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## CHRISTMAS AND FREUD

*Yes, Virginia, but Santa is now a psychologist.*

By David Moller

A few weeks ago television served up an eerie little show about a talking doll which took a dislike to its owner's stepfather and murdered him. Things haven't quite reached that stage yet, but parents shopping for their children this Christmas may be forgiven for wondering. Like everything else in life, toys are getting more complicated all the time.

A doll, for instance, is no longer just "a child's puppet" (Webster) but a creature which walks, talks, kisses, wets its diapers, and Heaven knows what else. This year, following inexorable laws of evolution (survival of the fanciest) dolls are more talented than ever. Mattel, Inc., largest toy company in the United States, has brought forth Charmin' Chatty, a senior-high-school type with glasses (see cover) and a vocabulary of 216 phrases in seven different languages. And the Ideal Toy Corporation is offering a baby doll called Bibsy who bubbles up a flow of soapy, sloppy liquid from her mouth.

While some rivals in the trade feel that Marvin Glass, Bibsy's inventor, has pushed reality a bit too far, Glass stoutly defends his creation. "Bibsy is indicative of the new dynamic relationship between the doll and the child," he says. "As Bibsy dribbles, the child cleans up."

Mr. Glass's remark is a tip-off to one of the main reasons today's toys are more complicated and, generally, more expensive than ever before. These days nearly every toy company employs consulting psychologists, and most of these have decreed that, for maximum "personality-expansion value," there must be give-and-take between child and toy. A psychologically satisfactory doll can no longer just sit there. For example, the Shirley Temple doll that today's young mothers may have treasured "was not a good personality-development toy, for it did not give in return—it only took," says psychologist Louis Schlon, retained by inventor Glass. "Playing mother in a fantasy world, a child hugged and kissed Shirley, and Shirley did nothing but accept this affection. Back in reality, that child became Shirley and just accepted her mother's affection, returning nothing and learning nothing." Fortunately for the present generation of little girls, toymakers know better now. "The more animation a toy has," Doctor Schlon explains, "the better a child learns to interact with people."

Animation, therefore, is the key to many of today's toys. Backed up by their teams of psychologists, inventors have been having a field day dreaming up robots of fearsome ingenuity and mechanical animals which stick out their tongues, climb steps, waggle their noses

and squirt water—among other accomplishments. One inventor, whose retaliatory dinosaur spits plastic balls when shot in the tail with a rubber-tipped dart, proudly boasts that "the child can now be taught that if you hit something, it will fight back."

Not all toys, of course—not even all dolls—hit back, waggle their noses or drool. The greatest current successes in the doll business, in fact, are a pair of rival foot-high fashion dolls named Barbie and Tammy, who have figures like movie starlets but don't actually *do* anything. This is not to say that they lack psychological overtones. On the contrary, they are rich in "imagination-stimulus value"—every bit as important in its way as give-and-take. In developing Barbie, Mattel presumably never lost sight of the crucial fact that, while most teen-age girls have given up toys for boys, they have millions of younger sisters who are happy at least to start thinking ahead. Selling Barbie for three dollars and then appealing strongly to the child's collector instincts with a vast number of different outfits and accessories for different social occasions, Mattel has proved that girls in the 9-13 age group want a doll not to mother but as a means of looking ahead to the days of the pizza party, the football weekend and the Junior Prom.

In four years Barbie has accounted for 40 percent of Mattel's \$78 million share of the American toy industry's annual \$1.1 billion gross. Last fall Ideal challenged Barbie's supremacy with its own fashion doll, Tammy, and in the course of a year Tammy has acquired a car, a house, parents and a brother and sister, a hat case, a telephone, a little dog and 40 outfits. "Kissy, Bibsy, Betsy Wetsy and Thumbelina are all toys we are very proud of," says Abe Kent, vice president of Ideal, "but Tammy is the company's most important item."

With all the ramifications of fan clubs, monthly magazines and look-alike competitions, and with hundreds of licensees turning out such products as Tammy tea sets and Barbie petti-pants, the battle between the two dolls has now taken on the dimensions of a political campaign. Both firms have had to hire people to deal with the daily avalanches of correspondence containing such knotty questions as "Why doesn't Barbie have a parachuting outfit?" and "When will Tammy start dating?"

