THE FEMININE CULTURE OF THE TELEPHONE. PEOPLE, PATTERNS AND POLICY*

Ann Moyal**

Few detailed studies have been made in any country of telephone usage. This paper reports a qualitative national study of 200 women, metropolitan and country, which embraces women of diverse conditions and ages across Australia. It presents evidence of a deeply entrenched, caring, feminine culture of the telephone which underlies our family, community, and national development. Importantly, it conveys the voices and attitudes of women to a communication technology which, locally and internationally, is undergoing policy change. At a time when a 'new telecommunications framework' is being considered in Australia, the data challenge traditional 'malestream' conceptions of telephone usage and telecommunications policy, and focus the point that women and men make significantly different use of, and have very different access to, decision-making about technology.

Keywords: Telephone, women, telecommunications policy, technology, gender

Senator Evans' departing Statement as Minister for Transport and Communications on a new framework for Australian telecommunications last year[1] set the stage for an important new phase in our development. It signalled an altered regulatory relationship between government and the Australian telecommunication carriers (mediated by the independent regulator, AUSTEL); recognition of a 'new telecommunications environment' in which the traditional telephone voice service has been overtaken by integrated computer and communications technologies; and a commitment to assisting the Australian telecommunications industry to respond competitively to changing global, technological, and market imperatives. At the same time, amid the technological push and commercial pull, the Government has underlined the national commitment, rooted at Federation,[2] to ensure Australians universal access to standard telephone service, equitably and 'at afford-

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able prices', and to enshrine the concept of that newest acronym in telecommunications — 'CSO' (community service obligations) — as a prime prong of telecommunications policy. "These new national policy objectives for telecommunications," the Summary Statement affirmed, "have been developed after full consideration of the increasing economic importance of efficient services, the linkage between telecommunications and the growing information industry sector, and the importance of achieving structural adjustment. At the same time the Government recognises its continuing responsibility to ensure that appropriate equity in the provision of essential telecommunications services is maintained."[3]

This said, the Government has determined that Telecom Australia will be required to obtain Ministerial approval for its plans to meet its community service obligations, that these and associated levels of costs and cross-subsidy will be set down in Telecom's corporate plan, and that an analysis of costs and cross-subsidies — hitherto a remarkably muddy area[4] — be provided by the Bureau of Transport and Communications Economics as a baseline of information for Telecom to meet these social obligations.

Despite this clear avowal of the importance of community service obligations (which the new Australian Telecommunications Authority, AUSTEL, will overview), it is difficult to escape the strong thrust of economic rationalism that pervades the Statement or to ignore the implication, as Reinecke sums up, that "the report's authors appear to believe that its explication is best left to economists."[5]

This study has, hence, been prompted in part by a perception that, as Australian telecommunications organizational change and deregulatory measures are being framed, important social data should be added to the equation. Significantly, to date, no systematic examination has been made by either carriers or scholars of telephone use in Australia.[6] Broad international generalizations, and a few case specific studies, can be found.[7] But while a flow of books and papers both at home and abroad examine broadcasting, television, video, cable, satellite communication, the information society, and the organization and politicization of telecommunications, that ubiquitous, taken-for-granted medium for two-way human communication, the telephone, remains largely invisible to scholars despite its central, and far-reaching influence on our daily lives. "While extensively used," comments Noble, "the telephone has been all but conceptually ignored."[8] This omission is the more critical in the light of major changes that have overtaken society in the past two decades. Rising divorce rates, single parenthood, disturbance of the nuclear family, the ageing of our population, the impact of feminism, problems of public transport, migration, youth unemployment, the diversification of home work sites, mature age re-entry into education, the impact of rural crisis, the development of the Northern Territory and the Aboriginal outstation movements, all have combined to change many of the old contours of Australian society and to pose questions about our social systems of communication.

In addition, then, to the well canvassed pressures from business and industry for telecommunications deregulation, more competitive tariffs, and the principle of 'user pays'[9], we need to know how the Australian people *use* the telephone; how historical conditioning has influenced our telephone use, and what input may be made from the Australian community to the critical debate of reframing a national telecommunications policy. "Society," wrote a founder of the computer society, Norbert Wiener, "can only be understood through a study of the messages and communications facilities which belong to it."[10] This survey represents one piece of the evidence. It focuses on an important component of telephone users, Australian women. As such it is the first survey of women's telephone use to be conducted in Australia and the first such national survey to be made in any country. It is presented in the hope that its findings may offer useful insights to Australian, and other national policy-makers, regulators, carriers and administrators, and provide pertinent data for sociologists, social policy, communication, gender and other disciplinary scholars and researchers.

RESEARCH STRATEGY

The concept for the study arose early in 1988 when Telecom's projection of the introduction of timed local calls (TLCs) raised a highly critical response in the Australian community. From a background of telecommunications research, I initiated a pilot study of older women and the telephone conducted by questionnaire in four States on attitudes to, and usage of, the telephone. The questionnaire drew a distinction between (a) 'instrumental' and (b) 'intrinsic' calls, calls made (a) for making appointments, shopping, seeking information, timetables, entertainments, making business arrangements, dealing with emergencies, accidents, household crises and (b) personal communication with relatives, friends, volunteer work, counselling, and initmate discussion and exchange.[11] The data returned from 50 respondents (aged 55 and over) was striking in its conformity. It revealed that the women in this sample made from 4-6 instrumental telephone calls per week lasting 2-6 minutes, and some 28-40 intrinsic telephone calls (extending across day and evening) to relatives, children, grandchildren, inlaws and friends, occupying from 10-15 minutes, quite often 20-25 minutes and, at times, from 45 minutes to one hour; that the telephone played a key, and continuing, role in building kin and friend relationships; fortified a sense of security and self-worth; created a 'psychological neighbourhood' that substituted for face-to-face contact, and that the familiar, 'invisible', telephone had assumed a distinctive significance for older Australian women as an essential part of their culture and as a central factor in the conduct of their lives.

The pilot study led to an approach to Telecom to commission a national study of women's telephone usage that would embrace women

of all ages from teenagers to nonogenarians; women at home and in the workforce; single, married, divorced and widowed women; single mothers; the aged; students and unemployed women; migrants; Aborigines; urban, rural and remote region women, and women without access to a private telephone — 'the telephone poor'. The survey, directed at respondents in metropolitan and country sites in all States, was launched in July 1988.[12] 200 women were included in the survey (exclusive of the original pilot group). Since the object of the survey was to gather the experience, attitudes, and voices of women, the method selected was qualitative rather than quantitative, and based on a 40 question questionnaire distributed in person to respondents followed by in-depth interviews. The research design took as its model the ethnographic, 'deep slice' methodology mounted by anthropologist, Diane Bell, in her Bicentennial study, *Generations. Grandmothers, Mothers and Daughters.*[13] Bell's study derived from in-depth interviewing by herself and a team of ten research assistants of one hundred women across the nation and focused on the material and emotional culture of Australian women. Her aim was to retrieve direct and reflective material on the 'enduring dynamic culture' of Australian women and to discern how women construct and transmit a 'sense of self' in a rapidly changing world. She saw a pertinent extension of her methodology in a study of the feminine culture of the telephone, and several of her research assistants were co-opted for the study.

The research strategy for a qualitative study of how women of a wide spectrum of life experience, location, age, and education, use the telephone was based on the involvement of fifteen research assistants scattered across Australia, themselves recruited from different backgrounds, professional and personal experience, and with access to different aspects of Australian society. Each assistant was equipped with the research protocol and questionnaire and required to provide 7-10 respondents of different ages from their network of contacts, and to record, tape, transcribe interviews and present written reports. Questions covered demographic data, occupation, living situation, telephone use (including local, STD and international), its instrumental or intrinsic character, timing and duration, last call, the respondent's network of contacts, her access to transport, volunteer work, hobbies and interests, attitudes to the telephone both positive and negative, views on charging (including timed local calls, STD, zonal and community access charging), historical conditioning, and, where relevant, responses to public phone use. Respondents were issued with time sheets and asked to monitor a week's incoming and outgoing calls. Importantly, privacy and confidentiality was assured and strictly protected by the uniform use of a pseudonym or first name. A further series of interviews, with additional questions to cover aspects of 'acculturation' were conducted by multilingual interviewers to bring a sample of Greek, Lebanese, Italian, Vietnamese, Polish and Spanish women within the survey. As chief investigator, I conducted interviews with surburban, rural and

remote area women and some Aboriginal women, and classified and analysed the collected data. Significantly, in a survey of telephone personal use, the telephone itself served as a most valuable instrument in gathering direct and detailed information, in recruiting very isolated women, and in ensuring a representative geographical and demographic diversity.

