

one television set; 54 per cent of respondents left television sets on even when not viewing specific programs; most shared viewing with other home activities, e.g. 48 per cent commonly ate the evening meal with the television on; and the programs people reported viewing with full attention were news (34 per cent), current affairs (21 per cent), documentaries (19 per cent), movies (18 per cent) and serials (18 per cent)¹.

The theme of this issue also implies that 'social scientists, commentators, reformers' are perhaps the people who should take on the responsibility for defining what television should deliver to its audiences, or perhaps, what audiences should be demanding from television.

While the former ABT made the rules by determining standards through public inquiry processes, the new ABA is charged more with a mediating role. A key premise of the new Broadcasting Services Act is that broadcasters should take primary responsibility for their relationship with the larger Australian community rather than be proscribed in the first instance by a government body. This is to be achieved through industry codes of practice developed in consultation with the community and the ABA.

The only general exceptions to this are for Australian content and children's programs, for which mandatory standards still apply. These standards reflect the importance the Australian Parliament attaches to the welfare of children and to the reflection of Australian identity, char-

acter and cultural diversity on our television screens. Commercial television broadcasters must schedule a minimum annual quota of 390 hours of children's programs (130 hours for preschool and 260 hours for primary school age children). These programs are pre-classified by the ABA. Fifty percent of this quota must be new Australian made programs, including the equivalent of 16 hours of drama. The broader Australian content requirements include 50 per cent of programs broadcast between 6.00 a.m. and midnight to be Australian. The objective of the Australian content standard is to encourage programs which are identifiably Australian, recognise the diversity and cultural backgrounds represented in the Australian community, are developed for an Australian audience and are produced with Australian creative control.

In its mediating role, the new ABA is charged with undertaking research into community attitudes to programming issues, and to feed its findings into the development of broadcasters' codes of practice. Also, research is to be used to monitor the effectiveness of codes of practice. Under the new self-regulatory regime, broadcasters are encouraged to take heed of community attitudes on such things as the portrayal on television of sex, nudity, coarse language and violence. They must also accept and respond to complaints from the public about the broadcasting services they provide. While the ABA still has a role in the complaints process, the initial responsi-

bility to resolve complaints is with the broadcaster.

It is true that we in Australia believe television is deserving of our interest, but it is perhaps less important to us than it was only a decade ago. In conclusion, I quote from the introduction of *Living With Television*:

'Television's role in our lives and within our homes has been changing since it was introduced into Australia in 1956. Television began with sets as an expensive novelty, which increased the family status. Families with television enjoyed an increase in social activity which flowed from visits to television-owning families specifically for the sake of viewing. As it became more widespread in the sixties and seventies, television became a focal point for the family's typical evening activities. As we move through the nineties, the ubiquitous nature of television and its commonplace usage have led us to look at the way in which it is now being used. ... How people use television has important implications for understanding community attitudes to television content and for the formulation of industry and government policy.'²

1 L. Sheldon, K. Aisbett and N. Herd, *Living With Television*, ABA Monograph 2, Sydney, 1993, p.7

2 Ibid. p.5

(reprinted from *Media Asia: an Asian Mass Communications Quarterly*).



CONFERENCE REPORTS

NATIONAL FORUM ON THE PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN THE MEDIA

Notes on a forum organised by the National Working Party on the Portrayal of Women, National Maritime Museum, Sydney, 1 July 1993

The results of a recent study of gender balance in television news and current affairs and newspapers were presented by Working Party Chairperson, Anne Deveson, together with researcher Milton Hill of Media Insight. The study found

that women featured much less in news stories than did men and were least likely to be included as a main subject or as an expert, although the number of women media workers was increasing.

In her address to the forum, Senator Crowley, the Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Status of Women, discussed the implication of these findings, in the context of women's role as the prime focus for advertising expenditure. She suggested it was in the commercial interest of advertisers and the media to improve the portrayal of women.

The main purpose of the forum was to explore responses to this research by those involved with the media. ABA Chairman Brian Johns joined panellists from commercial television, ABC radio and television and the press to discuss progress made in meeting women's portrayal needs, and strategies for the future. Mr Johns emphasised the importance of consultation between commercial broadcasters and relevant interest groups to progress the issue in response to community expectations about the portrayal of women. The

Federation of Australian Radio Broadcasters (FARB) presented their guidelines on portrayal of women to the forum. The guidelines are to assist commercial radio broadcasters in understanding and meeting their relevant code of practice. In finalising their codes of practice for commercial television, the Federation of Australian Commercial Television Stations (FACTS) undertook to further consult on the issue to develop similar advisory notes for their members.