This last question threw the top executives at Ideal into a huddle lasting several days. Finally they announced that Tammy would not start dating, ever. Meanwhile, back at Mattel, the slightly

bustier Barbie has now got not only a boyfriend, Ken, but a girl friend, Midge—and, very likely, an eternal triangle into the bargain. (Mattel insists, however, that Barbie has no marital plans, despite the addition of a bridal-trousseau outfit.)

Dollmakers are not, of course, the only toy people who thank Heaven for little girls—or the only ones who stress psychology in designing their increasingly complicated wares. Since becoming president of the formerly boy-oriented A.C. Gilbert Company, for example, William L. Quinlan Jr. has also drawn a bead on this rich market. "Let's face it," he says, "a little girl's future problems are men, and she should be taught how to face and fight them."

Going straight to the heart of the problem, he concluded that the most useful and profitable thing for Gilbert to do was to "teach young girls the skills and crafts needed to be good mothers and housewives." To this end, the company has recently introduced My Mixer, which will teach youngsters the culinary rudiments—sample menus: Bunny's Secret Salad, Peachy Mousse and Lime Delight—and a miniature version of the Singer electric sewing machine. Louis Marx and Company, doubtless operating on the same philosophy, takes the trend to home crafts even further with its E.Z. Weaver loom, on which the industrious miss can fabricate hats, scarves and even rugs.

To qualify in what the experts call "psychological creative potentialities," these weapons for the battle of the sexes have clearly had to be considerably more complex than toys of yore. But psychology is not the only factor acting as a complicator of toys. A second major force is television. Obviously the kind of toy that lends itself best to promotion on the small screen is one that does something, the more spectacular the better. Mechanical monsters (which give a child "the chance to manipulate at least part of his environment") and military toys (for "working off aggressiveness") are particularly well suited to TV. Sometimes, however, toy retailers have found TV promotion to be a mixed blessing. "Things have got to the point," says one, "where the toy is no longer designed to please the kid but to look good on television."

Moreover, as parents have discovered, TV commercials have a way of making toys look altogether too spectacular. "For weeks," says one father, "our kid drove us crazy about a jet fighter he had seen on television. When we bought it for him, he didn't play with it for more than a day. Having seen it come in on a strafing run, with its machine guns blazing away,

on television, he was a little upset when he saw what it would really do. Actually the product was a good one, but it was promoted in such a way that the real thing could only be an anticlimax."

On the other hand, television has created a whole new world of toys derived from the shows the kids watch. The stores are full of Beanys, Cecils, Caspars and Flintstones, and shows like Ben Casey and Dr. Kildare have spawned a seemingly endless array of such licensed products as Ben Casey stethoscopes, medical kits, games and jigsaw puzzles. There is, however, a built-in hazard to TV-related toys, as many a retailer has found. "Television games," says Charles W. Veysey, president of the F.A.O. Schwarz toy stores, "last only as long as the show does. When I first joined Schwarz at the end of the Davy Crockett era, we had 2,200 coonskin hats left over, and they might still be sitting on our shelves today if Daniel Boone hadn't come along."

Movies seem to provide a somewhat harder breed of model. Shirley Temple dolls lasted far beyond the normal two-year popularity span. And Aurora Plastics Corporation has been doing very well with a line of ghoulish goods called Movie Monsters. With these kits, children can assemble realistic replicas of Frankenstein's Monster, the Mummy, the Wolf Man, Dracula, the Phantom of the Opera, the Creature From the Black Lagoon and other sinister refugees from the neighborhood theater and TV reruns.

Although it is well known that children enjoy a mild fright, these playthings might seem to be low in "personality expansion value." Before embarking on this bold new venture, however, Aurora went through months of tense consultations with batteries of experts to see if their fearsome statuettes would harm the child's impressionable psyche—or Aurora's public image. Once again the psychologists came to the rescue. "Rather than creating fear," they said, "the kids would reduce it, as the monster is actually assembled by the child himself."

Indeed it seems to have worked that way. Since August, 1962, Aurora has produced 3.5 million monster kits and has been deluged with fan mail. The letter which most touched Aurora's heart was from a mother in Newark, N.J. At one time, she wrote, her son was the victim of almost constant nightmares from seeing too many horror movies, but since constructing his own monster he has become a completely relaxed individual.

It just goes to show that there's a lot more to the toy business these days than you might think. THE END