No methodology is free from problems. Some researchers drew richer material; some tended, for efficiency, to compress and stereotype some attitudinal responses; one half of the respondents failed to complete the weekly time sheet of calls on the grounds that, because of the atypicality of the 'check week', they preferred to furnish an 'observed average' of their weekly pattern of calls.[14] The sample does not claim to cover 'everywoman'. With a female population of just over 8 million in Australia, such expectation would be unreal, and no attempt was made to look for occupational or social categories. It is, nonetheless, indicative of the validity of the survey approach that it closely reflected the Australian demographic profile. While 200 was selected as an acceptable national sample (and almost *de rigeur* in Bicentennial year), respondent inputs on attitudes and telephone usage reached a degree of repetition before data collection was complete. Even so, the women ran the gamut from straightforward, pragmatic countrywomen, migrants of complex — and restricted — experience, Aborigines in the Centre and in academic employment, home-based mothers of wide diversity, women working in an 'electronic cottage' situation, through students, teenagers, sporty and intellectual women, the 'aged', through primary, secondary, tertiary and postgraduate education, and on to high profile women in the workforce. Their frank participation, reflective viewpoints, and a sense that their evidence was of interest and relevance, yielded data that a statistically larger, but impersonal, quantitative methodology would not retrieve.

Demographically, the sample of 134 women from capital cities, and 66 from rural areas and country towns,[15] corresponded with Telecom's regional partition of customer responsibilities into 67 per cent 'Metropolitan', and 33 per cent 'Country'. Age distribution of respondents conformed broadly with national percentages. There were 10 women aged 15-19; 70 aged 20-39; 52 aged 40-54; 32 aged 55-64; 24 aged 65-74, and 12 over 75.[16] One in every five Australians is a migrant and 47 migrants featured in the survey, a representation of 22 per cent. 15 respondents were interviewed belonging to the category 'without private phones'. There are recognizable gaps: the sample, for example, produced no women from remote mining towns or from distant defence service locations, both areas that offer a fruitful scene for further research. While the study, however, does not purport to assert 'universality' of experience, it has cut a swathe through a diverse spectrum of Australia's female population — the 50.07 per cent that make up half of Telecom Australia's constituency.

SURVEY FINDINGS

Usage

The survey threw into strong relief feminine patterns of telephone calling.

A demarcation was drawn between 'instrumental' (appointment and arrangement making, purchasing or information seeking) and 'intrinsic' (personal exchange and communication) calls, though the point was made by several respondents that instrumental calls — relating to making arrangements for children's outings, volunteer acitivites, or in pursuit of information — could lead to friendship and intrinsic communication. Consistent with evidence from sources overseas, the great proportion of telephone calling pertained to local calls. Women surveyed in all States made, on average, from 2-6 local instrumental calls per week, with the exception of women who work at home and use the telephone for work-related or business matters, home-based women temporarily involved in renovation, health crises involving children, or irregular charity commitments, and phone-dependent physically disadvantaged women.[17] In the latter category (6 in the sample), instrumental calls could rise to 10-12 per week.

Instrumental calls were made across the day (tending only to emergency calls at night) and occupied from 1-3 minutes (a uniform 2 minutes was most frequently cited), except when the call involved Commonwealth or State government departments and utilities where the now broadly established 'queueing mechanism' for handling callers pushed the telephone call up to 10, 15 or 20 minutes and elicited widespread and trenchant criticism from respondents.

Evidence on women's personal instrumental use of the telephone in Australia thus suggested that users conducted these calls with despatch; that, in this context, the telephone was a valued substitute for personal contact — many used the telephone 'to let their fingers do the walking' (paying bills, enquiring about potential purchases, seeking quotes) — but that the concept of teleshopping had not taken root among the sample (young, middle-aged and even older women like to get out to do their shopping),[18] and that the telephone was used rather as a constructive aid for the efficient, time-saving, control and handling of their personal concerns. Migrant women tended to contribute to the top range of instrumental calls (often using language-skilled kin to make the transaction) for the purpose of obtaining information from government departments and ethnic agencies and organizations to help them in the process of acculturation.

The respondents' pattern was very different for intrinsic calls. A high proportion of calls made were local calls though rural women showed a concentration of STD (trunk) intrinsic calls, while findings revealed a rising trend in STD intrinsic calling as the geographical spread of adult children to other States and cities, exposed a marked mobility among Australian families. In summary terms, women in the sample made from 14-42 personal communication calls per week, the average settling around 20-28. A small contingent — young mothers living close to parents and kin, women of British origin, and a small number of women over 75 — contributed to the low end of the user curve, while the highest number — from 25-48 each week — attached to women who worked at home,

some older women aged 65-75, and women from different ethnic groups. Women without access to a private telephone — 15 in the sample dispersed in Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, Wollongong, Albury-Wodonga (NSW), in rural Queensland and South Australia — made a comparatively low number (5-18) of intrinsic calls, while some rural, and Aboriginal women, registered high intrinsic calling rates of 25-35-41-45 calls a week.[19]

Significant evidence related to the duration of intrinsic calls. Only 38 (19 per cent) of the 200 women attested that their intrinsic calls occupied less than 5 minutes; 20 per cent (40 respondents) averaged these calls at from 10-15 minutes, and the remaining 61 per cent of the sample affirmed that their intrinsic calls commonly centred around 15-20 minutes, not infrequently reaching 30-45 minutes, and, on occasion, extended over an hour. Intrinsic calls were made by the sample from 7 a.m. across the day, commonly 9 a.m. to midmorning (after husbands had departed for work), at lunchtime, notably from 5-7 p.m., and in the evening. The aged (over 75) and the physically disadvantaged tended to make intrinsic calls at all times of the day and early evening. Other patterns emerged. Women in the full-time workforce — 40 — concentrated their calling after 6 p.m., occasionally early morning and at weekends, although almost half the sample, also had access for personal calling to a work phone. Teenagers specialized in late afternoon and evening calls, while women 'home-workers' made their intrinsic calls at lunchtime, from 5-7 p.m., and in the evening, developing a pattern of structured personal communication to break up the isolation of their working day. Rural women scattered their local intrinsic calls across the day but concentrated personal STD calling to coincide with cheaper evening and Sunday calling rates. The geographical location of respondents produced some minor differences. Queensland women appeared to use the telephone for some local intrinsic contact before 7 a.m.; Northern Territory and Western Australian women, experiencing significant time differences with southern and eastern States, were often unable to take advantage of the after 10 p.m. cheaper STD calling rate, to reach relatives in other towns and cities.

The sample's evidence on intrinsic calls, thus, clearly confirmed that while the number of weekly calls made by individual women was not large, their duration rarely fell within the time span characterized by telecommunications carriers as 'average' local calls.[20] Moreover, the call's duration, and the sense of unpressured communication it contained, was perceived as a key component of the purpose and satisfaction of the call. The viewpoint was endorsed by 192 members of the sample, an attitude unaffected by the education, occupation or age of the respondent.[21]

Women's Telephone Networks

In his broad and critical overview of *The Sociology of the Telephone,* republished in 1986, American sociologist, Sidney Aronson, pertinently observes that "that which we take for granted usually needs to be most

closely examined." The questions concerning telephone use yet to be answered, he sums up, are, in brief, "who talks to whom, for how long, and for what reasons and with what results."

The evidence from this survey suggests that Australians are a deeply familial people and enjoy a society in which ongoing telephone communication between female family members (both geographically proximate and remote) constitutes an important part of their support structure and contributes significantly to their sense of well-being, security, stability, and self-esteem. A total of 184 respondents confirmed that the prime importance of the telephone in their daily life related to 'sustaining family relationships' and to their contact with children, parents, and, to a less regular extent, with siblings, grandchildren and other members of the family. Conspicuously, 'kinkeeping' floods the lines. A singular proportion of these calls and time, is devoted to communication between mothers and daughters, who establish telephone contact daily or regularly throughout the week, and maintain an intimate and caring telephone relationship across their lives. The communication link appears at its most concentrated when the daughters have moved away from home, are in their childbearing/childrearing period, work in the same town or city, and live within an area of local call. Costs clearly govern the shorter duration calls between more geographically distant mothers and daughters (their regret at the constraint emerges in their replies), but the importance of the connection — regular, caring, and detailed in its content — was undiminished by geography.