PORTRAYAL OF CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND MEDIA SELF-REGULATION

Notes from a round-table conference organised by the Communications Law Centre and the Office of Multicultural Affairs, Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, 31 May 1993.

There is scope for improvement in the level and nature of representation of Australia's cultural diversity in the media. That was the starting point of this conference, which featured the launch of two recent research reports by Senator Bolkus, the Minister assisting the Prime Minister on Multi-cultural Affairs and the Minister for Immigration. The first report, *Multicultural Australia in the Media*, is a content analysis of the media's coverage of multicultural and ethnic issues in print, television and radio, conducted by Dr Phillip Bell. The second is a report of extensive qualitative research conducted with groups of ethnic Australians which explored the 'effects that media representations have on individual and group understandings of wider social relations'.

Some of the research findings were disputed by representatives of the broadcasting, advertising and production industries. But there was general agreement amongst conference participants that mainstream media had been slow in responding to the expectations of members of Australia's many minority cultures who see the media as reflecting the white, dominant, Anglo-Australian ethos. For many years Aboriginal and Islander Australians and Australians from non-English speaking backgrounds have criticised newspapers, radio and television for not catering to their needs or realistically reflecting the multi-cultural nature

of Australian society.

With the move to a less regulatory regime for broadcasting, the conference explored ways of addressing these issues in the new environment, including employment and casting practices, scripting, news coverage, and education and awareness raising programs.

ABA Deputy Chairman, Peter Webb, talked about the possibilities for more diverse services as an outcome of the planning process currently being undertaken by the Authority. He also saw the ABA's consideration of the Australian content standard for television as an opportunity for examining the issue of multi-culturalism. Staff member Lesley Osborne joined representatives of the ABC, SBS, FACTS, FARB and the Media Council for a panel discussion of possible future strategies. While the industry has the role to develop codes which may cover the portrayal of cultural diversity, the ABA has a role in encouraging consultation between the industry and the community, and monitoring developments in this area, particularly as they relate to the objects of the Act.

DIVERGENCE, NOT CONVERGENCE?

Notes from the 1993 Australian Communication Association National Conference, Communication and Identity: Local, Regional, Global, Victoria University of Technology, Melbourne, 7 - 9 July 1993.

'Divergence is not some random or unfortunate occurrence, but a necessary part of technological change.'

Professor James Carey of Columbia University addressed the opening plenary session at the ACA's 1993 conference in Melbourne last month. Contrary to prevailing analyses, technological developments in global communications had not produced convergence but divergence, he said.

Professor Carey's address dealt with the impact of mass media on systems of communication and culture. Tracing the social impact of technologies from early telegraphy, through mass dissemination of magazines to the death of the network era in American television, he heralded an era of global interconnection but cultural fragmentation.

More than 120 people presented pa-

pers in plenaries and parallel sessions over the three days of the conference, across a diverse range of specialised topics.

Officers of the ABA delivered papers drawn from the ABA's research program.

Linda Sheldon's paper *Living With Television - Is it really a toaster with pictures?* presented the results of research exploring the different ways people use television. This research was the subject of the recently published ABA Monograph 2.

Slimey or spooky? Kids and classification issues, presented by Milica Loncar and Linda Sheldon, reported on the qualitative stage of research in progress into children's attitudes and opinions to television classification issues such as violence, swearing, kissing and nudity.

Ramsay Street or Melrose Place? Views on Australian identity in television programming, presented by Barry Melville and Nick Herd, reported on research into the attitudes of television viewers to Australian made television programs. This research was conducted in 1992 and the results will soon be published as part of the ABA's new *Trends and Issues* series.

CENSORSHIP ISSUES: LAW, TECHNOLOGY AND EFFECTS CONFERENCE

Censorship Issues: Law, Technology and Effects Conference, Brisbane, 27 - 28 May 1993.

This conference was jointly organised by Griffith University and Queensland University of Technology and focussed on the policy, regulatory and social issues relating to the censorship of sexual and violent program material in the audio-visual and print media.

The conference speakers were drawn from all sides of the current debate on this issue and included Beatrice Faust, author of *Apprenticeship in Liberty: Sex, Feminism and Sociology*; Richard Dent, Project Family Coordinator; Senator Margaret Reynolds, Chairperson, Senate Select Committee on Community Standards; Richard Walsh, Managing Director and Publisher, Australian Consolidated Press; and, Max Walters, Company Secretary, Brisbane Television Ltd.

