

Gender on the Line. Women, the Telephone, and Community Life by Lana F. Rakow. (University of Illinois Press, Urbana and Chicago, 1992), pp. xiii + 165, \$US24.95, ISBN 0-252-01807-9.

Until recent years, gender and technology, gender and communication have found little place on the research agenda. Cheris Kramarae broke the silence with her edited work *Technology and Women's Voices* in 1988;¹ *Media, Culture and Society* released a Gender and Technology issue in January 1992, while the present work marks a specific step in one area of an important and emergent field.

The study, carried out through ethnographic fieldwork in the small rural mid-west town of Prospect, Illinois, focusses on data gathered from interviews with some 43 women in a conservative, white, Christian community of the U.S.A. and their use, memories and opinions of the domestic telephone. Few technological devices, as Lana Rakow points out, have so matched the needs and styles of women as the telephone. There has, in fact, been an entrenched tendency to dismiss women's telephone talk as 'gossip', 'indulgence', or 'chat'. Some male investigators, indeed, are still using these value laden categories in their social research. But Rakow's detailed American evidence presents another view. "Use of the telephone by women", she writes, "is both gendered work — work delegated to women — and gender work — work that confirms the community's beliefs about what are women's tendencies and abilities". As such, women's relationship to the telephone is "richer and more complex than common knowledge would have us believe".

Lana Rakow uses evidence from interviews to examine what she perceives as women's socially structured communication lives. In Prospect, women's telephone use is anchored in the domestic sphere. In this small, economically and educationally restricted town, the women use the phone for family contact and care, for maintaining relationships with family and friends, for a sense of 'visiting', for caring for the elderly and lonely, for church work, and for community contact and support. The experience and perceptions of 37 respondents is scattered through one chapter of the book while the author devotes a long sector, Part 2, to a recapitulation of interviews with six women of different ages and kind.

It is useful to have this one-time Ph.D dissertation adapted for publication. It marks a first assault on the question of women's communication 'on the line' and, as such, affords a base for comparative study with communities in other parts. But founded on data collected in 1985, it takes little account of findings about women's telephone communication conducted in more recent times. My study of women and the telephone in Australia² which drew on a national sample of 200 women, retrieved the voices of a considerably more diverse spectrum of women, and while confirming the importance of women's telephone communication as a key mechanism of community support, carried Australian women's telephone talk into broader arenas of community, urban, rural, ethnic, intellectual, professional, personal and national affairs.

Writing from a feminist perspective, Rakow sees the telephone as both easing women's lack of choices and mobility yet shaping them to a gendered role. "A telephone", she writes, "is not an equal substitute for a full, secure, purposeful life among others. Indeed, in some respects use of the telephone in these cases should be seen as a symptom — of isolation, loneliness, boredom, or fear —

rather than a cure" (p.151). There are evidently few questionings of the *status quo* in Prospect and the evidence, resultingly, acquires at times a narrow and repetitious ring.

Certainly as the author indicates, the patterns of meaning and experience found in Prospect will be found in other times and places; there will be different experiences with women from less homogenous backgrounds, and much work awaits to be done in other arenas and on the use, for example, that various women have made networking on the telephone for political and economic purposes. Moreover, as I have also found, research on this theme meets an 'excited response' from women. "Expressions of love and hate; stories about mothers, grandmothers, sisters, and friends; confessions of obsession and avoidance — all are personal emotions and experiences related to the telephone that women want to share". The book is grist, then, to an extending mill. As Rakow sums up, "Gender is on the line in more than one sense".

REFERENCES

1. Cheris Kramarae (ed.) *Technology and Women's Voices. Keeping in Touch*. Routledge & Kegan Paul, New York, 1988.
2. Ann Moyal, *Women and the Telephone in Australia*. A Study Prepared for Telecom Australia, April 1989; and 'The Feminine Culture of the Telephone. People, Patterns and Policy', *Prometheus*, 7, 1, 1989, pp. 5-31.

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The Nature of Copyright: A Law of Users' Rights by *L. Ray Patterson and Stanley W. Lindberg* (University of Georgia Press, Athens, Georgia, 1991), pp. xiii + 274, \$US12.95 pbk, ISBN 0-8203-1362-9.

This is not a book that will endear itself to many practising copyright lawyers. It is highly critical of the present state of US copyright law, the judicial interpretation of that law and, by implication, of the lawyers active in the field of copyright. The main message of the book is that the present US copyright law, as devised by judges and lawyers, ignores fundamental copyright principles and serves the interests of publishers at the expense of authors and consumers of copyright material.

The task of the book becomes, then, the identification of the proper goals and principles of copyright law, and how these might be used to develop a copyright law that does justice to all the social interests involved in copyright.

The identification of correct copyright goals and principles occurs through a historical investigation. This historical discussion of copyright law takes up the first seven chapters of the book. Copyright law, as is well known, had somewhat unprincipled beginnings. With the invention of the printing press in the 15th century, the spread of heretical ideas became an even more serious problem for the state. In England, the Crown decided to solve the problem by giving the craft guild responsible for the printing and book trade (the Stationers) a monopoly in exchange for the guild carrying out the duties of censor and prosecutor. This cosy arrangement of privilege broke down and eventually the English Parliament passed the Statute of Anne (1709) to deal with copyright.