Women's voices from the survey illustrate the gratification of the communication and the individual character of the response. A retired resident of a Queensland country town, attests: "Each night my daughter and I talk for half an hour by phone. We discuss the routine of the day, things we want to do when we meet. It helps my life entirely. It helps my daughter too. We get very depressed and lonely otherwise." A Melbourne woman, in her sixties rang her daughters and sisters frequently and, they in turn, kept in regular telephone touch with her. "Family contact is very important with one's children scattered and hard at work," she confirmed. "I need the phone for ongoing contact. My brother has a terminal illness and needs constant reassurance, as does my sister-in-law. Some days, with illness, I seem never to be off the phone." The mother emerged as "the nexus in the family of what's going on". "You offer a forum on the telephone," one said, "for listening to your children's problems." A younger Sydney woman, 33, defining the telephone as "crucial to the quality of my life," noted that she kept in constant touch with her mother and "in times of family crisis, Mum rings me constantly. The process of talking it out can go on for a long time, but it's vital to us and helps us work out the worry." Similarly, a mother in the Canberra workforce began each day, for a 4 month period, with a half hour phone call to a son who, devastated by marital breakdown, needed her call "to get him going". "It was the support he needed," she said, "just to speak to someone first thing in the morning."

Conversely, young mothers raising new babies and young children, made daily phone calls to their mothers and, at times, sisters to report on their child's progress, make baby-minding arrangements, and to gain confirmation and reassurance from the exchange. Two Victorian sisters interviewed, both young mothers, found that the daily phone call to each other "certainly helped with the baby." "To know that she is having the same problems with her baby, when I'm a new time mother," said one, "does help the self-esteem. We find it easier to talk more intimately about things over the phone particularly relating to the baby." A young Perth mother attached particular importance to telephone contact in the major change of circumstances which withdrawal from the workforce and solitary days at home with a baby implied. "My mother calls daily," she reported, "to enquire about my son. I'd used the telephone extensively at work, and it's very important as a connection to the outside world. Going from being at work where you are surrounded by people and activity to just being you and the baby at home without a car — you need these phone conversations to survive!" It was a reiterative theme. Distance raised problems, but the tenor of fortifying mother-daughter communication did not change. One older Canberra mother recounted that when her young married daughter moved to a city setting where other young wives were out at work, she would ring her with the plaintive cry, "Mum, I've put the egg-timer on, talk to me for 3 minutes!" Even when family members cohabit, interviews reveal how a 10-minute telephone call daily could break the isolation and bleakness experienced by a frail, elderly mother as the evidence of an 83-year old Greek respondent confirmed: "My daughter rings daily from work," she recorded, "for 10 minutes and sometimes more depending on her circumstance. Just the contact with my daughter's voice is a comfort to me and I look forward to her call as my loneliness grows."

The telephone relationship between grandmother and grandchild was also highlighted in the transcripts. Several older women recalled how grandchildren could command lengthy telephone calls, taking over a call to a parent with "Grandma I want to tell you something" and recounting a story that goes on for 45 minutes. Another emphasized the value of this kind of communication in a society where distance prevented frequent face-to-face contact with grandchildren and where a grandchild engaged in a close transgeneration relationship could enjoy ongoing, and uninterrupted converse with the grandmother. A Brisbane woman noted that "calls to and from her grandchildren in another suburb could last for 30 minutes and often longer. A great deal of my contact with my grandchildren is by phone. It is extremely important that they feel free to phone me often and hold these detailed conversations when they don't have to compete for my attention as they would if our contact was limited to face-to-face contact when other family members are present." An Albury grandmother recorded that her toddler grandchild "expects to speak to me on the phone at least every second day. The telephone is now an element in the lives of very small children." In Nambour,

Queensland, an Aboriginal grandmother who raised three grandchildren now at boarding school had the telephone connected for the first time when her grandchildren left for school. "I find the phone a wonderful thing," she summed up, "because it keeps me in contact with the 'children' all the time. They've travelled around a lot in their sport, one to every State in Australia. I get a big bill, but if they only say 'we're safe and enjoying ourselves and we've still got some money left', then I don't worry and it's worth it. I find this contraption a very handy thing!"

Clearly, the filial connection and its impetus to the process of ongoing discourse between women in the nuclear family feeds a major strand of telephone traffic in Australia. Contact breeds more contact, frequency gives continuity to the talk, and the very detail of the communication — a point stressed independently by many women — gave particular value to the calls. There were some negative images — the demanding mother who, when feeling lonely, "would not let her daughter off the phone", or the interfering mother who phoned to 'overadvise' on child care. But, in the sample of 200, the 'cons' came down to three. Significantly, the last call made registered by many respondents was 'to my daughter', or 'to Mum'.

Beyond the inner family, the second most important scene of telephone networking was between close women friends, an area of communication which, in both range and kind, has extended significantly in the past two decades. Not only do more women live alone, undergo marital break-up or separation, and assume responsibilities as single parents, but, in a period of rising feminist influence and ideas, they find increasing support and emotional and intellectual stimulus from women friends. In this, evidence from the sample appeared undifferentiated by education, social environment, or age. The sociological importance of confidants, girlfriends, and women's enduring friendships is well understood. What emerged conspicuously from this study was the high importance of the telephone in maintaining and enhancing these key feminine relationships. Most women interviewed gave their close friendship calls a high priority, 'top' for women without parents or children, and very important for married women of all ages, widows, the retired, elderly, those distant from relatives overseas, and those 'in relationships' with men. The exceptions in terms of volume of use were students or single women living in communal situations, a small cluster of married women in exclusively close relationships, and the telephone poor.

"Talking by phone to a close friend," said one young, home-bound Adelaide mother, "is a life-saver. When you're feeling lonely, these calls can transform your view." "My calls to close friends are the longest calls I make," a young Perth mother summed up for many women. "It's difficult to get to see them and I need frequent contact to exchange ideas about our kids and what we're all doing. After my last child's birth I was depressed and these phone calls helped me to get back to normal." Another Perth mother, married to a busy professional husband, maintained, "The telephone is very important to me because suburban

home life is lonely and the phone is a link with colour and variety and with people one loves. There's a need to communicate feeling and caring: the telephone is more personal than letters. What I want to know is how my friends 'feel' and I can hear this on the telephone."

Despite Noble's evidence to the contrary that instrinsic calls were in his study "used more for making arrangements and the organization of personal contacts in which feelings were expressed, rather than to unload one's heart through the telephone",[22] this survey's reiterative finding was that women talk more freely and intimately on the phone with close friends that they do face-to-face, that the telephone highlights warmth and sympathy in the voice, that (as one respondent put it) "you can convey 'I know you're worried' even if you don't say it", and that women can reach "greater depth in conversation on the telephone". An older postgraduate student, studying to re-enter the workforce, pinpointed a salient trend in society when she said, "When I was younger and in the workforce and sharing accommodation I was much more gregarious, and there was no great need to use the telephone as a lifeline. Now the telephone is the 'frontline' when it comes to giving or receiving news, good or bad. With friends, it's grabbed instantly and in all sorts of situations — in response to mail, another telephone call, about something I'm reading or heard on the radio, to air a grievance, share a success, seek support for an injustice or unlucky break, share news about health or holidays. It contributes to my sense of direction and participation, particularly if I need to discuss professional ideas I'm turning over." Another mature-age student confirmed, "With the phone it's instant gratification. If you are lucky, and if there's something preying on your mind, you can solve it speedily. The phone creates this psychological neighbourhood for women. Women are not doing all the same thing now, not all staying at home in the family, they're moving about and talking to people. Professional women working at home may not have anything in common with their immediate neighbours, but they've created a close-knit phone neighbourhood. It alleviates loneliness which is very important. My phone calls now are a lot deeper. I need people and I'm more attentive to the needs of my women friends. Feminism has made us not feel ashamed of being close to women; we encourage and support each other." "The telephone," reflected a young Aboriginal woman counsellor in a rural university, "that's what friendship is all about."

