

TV and violence: 'A modest relationship'

Several years ago a television drama, "The Domsday Flight," depicted a character who had placed a bomb on an airliner and then repeatedly phoned the airline giving hints about the placement of the bomb. Before the telecast ended, one airline had received a bomb threat. Within 24 hours four more threats were reported. By the end of the following week, during which the previous threats had been reported by news media, a total of eight bomb threats had been telephoned to airline offices—a figure twice that recorded for the entire month preceding the broadcast.

Yes, viewing televised violence can cause aggressive or antisocial behavior. Three years ago Sen. John O. Pastore (D-R.I.), chairman of the Senate Subcommittee on Communications, asked for definitive information on this question. The answer, not as clear-cut as Pastore might have liked, came this week in Washington from Surgeon General Jesse L. Steinfeld in the form of a report from the Surgeon General's Scientific Advisory Committee on Television and Social Behavior (SN: 9/18/71, p. 190).

The report notes that 96 percent of American homes have one or more television sets and that the average home set is on more than six hours a day. About eight violent episodes per hour are shown. This violence, the report states, can under some circumstances cause some persons to act aggressively. Impressionable young children who rely on television for much of their knowledge of the world are probably the most strongly affected—97 percent of children's cartoon shows contain acts of violence.

The 12 behavioral scientists who made up the committee came to their unanimous conclusions after a review of 23 research projects, a number of specially commissioned papers and a review of previously available data. Their cautiously worded report concludes that "the data, while not wholly consistent or conclusive, do indicate that a modest relationship exists between the viewing of violence and aggressive behavior." The report emphasizes that "the causal sequence is very likely applicable only to some children who are predisposed in this direction." Some of the preexisting factors the report mentions are socioeconomic status, age, sex, personality factors and family variables such as parental attitudes toward violence.

The cautious language of the report represents a compromise between the researchers who found that television can cause aggression or antisocial be-

havior and those who found no such connection. "Individuals with strong convictions on either side of the question about the effects of televised violence may not be satisfied," Steinfeld admits. But, he continues, "this report is not a whitewash of the television industry. For the first time there is scientific evidence that televised violence can cause aggression in some cases in some children. And I believe that the data in this report should provide the basis for intelligent action."

But Steinfeld would not say who should take action or what it should be. Members of the advisory committee would make no recommendations. When the Committee on Television and Social Behavior was formed, Robert Finch, then Secretary of Health, Edu-

cation and Welfare, requested that the committee confine itself to scientific evidence and make no policy recommendations.

Sen. Pastore does not agree. He sees the report as a major breakthrough, and the Senate Subcommittee on Communications will ask for policy recommendations. Nicholas Zapple of the Senator's staff said subcommittee hearings will be scheduled for March 21 (after the five volumes of research data become available). The Surgeon General, members of his advisory committee, the heads of the Federal Communications Commission, the Federal Trade Commission and the major television networks will all be called and asked what should be done in view of the findings. □

First breeder reactor: In Tennessee, by 1980



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Schlesinger with model of proposed demonstration breeder reactor plant.

A breeder reactor is a nuclear reactor that makes more fuel than it consumes. It uses plutonium as fuel, and as the plutonium fissions, it produces not only energy but also neutrons that can transmute nonfissionable material into more plutonium. Because of their fuel-making capability, breeder reactors are recommended by many scientists and technologists for use as power reactors instead of the currently used uranium reactors. High quality uranium is in short supply.

Last week the Chairman of the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission, James R. Schlesinger, announced that his agency had selected the owner-operator for a demonstration breeder-reactor plant to be built somewhere in eastern Tennessee. The winning offer, selected over several competitors, is a joint submission of the Commonwealth Edison Co. of Chicago and the Tennessee Valley Authority.

The new plant will cost about half a

billion dollars, and Schlesinger expects that it will be completed sometime before 1980, a date President Nixon had selected as a desirable goal for such a development. When completed the new plant will feed energy to the TVA grid. By 1985 Schlesinger expects that breeder reactors will have proved themselves competitive with other forms of power production, and that the electric industry will start building more.

Of the money for construction of the demonstration plant, the AEC will put up \$150 million as a direct Government subvention. It will also provide the initial fuel element. TVA's contribution will amount to about \$100 million. Schlesinger insists this is not Government money: "It will come from payments by [electrical] ratepayers in TVA's territory," he says. Private firms have pledged a total of \$240 million. These pledges are conditional on individual donors' approving the final plans.

Schlesinger denied that the recent