidence" that war toys are "injurious," West Bloomfield psychologist Morris Davidson said.
Children are more hostile — and for longer periods of time — after they play with war toys, he said.
"There's no question about it," said Davidson, the

spokesman for Metro Detroit Psychologists for Social Responsibility. "The increase in violence is remarkable if children play with war toys."
Nintendo has led the pack of other similar video-based games, such as Atari's "View to a Kill," which pits players against terrorists, Davidson said.
"WAR TOYS glorify warfare and advocate violence for the sake of violence," he said. "The whole idea of fighting and warfare not only becomes real — but accepted. It's pretty horrible."
Though "the games themselves aren't dangerous," the effects on children are, Davidson said.
Perhaps the worst effect of war toys is that, like violent movies, they trivialize death and can cause children to be "coldly aloof" to human suffering, West Bloomfield psychologist Harold Mathis said.
"American mythology is tied to the gunslinger, the Lone Ranger and the detective," Mathis said. "Guns represent power and a defense against criminals."
"War toys are not helpful in developing a kind of humanistic or friendly kind of outlook toward other

people," he said. "But the suppression of war toys is going to do little good, because it's like the forbidden fruit phenomenon. If you suppress war toys, the demand goes up."
Moreover, attacking war toys will do little to stop widespread violence because "it's kind of like trying to stop drunken driving by barring eggnog," Mathis said.
MANY CHILDREN get the idea from television "that only the Charles Bronson macho man is of value," Troy psychologist Coy Denton Sims said.
When children act out fantasies with toy guns, he said, "they are comparing themselves to the violent, shoot-'em-up image they see on television."
If they fall in real life to measure up to the fantasy, they may suffer low self-esteem, Sims said.
For parents who don't mind letting their children play with war toys, Sims offered advice: Be very selective, and give children instructions on how to use the toys.
"Parents have to tell their children that these are only toys and should be used as such," Sims said.

School kids display Christmas generosity

By Tim Smith
staff writer

Generosity came in many forms this holiday season, as far as students of Southfield Public Schools were concerned.
They gave in the usual ways, donating/collecting 18,000 cans of food for the Southfield Goodfellows, with Levey Middle School leading the way with 4,279 of them. The cans were recently picked up by the city firefighters.
But candy cane reindeer? That's what Thompson Middle School student council put together for its Dec. 7 visit to the Mt. Vernon Nursing Home in Southfield, said Margaret Holcomb, one of three council advisers at the school.
"Every person at the nursing home got one," Holcomb said, noting that the students also brought companionship and musical performances to the home.
THE TWO-HOUR visit went so well that a February return, to celebrate Valentine's Day, is a possibility, Holcomb said.
Meanwhile, Thompson students participated in other holiday endeavors.
They gathered 400 food items and

Students were busy at Levey School where teacher Linda Peabody said an eight-day canned food drive netted 4,279 cans.

packed them into wicker baskets "as big as bushels," Holcomb said. They were distributed anonymously to Thompson families for Thanksgiving through the school counseling center.
Students and staff members also pitched in to collect 65 items of clothing, such as mittens, hats and gloves, for distribution by the Goodfellows.
A contest was held to spark interest in the effort. Holcomb said the group bringing in the most items could dress principal Michael Horn for a day.
"But the staff brought in more than the students, so all we've seen him in is a three-piece suit," Holcomb said, chuckling.
THEY WERE BUSY at Levey, as well, where teacher Linda Peabody

The Workbench Winter Sale

Court orders dogs destroyed

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Kohl said that a woman's cat was destroyed by two of the Rotweillers. She was also attacked although she was not injured, he said.
In another incident, two children were attacked by two of the dogs, Kohl said. The children's mother fended off the dogs using a hockey stick and the children weren't hurt.
Another woman testified that she had to stop baby-sitting a relative's child for fear of the dogs attacking him. Neighbors testified that the

situation was unbearable, Kohl said.
Jane Verbus, one of the Shah's neighbors, said last week she has mixed emotions about the situation.
She had not had any problem with the dogs herself, but she had heard her neighbors' complaints, she said. She didn't want to see the dogs hurt, but at the same time she said she felt that the neighborhood would be safer now.
"FORTUNATELY, MY children are grown and can take care of themselves," said Ben Lapin, another neighbor. "Something had to be done to protect the little kids."
Gerald Acker, the Shah's lawyer, said the family is suing the dogs' owner for the "pain, suffering and scarring" caused to the young child. He said she required between 25 and 50 stitches and that she will be scarred forever.
Psychologically, she is recovering, Acker said, but he said the experience was very traumatic.
Attempts to reach Griffin for comment were unsuccessful.

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