Women with secondary education brought other perspectives to this view. Older women with children scattered interstate, sometimes widowed, some retired, carried on regular telephone networking with their circle of close friends, at times making daily contacts in late afternoon or evening to enquire how each fared. Such networking was essential to women who have moved through their share of life crises, and, through telephone contact, they found, and gave, important mutual support and care. Many respondents testified to long call durations from "30 to 45 to 60 minutes or more" with friends who, for example, had been widowed and who found telephone discussion often the only accessible

communication for their grief. Women of all ages readily engaged in 'reflective listening' with friends in stress or personal need. Even women who avoided personal telephone initiatives appeared responsive in this listening art,[23] accepting long calls, often disruptive to their own programmes, from distressed or traumatically involved friends. A 41-year old Sydney woman identified the trend. "Friends telephone me with their troubles. My 'last call' was from a friend who was very depressed; it lasted 2 hours which is normal for such calls. People seem to be feeling more stress these days and need to talk without getting their kids out of bed to go and visit. The telephone relieves a lot of tension."

"Telephoning is a form of care-giving," Rakow concludes in her study of women and the telephone in Prospect, USA. "It is gendered work and gender work."[24] The point is amply illustrated by the experience of women across Australia. On interview evidence, women in country towns, cities and suburbs, engaged widely in the process of maintaining phone contact with elderly relatives, aunts, in-laws, extended family members, the father living alone, and with frail older friends or members of the community living alone or in nursing homes who were isolated or without family. Volunteer work also ranked high. In a 'nation of joiners', women's voluntary work ranged extensively from Brownie helper to aged care, from conservation to neighbourhood centres, disturbed and handicapped children, women's refuges and counselling, regional, local and national sport, rural groups and networks, church and school activities, to medical causes, Red Cross, palliative care, and ethnic community and cultural organizations. 23 per cent of women surveyed contributed to these activities. "The purpose of volunteer work," said a Darwin woman, "is to get the best out of our lives." But it also conferred a substantial contribution of time, saved costs, and personal effort on the nation. For volunteer workers, "the telephone," said one, "is the tool." For women from the ethnic communities, community volunteer work figured prominently. Language fluent members of these communities were heavily committed to assisting parents, relatives, and community members in their telephone affairs, and several gave time to community projects. One respondent noted that 50 per cent of her 48 intrinsic calls a week were linked with community assistance. While many friendships grew from volunteer involvement, this part of women's 'telephone care' remained a largely hidden and taken-for-granted activity. As one respondent affirmed, "If every volunteer totted up her telephone calls, the sum would amaze you. We're contributing this as well as our time and enterprise, and everything else as well."

Across the broad community, patterns of telephone contact, reflecting altered social conditions emerged. Children of divorced homes frequently took initiatives to sustain a close telephone relationship with a non-custodial parent. One 16-year old teenager, in her father's custody for several years, telephoned her mother after school daily for long sessions of talk. A single mother reported that her three children initiated regular calls to their 'non-supporting' father in an effort to arrange outings or

'merely to talk', and quite young children felt it their right to have telephone access to key adults.[25] The single mother's evidence added potent testimony on the telephone's parenting and supportive role. Single mothers were heavy telephone users, dependent on extended local calls with family and friends, commonly constrained by cost factors in STD use, and keen adapters of this communication form for difficult instrumental or other dealings with a former husband. One working single mother summed up the value of the telephone for this growing, and vulnerable, group in these terms: "Without this form of parenting check, to ring my daughter when she comes home from school, I would be unable to work. The telephone allows me to earn an income and sustain some social contact. As a single parent, there's little margin for the optional 'extras' of social life. It's an unrelenting lifestyle, and seldom of one's choice. What sustains me are lengthy late evening phone calls to a small nucleus of friends (often in the same boat). Without this lifeline I would very likely be a candidate for suicide or hospitalisation."

SPECIAL SECTORS: PATTERNS AND NEEDS

The foregoing outlines telephone networks and usage made by women, and the purposes and satisfactions such use imparts. The following looks at particular sectors of the feminine culture of the telephone in Australia that invite special notice for their variations and national relevance, and serve as pointers to future social and communication trends.

The Aged

There is no group in the Australian community to whom the telephone offers more effective functional communication or a sense of personal participation and well-being than the 'aged'. For the purposes of this survey, the classification is applied to women over 75. While the Australian Bureau of Statistics marks its categorization of 'aged' at 65[26], there was too great a commonality in the life and telephone patterns of the 24 members of the sample aged 65-74 and those 32 aged 55-64, to group women aged from 65 to 90 as a cohesive division in terms of telephone use or to identify a cohort of predominantly active, part-work/part-volunteer -involved women in the analysis of a long-living, but frailer, senior group. Accordingly, 12 respondents over 75 were allocated to the 'aged' subset, drawn from women living in cities and country towns, living alone, with family members, or in retirement villages, but not living in nursing homes or hostel accommodation. The interest and significance of the experience of this group, however, lies in the fact that women outlive their male contemporaries to a noted degree, and that the longevity of women and the 'greying' of Australia, poses serious questions for social planning and elderly care. "The growth in the numbers of older people", predict the authors of *Greying Australia: Future Impacts of Population*

Ageing, "is likely to be one of the greatest challenges facing Australia society over the next few decades."[27]

Yet, despite this, and the research lavished on the physical capacities, needs, environment, health and support arrangements for the aged, there is a dearth of literature on the telephone and the aged, and there has, to date, been no attempt in Australia, or elsewhere, to examine the importance of 'telephone relationships' in the aged's daily or weekly care. Data from this sample does not purport to map a territory but to point the seriousness of the research gap, and to focus the role of the telephone as a major agent in, and option for, the elderly's continuing independence and support.[28]

All the women interviewed in this subset gave first priority to the sense of security and safety the telephone conferred and its importance in providing instant connection for their well-being and health. Most kept the telephone beside the bed. Those respondents who lived alone (9 out of 12), conformed with the national sample in setting the greatest store by contact the telephone gave them to immediate members of their family, most frequently a daughter who kept in daily touch to find out about their health and needs, and to furnish the companionship of a 'chat'. One 83-year old South Australian woman, recently widowed, living alone and crippled with arthritis, was a significant example, being 'heavily telephone dependent', carrying a cordless phone everywhere and charging up the battery at night. For her, the telephone was 'a vital link', enabling her to remain in her own home and function independently. "If she needs to get something down from a top cupboard," said the transcript, "she telephones either her cleaning girl or one of the Support Care systems available. She made 6-7 calls a day, some 42 a week. Many calls were instrumental, banking, shopping, medical, chemists, since everything she does comes by the medium of the phone, and as she cannot use public transport or drive, 'the calls snowball'." Her daughter in Adelaide made telephone contact each night to help her mother over her mourning and loneliness.

In Perth, a widow of 86 living in a retirement village with daughters nearby made notably fewer phone calls (10-15 a week) but kept in regular touch with daughters to arrange meetings, and discuss her health and the activities of grandchildren and great grandchildren. To an 87-year old respondent living with a daughter in Sydney, the telephone had assumed great importance over the past five years when she was often unwell, could not use public transport easily, and did not wish to obtrude on her daughter's plans. As her intimate circle of friends shrank through death, she depended greatly on incoming calls to bring her connection with a wider world. "The telephone," she said, "is very important to me to maintain contact. I ring less often as so many old friends have gone, but my life is invigorated by the people who phone in." Similarly, a housebound migrant, 75, enfeebled by a stroke, made all her contacts by telephone in Greek while her daughter was at work, reducing loneliness and connecting herself, as she put it, to the 'multicultural Australian community'.

For the aged group, the telephone emerged as the human connector that brought encouragement and a feeling of adequacy and worth. The process flowed two ways. From Albury-Wodonga a 75-year old pensioner underscored the telephone and transport theme. "I would not be able to live without a phone," she said. "I don't drive a car. There is no transport on Saturday afternoon or Sunday, and you need a telephone to make appointments to work in with the bus. It's an hour and a half between buses!" Intrinsic family, and instrumental calls were very important to her, letter writing was no substitute ("It often takes a week"); and she left her intrinsic calls till evening "because then I'm lonely." As a recent widow she had been greatly helped by the telephone. "People have helped me in my bereavement, talking to me, and it's been wonderful. Now I find that I can help them." Reflecting on the changed nature of telephone use in her adult life, and on the importance of the communication we have now, she noted that while women used the phone in earlier decades "for family and friendship purposes, these calls were not the relaxed and long types of calls we are used to today." "We can't be a silent people," she concluded, "we must communicate."

