

New papers from the CLC

Papers from two recent events hosted by the Communications Law Centre will be available from the centre in Sydney next month.

"Connecting the Country": jointly organised in Albury-Wodonga in

September 1998 by the Communications Law Centre and the National Farmers Federation.

Further details will be placed on the centre's website (www.comslaw.org.au) or telephone (02) 9663 0551.

"Tendering the Universal Service Obligation": a copy of the report is available for \$25 by contacting Stephen McElhinney at the Communications Law Centre on (02) 9663 0551, or by email smcelhinney@comslaw.org.au <<

From The Archives

How people view violence

Viewers' reactions to on-screen violence appears to be directly related to whether they perceive it as *real* or fictional. This is a key preliminary finding of an Australian Broadcasting Tribunal survey of public perceptions of television violence being conducted in conjunction with the current inquiry into violence on television.

During the qualitative research each group began with general discussion about television followed by the screening of a video compilation containing segments of news, movies, drama series, comedy and cartoons. Reactions were obtained immediately after screening.

Researchers found that they were dealing with a complex area: initial reactions were that violence was not a serious problem but when they delved

deeper, subtle underlying perceptions became apparent. They found a phenomenon described as the "fact/fantasy dimension" in which the classification of violence and its impact were determined largely by the perceived realism of its portrayal. Despite a substantial degree of violence in the cartoon segment and a clip from The Three Stooges, for example, these were accepted as fantasy. As a corollary to this, an extremely realistic and violent rape scene from a Hitchcock movie attracted less criticism when people were told that it was a fake.

Viewers make distinctions about violence on the basis of content... There appears to be an acceptance of violence as part of life. The reporting of news presents a dilemma because while graphic news footage may be upsetting it is part of life and should not be "played down" excessively. But there was a

feeling that sensationalism was a key factor in news reporting and that the media should exercise restraint... Not surprisingly, the group discussions showed that people had little awareness of what were the mechanisms in existence to regulate television. Among adults, the responsibility for "regulating" viewing was seen to be their own; this was not the case where children were concerned.

Meanwhile the Tribunal has monitored evening news programs on the three networks when major disasters such as plane crashes and violent crimes have occurred, and has also monitored selected entertainment and news programs. These will form a discussion base for proposed background briefings on professional practice. <<

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