The impact of new technology

emerged as a major theme of the conference, with general acknowledgment that current developments in state-of-the-art video games, virtual reality and the increasing capacity for contentious material to originate from outside Australia all posing complex problems for policy makers and regulators.

THE POST COLONIAL FORMATIONS CONFERENCE

Post Colonial Formations Conference, organised by the Institute for Cultural Policy Studies, Griffith University, Brisbane, 6-10 July 1993.

The conference was intended 'as a forum for discussing the relations be-

tween culture, policy and nation formation in post-colonial societies.' Post-colonialism was defined at the conference as, 'not a stage which has been reached, but a process which seeks to produce a knowledge of a state still in operation.'

Papers were presented by academics from Australia, Canada and New Zealand. Issues discussed related to cultural policies for Government and cultural institutions, (with some emphasis on broadcasting and communications), and were presented from multicultural, feminist and indigenous peoples' points of view. More than a hundred and fifteen papers were presented over the four day period. In the sessions relating to Broadcasting and

Communications, speakers and topics included: Roy Shuker (NZ) - Cultural quotas for Kiwis: the television content and radio quota debates in New Zealand; Dr Liz Jacka and Stuart Cunningham (Aust) - Contra flow in television drama; Thomas Wilson (Canada) - Satellite television in the Canadian arctic: 1974 - 1992. Cultural replacement and regeneration; Michael Meadows (Aust) - Indigenous media responses to racism; Hart Cohen and Gerry Bostock - Anti-racist projects and media production pedagogy: a collaborative approach; and Helen Molnar - Indigenous Culture and media policy in Australia.



AN UPDATE ON TELEVISION VIOLENCE

**(INCLUDING NOTES FROM THE INTERNATIONAL COLLOQUIUM ON TELEVISION VIOLENCE, MONTREAL)
BY DEBRA RICHARDS, DIRECTOR, PROGRAMS, ABA**

The issue of television violence has been making headlines in the US recently. The US Congress has called for the television industry to come up with self regulatory measures to curb the amount of violence on television.

On 30 June 1993, in a move which pre-empted any legislative action by Congress, the four major US networks (ABC, NBC, CBS and Fox Television) announced their agreement on a self-regulatory regime for the broadcast of violent programming. The Chairman of the Motion Picture Association of America, Jack Valenti, has been a prime mover in negotiating the proposed regime.

The networks have agreed on a two year test regime focused on parental advisories or 'warnings'. These are to be used at the beginning of programs, during commercial breaks and in all promotional material. The use of parental warnings in promos is a new step for the US industry. To date, the cable industry is not party to the networks' agreement although Ted Turner has endorsed the proposal and has said his stations will comply. Congress hopes this move by the networks will see a new era in 'parental empowerment' which will be

enhanced through technological developments.

These public moves in the US have come close on the heels of recent moves in Canada to try and cope with the increasing concern over television violence and children's programming.

INTERNATIONAL COLLOQUIUM

The first International Colloquium on Television Violence, sponsored by the Canadian government and its Department of Communications, was a one day seminar held in Montreal on 29 April 1993. Its aim was to hear from other countries on measures taken to address concerns about television violence.

The concern in Canada was highlighted late last year when 13 year old Virginie Lariviere presented a petition to the Prime Minister of Canada, urging action on television violence. The petition contained 1.3 million signatures. This initiative provided the impetus for a number of efforts on the part of the Canadian broadcast industry, government and the public.

ORGANISING COMMITTEE

In response to this growing concern

about television violence, the Canadian Minister for Communications, Perrin Beatty, formed an Organising Committee of the National Action Group. This comprised members of the broadcasting, distribution, advertising and production industries, the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) and the Department of Communications. The Committee has a number of priorities, including the development of uniform industry codes and a classification system for broadcasting to assist parents in determining the appropriateness of programming for their families.

In researching the measures taken by other countries, the Canadian government saw the benefit in gaining some insight into the international experiences of developing codes of practice, classification systems and viewer warning measures.

To this end a group of international participants met with Canadian broadcasters, cable operators, advertisers, producers and distributors in a public forum to talk about the development of such systems in their own countries. The day's seminar was broadcast live on the local cable station and the lively debate was facilitated by the Chair of the Organising