Such evidence is significant. All respondents in this age group made their telephone calls across the day; most were not well-off, many calls were long (15-20-45 minutes to 1 hour) and it is clear that this set of women would especially forfeit much of the comfort and purpose of their calling if they were hemmed in, from any change in national charging policy, to specific, cheaper, local calling times. Evidence from this sample indicated that aged women's instrumental calls were essential to their autonomy and maintenance as their physical strength declined, while their intrinsic calls furnished psychological comfort and support and illustrated the value to the well-being and survival of elderly women of confidants and friends. "If interaction with friends is an important buffer against the threat that life change presents to self-esteem," wrote gerontologist Alice Day, "it is the widowed elderly woman, rather than the married, that has the most ready access to this resource."[29]

Despite the small sample size of the subset, its sociological findings should be stressed.[30] In an ageing community, with women at its forward edge,[31] any resource that can increase the number of non-institutionalised elderly and reduce their occupation of nursing home, hospital and special accomodation offers positive social gain. The role of the telephone as a coping mechanism, a 'lifeline', support system and companion to the community's 'aged', focuses this largely invisible, taken-for-granted technology as a resource that should be fully recognised in future planning for the aged. With the wide introduction to the homes of elderly people of cordless phones, Versatel phones with amplified, no hands commuication, and beeper systems to connect those living alone with medical help, the telephone stands as a major option for innovative public and private sector plan for elderly care.[32]

Migrant Women

A second sector that shows distinctive characteristics of telephone use is that of ethnic communities in Australia. The experience of migrant women's telephone use has received little attention in this country. Yet Australia is a nation of immigrants. One in five residents was born overseas, and 40 per cent of the population has parents born outside Australia. While Government policy shifted from the firm cultural 'assimilation' of all 'New Australians' in the decades of the fiftes and sixities to that of service to, and recognition of, 'ethnic diversity' in the last seventeen years, the individual experience of transplantation, of a new environment and language exposed migrants to severe psychological and cultural change. Women, housebound, and restricted in their social contact and exchange, often proved especially vulnerable, and were for periods 'hidden' members of the Australian community, underprivileged and 'depressed'. In these circumstances, it is useful to ask did the telephone play a useful part in the acculturation of the migrant woman? Did it help in their settlement and adaptation, did it keep their links with their homeland firm, and did it offer them, in the privacy of their own language, an 'ethnic place'?

These questions and others were added to the survey questionnaire and administered by researchers in several languages. The results show a striking commitment by women of different ethnic communities to telephone use. They also show how women with little or no telephone experience in their own country have become significant telephone users here, and how, in multicultural Australia, there is a daily concourse of many languages in Australia's telecommunications links.

Of the 47 migrant women surveyed 12 were Greek, 8 Italian, 7 Vietnamese, 6 British, 5 Lebanese, 5 Polish, 2 Spanish, one Peruvian, one Indian, while one Portugese and two American women appeared among the sample. As the largest ethnic community, Greeks assumed some prominence in the survey. Several were aged or older women who entered Australia in the 1950s and 1960s, had either no formal or primary education and had had no exposure to telephone communication in their villages before leaving Greece. There, women's 'distance' communication was of the pre-semaphor type. In the Greek village, one recalled, there was no phone, the bell rang out the messages to bring people to the square for discussion, and women separated by small distances, called from hill to valley to get a message through. At first, these migrants made little use of the telephone in Australia, costs of installation were high, they found the technology 'alien', and they could not at that time afford to telephone kin 'at home'. When, after several years, they installed a phone, they "used the telephone a good deal." The experience was common to all ethnic groups. For all, instrumental calls loomed large. Migrants of all sectors surveyed make conspicuous use of the telephone for information-seeking from government departments and agencies to ascertain their rights (the Telephone Interpreter Service (TIS) introduced

in 1974 had been used by only two women surveyed), and the telephone served consistently as an access route to jobs, community services and medical care. For these calls, older women from all groups with poor language skills, called uniformly on relatives, and later their children, to conduct this instrumental exchange.

On the intrinsic front, however, the telephone developed rapidly as a welcome connector in the migrant's own language, to communicate with immediate and extended family, cultivate friendships within their ethnic groups, and reduce their sense of alienation and 'loss'. "Speaking my own language by telephone," said a 45-year old Greek woman, "is comforting and reassuring, it alleviates tension and loneliness." Another Greek said that, with language problems, at first she avoided the phone, but now it is "often her only company, linking her with a supportive family and with close Greek friends." Italian respondents were also deeply engaged in telephone kinkeeping and "in helping each other with difficult problems by phone." For some, participation in the workforce overcame their resistance to unfamiliar telephone use, and migrant women in general testified that using the telephone in their own language encouraged their confidence in moving into the community, and attempting to communicate with Australians. "Having the security of knowing that I can call my family and friends in my native tongue," one 75-year old Greek woman summed up, "has given me confidence to try and communicate face-to-face with my Australian neighbours."

Some women depended on the telephone entirely for their career. A young Greek woman outworker housebound with children, needed it "to make arrangements for pick up and delivery and for the progress of her work"; others practised their English in shops and other avenues of work, retreating in the evening to first language telephone calls "to relax and unwind". There was wide confirmation from most respondents of the telephone as an 'ethnic place' and evidence revealed that even among those respondents who emigrated to Australia at an early age, they spoke their first language at home. The Lebanese respondents were home-based women whose phone usage was significantly smaller than Greek and Italian groups; most had no phone experience in their homeland, spoke Arabic for their intrinsic calls, carried on lengthy discussion in their family calls, and depended on younger members of the family to conduct their instrumental calls. Such kin and community co-operation was central to all groups. Several Vietnamese women aged 30-44, were high telephone users for whom some 50 per cent of calls were "directed to family and community helping". In general, ethnic community volunteerism rated high, while the ongoing role of the younger family 'interpreter' appeared as a thread in the telephone tapestry. Not all, perhaps, would agree with the 30-year old Polish respondent who recalled:

> I always had to make calls for my parents because they couldn't speak English well. Until I left home they never used the phone except to speak

> in their own language to friends. They used it as a lifeline. It really 'freaked' me because the responsibility was so great. I was too young to deal with bureaucracy.

The experience represents, nonetheless, an important piece of social history.

In addition to local calling, STD calls (facilitated by direct dialling and the replacement of the more difficult operator connected calls) were regularly made by European respondents to immediate and extended family members in a circle of contacts deeply geared to kin. Overseas calls were also increasingly made after settlement as incomes increased. Most calls were made to mothers who could neither read nor write; "The only way I can communicate with my mother so far away," said one Greek woman, "is over the telephone," and the calls gave emotional support. Italian and Greek women kept up strong lines of communication with the overseas family, the calls expanding at times of ill-health, lasting normally from 15 to 30 minutes, sometimes 45 minutes to an hour, and as one Italian woman put it, "never declining in value across the years." These intrinsic calls, said another, were "vital for catching up on health, to feel close, to learn what is happening in Italy, and to find out if parents need financial help."

The British proved a significant subset. Unlike the European migrants and those from Asia and the Middle East, they did not adapt to different telephone habits when they reached Australia. British women generally registered the lowest number of intrinsic calling in the sample (from 4-9 a week, with the exception of one postgraduate home worker whose score rated 16 a week), and their call duration at 2-10 minutes (again with one exception) was characteristically brief. Moreover, despite the OTC plea to Britishers flying to Australia on a Qantas ticket to 'ring home', overseas telephone calls figured minimally (with one exception) among British respondents in the survey.

Yet the female migrant experience of the telephone in Australia marks a positive venture in acculturation. For women in the male dominated Greek, Italian and Lebanese cultures, this technology offered an accepted opportunity for building a feminine network of family solidarity, communication and control, and for many women, after initial years of lonelines and deprivation, access to a domestic telephone established their 'telecommunication neighbourhoods', brought language instruction within their reach,[33] and, from their own testimony, enriched and enhanced their lives.[34]

Rural Women

While women living in country towns and rural settings share common attitudes with their metropolitan sisters to telephone gratification and use, there is some difference and distinctiveness in patterns of rural use that stem from geography, lifestyle, available technology and costs.

Evidence from these respondents encompassed both gratitude for access to telephone technology and the security and facility such access gives, but also a wide concern for some reassessment of charging policy that will mitigate the cost of distance and spur a new conceptual look at rural problems and needs.

For women living in country towns, intrinsic networking has increased perceptibly in the past 5 years. The rural crisis of 1987 in the Mallee district of Victoria graphically illustrated this trend. "We were having a crisis and the men were silent about their difficulties with each other," one woman reported, "and we realized that the women could not afford to talk to each other" (zoned calls in country town and rural fringes are metered after the first 3 minutes). Overtures from the women prompted a Felton Bequest donation that enabled rural women of the area to communicate by telephone for the local call charge. "I found that I could have a good intrinsic chat for 25 minutes," said one organizer, "that is the true length of a satisfactory call for someone who — as we were in this crisis — was worried or upset." Time charging for calls outside a 'community access' radius which links the caller to her nearest commercial centre, provided a different telephone environment from city and suburbs, and acted as a cost brake on personal calls. Country women surveyed believed that, as one put it "there is a continued underrating of the woman's function in rural society. We are part of the production process, and we work for the community but our labour is taken for granted, and unpaid." In the critical times in the Mallee, younger women were forced into paid work, and there was a decline in the numbers of women willing to do important community work. "We're paying quite heavily to do this voluntary work through zonal charging," another respondent affirmed. "How are our country communities going to be held together in the future without such volunteers and in a society where the emphasis has swung so strongly to 'user pays'?"

For these and other similarly sited women, the telephone was 'top priority'. "We would be absolutely lost without it." For many it was not just a route to family, vital in emergencies and for rapid contact, but also a 'therapeutic place'. At the same time, country women widely felt that community networking, caring and kinkeeping were "disregarded from the policy point of view" and that women's voices on rural changing "were not sufficiently heeded." There was strong evidence of 'telephone neighbourhoods'. The telephone replaced transport in personal affairs. "People haven't time to visit each other," said one farmer's wife. "By the time you've got food in, spent money on petrol, you rely more on the telephone. Face-to-face contact is withering, but this is not a substitute, it's a new kind of neighbourhood of its own." As in suburbs and city, country women emphasized the telephone's intimate role. "We pick up the phone when *we need* to talk," said a Victorian woman, "hence our dialogue is more open, and deep." Older women, widowed, staying alone on their farms, use the telephone

among confidants "to recollect their lives". Neighbourhood networking in new rural development areas was nourished by the telephone.

In the Northern Territory where distance dominated living, women in community and volunteer organizations were innovative in adopting new communications means. The scattered members of the Northern Territory Women's Advisory Council and the N.T. Children's Service, Reform and Advisory Programme, to cite two, conducted much of their business by teleconferencing to obviate the vast journeys and poor connections involved in meeting face-to-face. At the same time STD calling was a vital and booming connection for Top End families to connect them to kin and close friends in the south. From the uranium mining town of Jabiru, one respondent observed, "This town is very family oriented because of the telephone. Many women come here because their husbands decided to work here for a limited period (an average of 2-2½ years). It's a very fertile population. The town of 1400 is virtually young and childbearing. Very few have relations here, their support networks are in the south; they're tied up looking after kids. The mother-daughter relationship looms large. They often just want to hear a voice from the south."

In the remote outback of Western Australia, South Australia and the Northern Territory, some women are still unconnected, many still rely on the radio telephone (a mantle of communication flung over the inland when the Maralinga rocket development of the fifties required a warning system along its firing line). For these women, climatic fluctuations greatly affect their communication mode; privacy may be non-existent, and conversations restricted in personal matters or transfigured into codes. "You try and judge what your children distant at school are trying to say to you," said one remotely settled woman in North Queensland. "You can tell they're troubled, but you can't get them to repeat this several times!" Most respondents tied to the radio telephone were pragmatic however about this communication form; some would be reluctant to lose the warm link of operator connection, others were frustrated by bad evening connection and whirring, singing, and 'whooshing' on the waves. In remote regions, the Digital Radio Concentrator Scheme (DRCS) now brings direct STD connection to outback stations spreading out from Darwin and Alice Springs south, east, west and to the Gulf of Carpentaria in a widening arc. "It's transforming, fantastic" was the common cry. No longer the 12 minute maximum of radio telephone connection but, when all calls are STD, costs are high.

For remote Aboriginal women, telephone communication is problematic. "Aborigines are great talkers on the phone, it's been Aboriginised," one commentator noted. But men dominate the telephone. Federal Government policy ordains that every outback station will have a radio telephone, but in the words of one prominent Alice Springs Aboriginal woman, the system is "man-controlled". "Women are really disadvantaged in the rural outback. Even in a rural community like Hermannsberg, it's very difficult for women to get access to the

office phone. You have to fight the person in charge to get access." Similar experiences were reported in Kintore and in other outpost settlements. The evidence was illuminating. "Male domination was not cultural," one woman affirmed. "Aboriginal men and women are equal, side by side. Each plays their role. But white men have contaminated the Aboriginal man's attitude to women in many parts. It's an 'imposed' inequality now. When we seek to use the outpost telephone, a man will say 'you have to wait, men must go first'." The solution appeared to several women to be the installation of a second radio telephone connection, a dual system, that would give ongoing access to Aboriginal women for use in domestic or community violence, in health matters, in seeking information, and for social communication with their children away in training or education in Darwin or Alice Springs.

CONCLUSIONS, CHARGING, AND POLICY

Here are the voices of women. They have not hitherto been heard in Australia. Yet, in their diversity and complexity, they reflect a pervasive feminine culture of the telephone in which kinkeeping, nurturing, community support, and the caring culture of women forms a key dynamic of our society and invites the careful attention of policy makers. This paper represents the first report of material gathered in the survey. It focuses on the broad attitudes and views of women on telephone use in a period of projected telecommunications change, and offers evidence that challenges existing mainstream, sociologiocal and carrier interpretations of patterns and purposes of telephone use.[35] As such it represents a preliminary presentation of the evidence which, in the Report[36] and elsewhere, will additionally address such other sociological questions as the historical conditioning of Australian women and their telephone use, teenagers and the telephone, the telephone in the homeworking ('electronic cottage') situation, changing attitudes to telephone communication and contact face-to-face, and women's resistance, or adaptation to, new, value-added telecommunications innovations. While household income was specifically excluded from a survey dependent on interview candour and rapport, material retrieved sheds light on economic and other relationships between transport and telephone use, on Aborigines and the telephone, and the 'feminization of poverty' among the 'telephone poor'.

Centrally in the present study, the evidence opens up an arena of 'private sphere' social organization and activity that has, politically, been overlooked. Since the telephone's invention, the canon of women's particular 'addiction' to the telephone has become entrenched, and, fuelled by Mark Twain's classic story 'The Telephone Conversation' (1880), women's telephone communication has been persistently portrayed in literature and the media as 'gossip' and a trivial pursuit.[37] The point, however, has drawn some pertinent comment from feminist

scholars of gender and technology. "As we have discovered through our 1970s and 1980s studies," writes the American scholar, Cheris Kramarae, "the stereotypes and jokes are misleading," embedded in a masculine mindset and 'malestream communication theorizing'.[38] Most explicitly, Lana Rakow in her study of 43 women and their telephone use in the midwestern town of Prospect, USA, confirms the care-giving, socially salutary role of women's telephone talk and points up a continuing tendency in western society to demote and undervalue this activity. "Women's telephone talk fits into the appropriate spheres of activity and interests designated for women," she observes. "It is both 'gendered work' and 'gender work', in that it is work that women do to hold together the fabric of the community, build and maintain relationships, and accomplish important care-giving and receiving functions." "It is through their care-giving work at home and their jobs that women occupy their place in society . . . taking responsibility for the emotional and material needs of husbands and children, the elderly, the handicapped, the sick and the unhappy. While this role has been little recognised or valued, the caring work of women over the telephone has been even less noted."[39]

The same holds true for the situation in Australia. Historically, women's telephone communication has moved a long way from its major instrumental uses of some decades ago to a notable concentration on protracted intrinsic calling. The role of the telephone has thus changed from an important facility for expediting daily life and transforming the problem of distance in Australia, to an arena where the claims of feeling are acknowledged and to a key site for the execution of women's care-giving gendered work. As in Prospect, USA, "the telephone runs like a thread"[40] through the lives of women in Australia. The voices of men, contrastingly, have played little part in this study except as brothers, fathers, and lovers interacting in the women's world. The phenomenon is cultural. While there are, identifiably, men who deploy the telephone as women do, women and men in general inhabit different (if intersecting) economic, and telephone network worlds. Their separation, and the differing values they acknowledge, impact directly on policy making. Technology, notes Kramarae, "is designed and developed by people with assumptions about what makes for necessary, desirable, profitable and important human activity; planners, manufacturers, and systems organizers may consider women's labour and efficiency, but seldom is women's communication with other women and with men considered as a necessary part of the planning evaluation."[41] In the 'new telecommunications environment' in Australia, the claims of industry, competition, rationality and production would appear to overtower the values of human co-operation, nurturing, emotion and mutual care, and, to date, women have had little access to the decision-making.

This survey aims to bring relevant data to the evaluation. It bears on changing charging policy in Australia. Like Canada, Australians have

been traditionally conditioned to a telephone service based on spreading universalism, unmetered local calling, and costs to the rural population linked with distance. Upgraded technology has now removed much of the cost factor from distance links, data telephone communication impacts significantly on voice telephone lines, and considerations of timed local calling have altered elements in the telecommunications scene. Women in the survey were highly vocal on the issue of timed local calls.[42] 92 per cent reacted strongly against the prospect. Many attested that their phone use would radically change; many would "stop using the phone except for emergencies"; several migrant respondents declared that they would "cancel the telephone"; others indicated that it "would no longer be easy to reach out for help"; still others felt that it "would become difficult to manage for calls that involved worry, depression or distress", that volunteerism would "fall away", and that TLC's would seriously disturb the character of feminine telephone communication built up since domestic phone installation had become commonplace in Australia. Women with recourse only to Public Phones believed that they would be forced further into a poverty trap, and that, while the telephone service was not universal in Australia, timed phone box local calling would seriously penalise the 'have nots'. For the elderly, the single parent, the pensioner, the country woman, the woman who worked at home, the prospect of timed local calls threatened solace and security. "Lots of people would be in trouble," said one Albury pensioner — "all my neighbours would." An aged Greek migrant, who had worked in Australia for 50 years, saw timing as a poor return on long invested labour. "If calls were timed," she said, "we would be further isolated from our family and friends. My husband and I only have independence as long as we have the phone as it is." Even among high income and working women who comprehended the downward trend of local call rates over the past decade,[43] opposition was firm. Significantly, the words used by respondents to express their response to TLCs were highly charged: 'outrageous, horrendous, devastating to our humanitarian concerns'. Unmetered calls were, indeed, perceived not as a 'utility', but as a 'social good', as vital to national and social progress as economic development.[44]

With Canada, Australia now stands alone among industrial nations in offering untimed calling for local telephone communication. In Canada, the universal service is under threat. "The thrust to deregulation," comment social scientists, Pike and Musco, "threatens to limit the telephone, for those who can still afford the service, to instrumental use. The intrinsic value of the telephone, for the maintenance of contact with family and friends, would be reduced." They see a shift to 'cost-based pricing' as a backwards historical step, one which could take the Canadian consumer "from luxury to necessity and back again" and condemn many Canadians to 'an information desert'.[45] Both countries also face challenges, implicit in this survey, of more equitable, rural and remote, distance costs. Planners need wide, and democratic, perspectives. A telecommunications policy that

lowers the social equity of its people on industrial and economic grounds may forfeit Australia's reputation as a telecommunications leader, widen the political 'gender gap', and impoverish the character of women's communication and its part in our evolving information society.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. *Australian telecommunications services: a framework.* 25 May 1988. *Report.* 228 pp. and *Summary,* Canberra, Australian Government Publishing Service, 1988.
2. Cf. Ann Moyal, *Clear Across Australia. A history of telecommunications,* Nelson, Melbourne, 1984.
3. *Summary, op. cit.,* p. 3.
4. There has, for example, been considerable controversy in USA, Canada and elsewhere as to how cross-subsidization works between the local telephone and trunk networks, two schools of thought contesting that (i) trunk networks profits sustain local networks and, conversely (ii) that local calls, as some American economists suggest, sustain trunks. In Australia, only meagre information on the elements of cross subsidy has been publicly available and research on the subject is in short supply. Evans' *Report,* acknowledges that "it is not clear how much economic loss actually arises from the current pattern of cross-subsidies" (p. 40). For a historical perspective see Moyal, *op. cit.* and I.W. McLean, 'Telephone Pricing and Cross-Subsidization under the PMG, 1901 to 1976', Australian National University, Working Papers in Economic History No. 27, September 1984.
5. Ian Reinecke, 'Regulating Deregulation in Australian Telecommunications', Communications Institute of Australia, Canberra, Occasional Paper No. 6, July 1988.
6. But see Grant Noble, 'Discriminating between the intrinsic and instrumental domestic telephone user'. *Australian Journal of Communication,* No. 11, 1987, pp. 63-85 for a broad examination of 100 people.
7. I. de Sola Pool (ed.), *The Social Impact of the Telephone,* Cambridge, MIT Press, 1977, a collection of essays assembled to mark the centenary of the invention of the telephone in 1976, remains the most seminal source book. In addition broad commentary on telephone use can be found in S. Aronson, 'The sociology of the telephone', in C. Gumpert and R. Carthcart (eds), *Intermedia: Interpersonal Communication in a Media World,* 3rd ed., New York, Oxford University Press, 1986; Guy Fielding and Peter Hartley, 'The telephone: a neglected medium', in A. Cashdan and M. Jordin (eds), *Studies in Communication,* Oxford, Blackwell, 1988; Frederick Williams (ed.), *Technology and Communication Behavior,* Belmont, California, Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1987; and Herbert S. Dordick, 'Reflections on a wired world', *Media & Values,* 26, Winter 1984, pp. 2-3 and *Intermedia,* 1983. Place specific studies of suites of telephone users include G. Claisse and F. Rowe, 'The telephone in question: questions on communication', *Computer Networks and ISDN Systems,* International Journal of Computer and Telecommunications Networking, 24, 2-5, 1987, pp. 207-219 which examines 663 French telephone callers in 1984; Belinda Brandon (ed.), *The Effect of the Demographies of Individual Households on their Telephone Usage,* Cambridge, Mass., Ballinger, 1981, a detailed analysis of the household characteristics of some 500 telephone users in Chicago, 1972-4; and W. Infosino, 'Relationship between demand for local telephone calls and household characteristics', *Bell Telephone Technical Journal,* 59, 6, July 1980, pp. 31-53, a study of 998 individuals in California and Cincinnati, 1972-3, 1975-6.
8. Noble, *op. cit.,* p. 83.
9. These found full expression in submissions to the Davidson Inquiry, and its *Report of the Committee to inquire into telecommunications services in Australia,* 1981/82, rejected by the Hawke Government.

10. Quoted Suzanne Keller, 'The telephone in new communities and old', Pool, *op. cit.*, p. 289.
11. The 'instrumental/intrinsic' categorisation was first defined by Keller, *op. cit.*, p. 284. See also Noble, *op. cit.*
12. From its design stages and as the research grew, it has attracted the interest of a spectrum of women's organizations including the Office of the Status of Women, the Office of Multicultural Affairs, the Australian Institute of Family Studies, the National Council of Women of Australia, the Rural Womens' Network of the Victorian Department of Agriculture, the Rural Women's Information Service of S.A., Department of Agriculture, the Northern Territory Women's Advisory Council, and the National Women's Consultative Council. I thank them for their encouragement and constructive ideas.
13. Diane Bell. Photographs by Ponch Hawkes, *Generations. Grandmothers, Mothers and Daughters.* Bicentennial Landmark Publication for Women, Gribble/Penguin, 1988.
14. Telecommunication carriers, including Telecom, suggest that survey respondents relying on memory invariably underestimate their calling patterns when it comes to challenging telephone bills and, conversely, would overestimate the average number and duration of local calls per day. Martin Mayer confirms this in 'The telephone and the uses of time', in Pool, *op. cit.* In the present survey, a comparison of time sheets and recorded calls suggested that interviewees tended rather to *underestimate* both the number, and duration, of calls.
15. Distribution among capital cities was: Sydney 40, Melbourne 25, Canberra 17, Brisbane 14, Adelaide 12, Perth 11, Hobart 9, and Darwin 6. Country distribution included country towns, rural fringe and remote settlements: NSW 14, Victoria 16, Northern Territory 15, Queensland 11, South Australia 5, and Western Australia 5.
16. Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1987. In this source, 11 per cent of Australian women were aged 0-14, 8 per cent aged 15-19; 32 per cent, 20-39; 16.5 per cent aged 40-54; 9 per cent aged 55-64; 7 per cent aged 65-74 and 5 per cent over 75. The skewing to a higher percentile representation in the survey arises from the absence of any representatives of respondents aged 0-14.
17. The survey did not seek information on work-based calls for either those made in the workforce or from home.
18. A similar resistance to altering established and participatory shopping patterns is also reported from Japan. Tessa Morris-Suzuki, 'The communications revolution' and the household: some thoughts from the Japanese experience, *Prometheus*, 6, 2, 1988, p. 242.
19. Comparative data on weekly calls made by women in other countries is not available. Neither Brandon's (ed.) 1981 study of telephone use in Chicago households, *op. cit.*, or Infosino's 1980 study of Cincinnati and California households, *op. cit.*, or Claisse and Rowe's 1983 study of French urban telephone use, *op. cit.*, offer data breakdown on gender. Mayer, *op. cit.*, demonstrates the pervasiveness of male value judgments on the issue when he alludes to an American 'Statewide' survey where the average length of call of four and a half minutes was "dragged up by those who hang on the phone" (p. 228). Unfortunately Lana F. Rakow's pioneering gender study, *Gender, Communication and Technology. A Case Study of Women and the Telephone,* University of Illinois at Urbana-Champagne, Ph.D. 1987 (University Microfilm International, copy held by Macquarie University Library) based on interview data of 43 women and their telephone use and attitudes in the Midwestern rural town of Prospect, USA, furnishes no record of call duration or number of telephone calls made.
20. The concept of three minutes as the basic unit of telephone call 'conversation time' has long been accepted internationally. The calculation is based on recorded call time measured at telephone exchanges at the busiest time of day and encompasses an average over all types of business and residential voice calls. While little independent research has been published on the subject, it is now considered in Sweden, for example, that as unanswered (unsuccessful) calls, wrong numbers, etc. are included in the calculation, the measure of 'conversation time' is artificial.

21. The educational range of the sample encompassed 5 women without formal education, 24 with primary education, 118 with secondary education, 48 with tertiary education and 5 with postgraduate qualifications. No attempt was made in this survey to establish incomes of respondents.
22. Noble, 1987, *op. cit.*, p. 81.
23. Feminist scholar, Dale Spender points out that little research has yet been done on listening, a form of interactional work particularly associated with women and 'as complex and important as talk' quoted by Rakow, *op. cit.*, p. 175.
24. Rakow, *op. cit.*, p. 176.
25. Data retrieved on children's telephone use was both random, and small. It points, however, to a revealing area of telephone usage for further research.
26. There were 421,255 women aged 75+ in Australia and 917,056 women aged 65 years and over in June 1987 against a male population of 736,769 aged 65+. Australian Bureau of Statistics (1987). Combined, the total number of Australians aged 65+, represented 11 per cent of the population.
27. Hal. L. Kendig and John McCallum, *Ageing and the Family Project,* Australian National University, Canberra, Australian Government Publishing Service, 1988.
28. It is, for example, worth noting that the questionnaire of the 'Survey of the Aged in Sydney' conducted by the ANU Ageing and the Family Project in 1981, only briefly listed 'phone contact' with enquiries about numbers of children, days seen, letters received, and the broad question 'is there a phone in the home or flat'. More recently the 'Australian Longitudinal Study of Ageing, Initial Survey Questionnaire (1988), of the Centre for Ageing Studies, Flinders University (a WHO Collaborating Centre for research on the epidemiology of ageing), with its many questions on the physical condition, illnesses, available services, emergencies, relationships, leisure activities of the aged, contains only one question — the strictly functional 'do you need help using the telephone?' for a survey concerned with the biomedical, psychological and social characteristics of ageing.
29. Alice T. Day, 'Family Caregiving and the Elderly: Myths, Realities and Environmental Implications, Seminar in Human Sciences, Australian National University, 11 August 1988.
30. Interestingly, Brandon's American findings, which combine men and women in the sample, sugest that "the medians of total local and suburban message units display a strong downward trend with increasing age", 1981, *op. cit.*, p. 6.
31. The Australian Bureau of Statistics reports 19 July 1988 that "only 73 per cent of males, compared to 91 per cent of females, living alone, had the telephone connected".
32. The Red Cross Telephone Security Service, a voluntary caring service aimed at providing security for aged, frail, sick, disabled or housebound people living alone and medically at risk offers an example for further development. In this scheme, volunteers telephone recipients of the service each morning 7 days a week to check their well-being. If there is no answer after a repeated call, the Red Cross office is advised and an emergency procedure taken to contact the recipient. The service is provided to recipients free of charge (*In Action,* 17, June 1988). In Japan, experiments are currently being conducted with videophones that may enable doctors to offer a service of 'checking up on elderly invalids with no acute health problem' over the phone; Morris-Suzuki, *op. cit.*, p. 242.
33. The Home Tutor Scheme, a Joint Government and Community Service, from 1988 offered telephone instruction in English to homebound migrants.
34. The role of the Women's Information Switchboard in Adelaide, for example, in helping migrant women in difficult home situation via telephone contact is noteworthy, though no such use was recorded in this survey. Cf. Des Storer (ed.), *Ethnic Family Values in Australia,* Institute of Family Studies. Prentice-Hall of Australia, 1985.
35. See Endnote 7. Fielding and Hartley, commenting on the paucity of telephone communication research, *op. cit.*, 1987, summed up: "we know little and are therefore forced to speculate".
36. Cf. Ann Moyal, *Women and the Telephone in Australia. A Report to Telecom Australia,* April 1989.

37. Alexander Graham Bell was guilty of the suggestion that the telephone would become a venue "where Mrs Smith could spend an enjoyable hour with Mrs Brown, pleasantly dissecting Mrs Jones" and the theme resounds through the literature. See John Brooks, 'The first and only century of telephone literature' in Pool, *op. cit.*, 1977, pp. 208-224. In Australia, a *Sydney Morning Herald* column on telephone use, 15 June, 1988, characteristically proclaimed 'Women Do Love to Chinwag'.
38. Cheris Kramarae (ed.), *Technology and Women's Voices*, New York, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1988, Preface, pp. 5 and 7.
39. *Gender, Communications, and Technology, op. cit.*, 1987, pp. 1-2, and Lana F. Rakow, 'Women and the telephone: the gendering of a communications technology', in Kramarae (ed.), *Technology and Women's Voices*, pp. 207-228.
40. *Ibid.* See also Lana F. Rakow, 'Rethinking gender research in communications', *Journal of Communications*, Autumn 1986, 36, pp. 11-26; and Lana F. Rakow, 'Looking to the future: five questions for gender research', *Women's Studies in Communication*, Fall 1987, 10, pp. 79-86.
41. *op. cit.*, p. 10.
42. Their opposition was also widely articulated when Telecom Australia opened the debate on timed local calling in late 1987-88, promoting a statement from the Prime Minister in February 1988, that Australia would not introduce timed local calls. The issue, however, remains on the telecommunications policy agenda.
43. Since its inauguration in June 1975, Telecom Australia has kept its telephone charges down. 'Average price increase for the overall range of basic services' have risen by 36 per cent between June 1975 and June 1987, compared with a 167 per cent rise in the Consumer Price Index, 211 per cent rise in Public Transport Fares, a 230 per cent rise in fuel and light, and a 279 per cent rise in petrol prices. Australian Telecommunication Commission *Annual Report*, 1987-88.
44. Telecom, to date, appears short of data relating to length of local calls. Some 'very limited surveys' suggest an average voice business call occupies 2½ to 3 minutes; and an average domestic call under 6 minutes. Telecom Australia.
45. Robert Pike and Vincent Musco, 'Canadian consumers and telephone pricing: from luxury to necessity and back again?', *Telecommunications Policy*, March 1986, 10, 1, pp. 17-32.